

THE HYSTERICAL MIRROR: STAGED MASTURBATORY FANTASY AND GENDER
TRANSGRESSION IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY MALE AUTHORED
LITERATURE OF THE HISPANIC WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Natalie Love: The Hysterical Mirror: Staged Masturbatory Fantasy and Gender Transgression in Late Nineteenth Century Male Authored Literature of the Hispanic World
(Under the direction of Juan Carlos González Espitia)

This dissertation analyzes how male authors of late nineteenth to early twentieth century Spain and Latin America used the themes of masturbatory fantasy, mirror gazing, and illness to display struggles of living up to unattainable gender norms. These works include Francisco de Sales Mayo's *La condesita* (1869), Eduardo Zamacois's *La enferma* (1896), and Alberto Insúa's *Las neuróticas* (1910) in Spain. For the Latin American perspective, I analyze "Los perseguidos" (1908), "Los guantes de goma" (1909), and "La meningitis y su sombra" (1917) by Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga. These texts expose a shared crisis of masculinity provoked by arguments for female equality, women's desires to remain independent, and the pressure for men to fulfill women's wants. This male predicament was also aroused by oppressive hegemonic standards of masculinity and medical discourses that compelled men to display virile prowess, self-control, and dominance over the public sphere.

I also show how individuals who deviated from gender ideals in fin-de-siècle society would risk being labeled as sick, hysterical social outcasts, leading them to hide their true selves behind a façade of conformity. Because of these tensions between private wants and social expectations, individuals turned to the mirror, real or figurative, to enter a fantasy realm where they could explore their forbidden wants. Solitary mirror encounters are masturbatory reveries in

which characters undergo a pleasurable retreat into the self, becoming the subject and object of their desires. In this introspective autoerotic journey, characters experiment with identities that rebel against gender ideals in a fearful, yet enticing process of self-spectatorship. Through masturbatory fantasy the characters “go on stage” to participate in a performance of the self where they negotiate their identities, judging themselves from an external perspective. This auto-scrutiny involves seeing oneself through the gaze of a desiring, liberated other who disregards social constraints to pursue his or her own wants. However, the pleasures involved in this trial of the self are interrupted by the condemning gazes of society and physicians, who remind them of the supposed immorality of their transgressions.

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INTRODUCTION

The end of the nineteenth century was a time “when gender roles were particularly rigid and polarized” and both sexes were expected to conform to unattainable ideals of manhood and womanhood (Rosenberg 147). This was also an era of radically changing gender roles, in which “all the laws that governed sexual identity and behavior seemed to be breaking down,” leading to “stricter border controls around the definition of gender” (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 3). In this investigation I study the difficulties that men and women of the Hispanic world experienced while trying to conform to these rigid gender norms, revealing “gender normativity to be no more than an ideal, a regulatory fiction impossible for real bodies and subjectivities to achieve” (Tsuchiya 113). In particular, I show the ways in which both sexes attempted to break free of these social pressures through the realm of masturbatory fantasy, an appealing trope to display the secretive autonomous reverie, excitement, and guilt attached to transgressive pursuits of self-desire that went against imposed gender ideals.

Male authors from late nineteenth to early twentieth-century Spain and Latin America connect this theme of masturbatory fantasy to mirroring, self-spectatorship, and illness. In the novels and short stories studied, both sexes turn to the mirror to enter a private fantasy realm of onanistic gratification where they shed their false societal masks to embrace their authentic identities and forbidden desires. In these introspective reveries, the protagonists undergo a performance of the self, in which they dream of embodying a liberated other who rejects social norms to achieve personal fulfillment. Although these fantasies provide the characters with tantalizing pleasure, they are simultaneously overwhelmed with guilt upon subjecting themselves

to imaginary public gazes that expose a fearful reflection of hysterical illness in the mirror for failing to conform to gender norms. Through these mirror performances, the writers demonstrate the intricate ways in which men and women interpreted and negotiated their identities in this atmosphere of fluctuating gender roles and relations.

The selected male authors from both sides of the Atlantic utilized this combination of motifs in their texts to display a shared crisis of masculinity provoked by shifting gender roles. I have chosen to analyze these male-authored novels and short stories because they provide the reader with a complex, panoramic view of the male and female experience, while revealing the growing tensions in relationships between the sexes, which often result in antagonistic frustrations. Although I do not include any texts from female writers, these male authors were responding to discourses of emancipation presented by women. The authors react to women's desires and demands in an ambivalent fashion that displays their feelings of fascination, arousal, fear, intimidation, and anger. While women were stepping out of their traditional roles to gain agency, independence, and equality on various levels, patriarchal power was wavering, resulting in a crisis of male identity.

The majority of the authors studied in the dissertation are Spanish novelists: Francisco de Sales Mayo (birth and death dates unknown, but active as an author between 1860 and 1870), Alberto Insúa (1883-1963), and Eduardo Zamacois (1873-1971). However, both Insúa and Zamacois were born in Cuba, and Zamacois spent his final years in Argentina, so these authors had personal transatlantic connections between Spain and Latin America. I have specifically chosen Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga because the three stories I discuss display different facets of this joint crisis of masculinity, namely the pervasive male fears of sickness and effeminacy, worries of being rejected by women, anxieties surrounding the corporeally autonomous female,

and men's emotions of shame, horror, and disgust towards their own bodies. The writings produced by these authors of both regions underline the commonality of worries and desires that men shared in a period of gender transition that was occurring in both regions.

This joint masculine crisis was provoked by several different factors. Men were threatened by the notion of a new woman who was becoming a man's equal on intellectual, moral, and sexual grounds. Men were also plagued with a sudden burden to understand and fulfill women's emotional and sexual desires, an intimidating idea that threatened emasculation and failure. In addition, because women were starting to explore new possibilities for themselves, embracing the idea of independence, voicing their demands for personal satisfaction, and denouncing the egotistical nature of the male sex, men worried that they would become dispensable from a woman's perspective. In several of the texts studied in the dissertation there is a lingering male fear of being rejected by the autonomous, self-sufficient woman. This anxiety was summarized by Sally Ledger as follows: "one of the main sources of the panic provoked by the New Woman" was that "there was a very real fear that she may not be at all interested in men, and could manage quite well without them" (5). Akiko Tsuchiya summarizes this crisis of masculinity provoked by discourses surrounding female agency and equality:

Changing women's roles, the collapse of the opposition between the private and the public, and the potential for new spaces of female subjectivity and agency naturally led to anxieties about male subjectivity, as normative notions of bourgeois heterosexual masculinity were being challenged by women who deviated from the norms of femininity. (112)

In addition, María Cristina González Moreno and Daisy Camacaro Gómez discuss how the long-lived notion of male superiority was being torn down in the late nineteenth century as women were becoming educated and demanding social rights, causing men to experience feelings of hostility and impotence:

La educación abre nuevas oportunidades para las mujeres quienes accedieron a estos espacios irrumpiendo en áreas del conocimiento históricamente destinadas para los hombres. Los movimientos feministas reclamaron derechos y espacios para el ejercicio de la ciudadanía. Ante estos avances, los hombres asumen una postura hostil frente a la amenaza de pérdida de identidad, fuerza y poder. (69)

Aside from the angry, anxiety-ridden male response to women's changing roles in society, I show how men underwent a predicament because they became victimized by medical discourses that scrutinized and pathologized male bodies and passions. Suddenly, men were no longer free to openly express their erotic desires, an idea that goes against traditional notions of male sexual freedom. The man who was unable to control his passions was not only deemed as sick, but he was also equated with the dreaded, fluid, and sexualized nature of the "feminine." As we will see throughout the dissertation, due to this decrease in patriarchal power and redefinition of masculinity, there was a surge of representations of sick, frightened, feminized, humiliated, and debased male characters who experience an extreme crisis of selfhood given that "masculinity, it seemed, could no longer be taken for granted as a stable, unitary, and self-evident reality" (Felski 92).

Emerging Notions of Female Agency

Before discussing the themes of illness, masturbatory fantasy, and mirroring, it is useful to delve into a deeper discussion about gender ideals for men and women, as well as the way both sexes were attempting to rebel against these roles, creating an ambivalent, complicated atmosphere of agency and repression. On both sides of the Atlantic, the Hispanic ideal for women was the *ángel del hogar*, or the angel of the home. When discussing this model in the Spanish context, Catherine Jagoe argues that the *ángel del hogar* was a meek, homebound, asexual, pious, and selfless creature. She inhabited the private, domestic sphere and lived entirely

for husband and family” (79-80). Nancy LaGreca describes this model of the feminine ideal in Latin America at the time:

The ideal angelic woman is not focused inward on her own subjectivity, but rather outward to those around her. She is judged by her tenderness and virtue towards others: women should be ‘buenas y tiernas madres, hijas sumisas y amorosas, esposas irrepreensibles’ almost all of the definitions and discussions of the Angel of the House speak of this model in terms of the woman’s relationship to those around her: she is daughter, wife, and mother, rather than an individual independent of these patriarchal ties. (10)

Both Jagoe and LaGreca show how this female ideal was challenged in nineteenth-century novels. Jagoe mentions how the female protagonist Fortunata of Benito Pérez Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887) rejects the model of the *ángel del hogar*, while stating that the novel “traces the passage of the heroine from a childlike, passive state to autonomy and responsibility” (84). Regarding a selection of woman-authored novels of the time from Latin America, LaGreca states “The angel in the house is manipulated in each novel to allow the author to offer an alternative and unique female self, inviting women to look and think beyond the prescribed model and take control of their subjectivity” (12).

In addition to this strengthening of female subjectivity, agency, and autonomy over the ideal image of the *ángel del hogar* in the aforementioned examples, there are several other cases of resistance to norms of femininity in both regions. Mary Nash argues that female writers in nineteenth-century Spain “advocated equality between the sexes, an end to male supremacy and of new foundations for gender relations” (248). Nash also states that “women played an important role as instigators and participants in social protests during this period of significant social and political change” (248). One of the most influential advocates for female equality in Spain was Concepción Arenal, a feminist who “challenged prevalent scientific notions of women’s innate physiological, moral and intellectual inferiority,” while promoting women’s

access to education (Nash 254). Concepción Arenal (1820-93) also urged women to consider other roles for themselves outside the realm of patriarchal expectations and to pursue their own independent wants:

It is a grave error and one of the most harmful to inculcate women with the idea that their sole mission is that of being a wife and mother; it is the equivalent of telling them that by themselves they cannot be anything. . . . [Women] must affirm their personality, independent of their state, and persuade themselves that, single, married or widowed, they have duties to carry, out, rights to vindicate, a job to do. . . . Life is something serious, and if they take it as a game they will be unremittingly treated as a toy. (qtd. in Offen 174).

The Spanish writer Emilia Pardo Bazán also advocated for female equality and denounced patriarchal efforts to keep women in a place of childish submission. According to Nash,

Pardo Bazán denounced the infantilism of Spanish women, who were confined to a state of frivolity and lack of ideals through the deprivation of education and culture which led them to a situation of inferiority and dependence contrived by men. The dissenting voice of this major writer claimed that women were victims of male politics and thus not responsible for their social condition. (257)

Jennifer Smith also argues that Pardo Bazán attempted to normalize female sexual passion in her works of fiction, such as her story “La novia fiel,” while refuting the common notion that the desiring woman was sick, a prevalent idea in late nineteenth-century society that will be subsequently discussed:

While in “La novia fiel” (1894) it is the female protagonist’s frustrated sexual desires that bring on hysteria, it is clear that the problem is not female sexuality itself, but rather society’s refusal to acknowledge female desire and its need for expression. Moreover, the story expands its critique beyond the question of female sexuality in order to show that it was also the culturally prescribed feminine role that required an erasure of the self as well as the stultification of woman’s intellectual and creative ambitions that were making so many women “sick.” (Smith 93)

In this same line of broaching the taboo topic of female sexuality, Nash argues that promoters of women’s rights attempted to foster female self-confidence by encouraging women to transgress “gender norms of female silence” and to speak about topics that were traditionally banned for

women (261). This un-silencing of women also occurred through the writings of Spanish Romantic women writers such as Carolina Coronado and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, who used their artistic creations to promote a model of female selfhood that allowed women to openly voice their pain and sufferings in patriarchal society:

Their construction of a lyrical self was about a women's place in the world. It would seem, then, that other women read this first female Romantic poetry as the expression of a particularly feminine anguish and were emboldened by it to speak out themselves; and, as the number of women poets grew, they all felt more confident about openly discussing their hitherto silent pain and resentment in a language with clear political overtones. (Kirkpatrick 85)

Kirkpatrick also states that this “burst of female poetic protest” served to defend “women’s right to intellectual activity and literary self-expression” (85).

As will be seen in my analysis of the Spanish novels in the dissertation—Francisco de Sales Mayo’s *La condesita* (1869), Alberto Insúa’s *Las neuróticas* (1910), and Eduardo Zamacois’ *La enferma* (1896)—all of these discourses surrounding women’s liberation are broached through the multilayered topic of female masturbatory fantasy. Through autoerotic touching or reverie, the characters develop a sense of subjectivity by way of creative self-exploration, intellectual cultivation, as well as social and political observations of gender roles. The self-pleasuring women fantasize about the possibility of independence, while questioning women’s place in society, expressing resentment of patriarchal control, and contemplating the daring idea of remaining a single woman. These characters strive to exert sexual agency while fostering self-confidence. In their fantasies they dream of ascending from a position of infantile submission into one of sexual equality, while vocalizing their thoughts on topics that would have been deemed unacceptable for women, such as their need for personal happiness, their erotic curiosities, and their longing for sensual pleasure.

Women in Latin America were also rebelling against their prescribed roles and imagining new possibilities for themselves, demands that will be presented through the theme of masturbation in Horacio Quiroga's short stories dealing with female protagonists in "La meningitis y su sombra" (1917) and "Los guantes de goma" (1909). In particular, I will focus on these discourses of female agency and emancipation in the Southern Cone, especially given that Quiroga was born in Uruguay and kept deep connection with the Argentinian milieu. In *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940*, Asunción Lavrin states that through the dispersion of feminist discourses in the Southern Cone at the end of the nineteenth century "gender relations were put under rigorous scrutiny for the first time in the history of these nations, and though in practice they did not change much, they were not to remain in unchallenged complacency" (13). Lavrin discusses how feminists of the time promoted female education and intellectual equality (42), challenged the double standard of sexual morality (125), endorsed women's knowledge of their bodies and sexual functions (127), encouraged free sexual expression (129), and denounced the idea that marriage was the only outlet for women (129).

Women in early twentieth century Uruguay were also criticizing the misogynistic efforts of patriarchal society to label women as sick for attempting to change their traditional roles. For example, Christine Ehrick describes how a feminist group called "las Damas Católicas," "saw religion as the principal perverting force in society, and particularly so in the case of women, where oppression and domination by the church and its teaching had left her a 'physically and morally deformed being'" (55). Ehrick explains how the leader of this group, a Spanish woman by the name of Belén Sárraga in particular encouraged women to become educated and to rebel against their roles of submission, even if it meant that society would deem them as mentally ill

In later conferences, for example, Sárraga described women as beings ‘sickened by religious mysticism [and] excessive sentimentality.’ Although woman was a deformed and/or sick creature in the liberal view, her redemption was possible through education and liberation from damaging clerical influence. ‘Mental health produces a virtuous and valiant rebelliousness’ in women, they argued, leading her to “break the molds of tradition.” (55)

The effort to change women’s roles and promote sexual equality can also be observed in feminist newspapers in Uruguay and Argentina from the time. An article in the feminist Uruguayan periodical *La Aurora*, titled “A las mujeres” [To the Women], blatantly denounces male control over the opposite sex: “all men, proletarians and bourgeois and those of the dominant classes, have always kept women ignorant to be able to dominate her more easily” (qtd. in Ehrick 39). The anarchist Argentine feminist newspaper *La Voz de la Mujer* (1895-96), openly embraced female autonomy through its slogan “Ni Dios, ni Patrón, ni Marido” (Molyneux 25). Molyneux provides an excerpt from this newspaper translated to English, in which the feminist women writers in charge blatantly ridicule men who tried to speak out against their emancipation to perpetuate the misogynistic belief that women are stupid and inferior subjects. The writers end their rant with a sarcastic message that would have worried and angered men even more in this era of female agency and patriarchal decline:

When we, women, unworthy and ignorant as we are, took the initiative and published *La Voz de la Mujer*, we should have known, Oh modern rogues, how you would respond with your old mechanistic philosophy to our initiative. You should have realised that we stupid women have initiative and that it is the product of thought. You know— we also think. . . . The first number of *La Voz de la Mujer* appeared and of course, all hell broke loose: “Emancipate women? For what?” “Emancipate women? Not on your nelly!” . . . “Let our emancipation come first, and then, when we men are emancipated and free, we shall see about yours.” (22)

Francine Masiello argues that the female writers of this same newspaper

negotiated new representations of women not to be shaped by the dictates of fashion magazines but by female sexual desires. The newspaper thus counseled its female readers to recognize the demands of their bodies and to find satisfaction and pleasure in the promise of anarchist thought. (227)

Jaqueline Vassallo also describes how these women writers made daring statements about their rights to independence, sexual pleasure, and corporeal autonomy, while refusing to be instruments of male control: “ellas rechazaban el matrimonio por considerarlo «un contrato de prostitución» y ensalzaban la libre expresión del cuerpo femenino, el derecho al placer, la masturbación, el amor libre y medidas de anticoncepción” (142).¹

In Quiroga’s stories “La meningitis y su sombra” and “Los guantes de goma,” these themes will reverberate. Both texts deal with young women who clandestinely pleasure themselves in their bedrooms, demonstrating threatening forms of mental and physical autonomy that disrupt traditional notions of male dominance over the female body and psyche, while showing that women do not need men to fulfill their desires. The female characters of these stories also reveal how feminist discourses were disrupting the stigmas and silence surrounding women’s bodies that tried to keep women ignorant of their desires. The young women of Quiroga’s texts are very aware of their passions and find secretive outlets to satisfy them.

Fragile Masculinity

Now that we have surveyed the female ideal and the various ways in which women were attempting to break free of this mold in both regions, it is necessary to turn to the situation of men at the same time in these regions. In both cases, men were expected to live up to a standard of hegemonic masculinity, which can be described as

a culturally normative ideal of male behavior. It is not static and is not even the most common type of masculinity. Rather, it represents a particular configuration of masculinity that is culturally exalted. It is not a reality but a socially endorsed fantasy. It includes those characteristics and behaviors considered most desirable by a given society at a given moment. (McKinney 76)

¹ I will further discuss feminist discourses that promoted female corporeal knowledge in nineteenth-century Uruguay in chapter 4 of the dissertation.

McKinney argues that the male ideal in late nineteenth century Spain consisted of intellect over the body and virile prowess. Men were expected to have firm, muscular bodies that were “self-contained, hermetically sealed, and subject to self-discipline” (93). Men were encouraged to control the public sphere and exert their authority over women. McKinney sums up the masculine ideal describing that “man is muscular, hairy, and hard; woman is soft and weak. Man dominates; woman submits. Man conquers; woman shelters. Man relies on reason; woman on emotion. These beliefs were used to justify the concept of separate spheres” (80). McKinney explains that men were instructed to engage in sexual pleasure only for the purposes of procreation, and to do so with great moderation:

In particular, sexual excess, masturbation, and celibacy were viewed as antagonistic to middle-class masculinity, which was instead associated with venereal moderation, marriage, and fatherhood. Men who transgressed this model risked their health as well as their masculinity. (73)

McKinney also argues that the denouncement of male sexual pleasure and the obsession with corporeal restraint led to a fear and hatred of the feminine:

Permeating this discourse on sexuality is an undercurrent of anxiety expressed as a fear of leaky bodies and a disdain for men who allow themselves to be ruled by their passions as well as those who seemingly reject or neglect their carnal instincts. In sum, because the gender discourse of the nineteenth century is founded on the concept of essential differences, male sexuality in the nineteenth century is characterized by a disdain of the feminine. (74-75)

As will be shown in chapter 1, the male character Turbosa of Francisco de Sales Mayo’s *La condesita* struggles to live up to these standards of hegemonic masculinity for various reasons. He rejects marriage and unrestrainedly satisfies his erotic impulses through masturbation. Turbosa secludes himself in the private sphere to fulfill his own desires, making him a male outcast who fails to assume his role of dominating the public sphere. Turbosa’s character disrupts the idea that men were associated with reason and women with emotion when he loses

control of his mental faculties and slips into a state of insanity. He does not possess the firm, virile, self-controlled body that men strove for, but rather a leaky, uncontrollable body. Instead of dominating the “female” side of his being, when Turbosa analyzes himself he sees a sick, sexualized woman in the mirror.

The masculine ideal shared similar characteristics in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Uruguay. Carla Giaudrone explains that “hacia mediados del XIX, la oligarquía terrateniente uruguaya proyectó un ideal masculino nacional identificado por su voluntad enérgica y viril” (72). José Pedro Barrán describes how this emphasis on virility and self-control led to a pervasive male fear of feminization, just as it did in Spanish society: “Ahora el insulto mayor es la duda sobre la virilidad, la acusación de “afeminamiento,” un también pasarse al otro bando, pero al bando del nuevo enemigo diabolizado, la mujer, una traición al poder masculino” (205). As in the case of the male ideal in Spain, to avoid feminization and weakness, men were expected to control their sexual impulses: “La masturbación era otro ‘mal’ de la sexualidad que quebraba la idea de ‘masculinidad’. Los profesionales de la medicina establecieron un vínculo entre la debilidad física y moral y el derroche de líquido seminal o la sexualidad no contenida” (Duffau 30). Barrán also describes how this male display of virility was associated with domination over women: “En esta cultura en que el hombre tenía el poder, la virilidad era una de las causas esenciales del dominio, pero para turbación e inseguridad del dominador, la probanza de ese poder correspondía en última instancia a su rival, la mujer” (160).

In his book chapter “Pariahs in the Wilderness: Abject Masculinity in Horacio Quiroga,” Todd S. Garth has noted how Quiroga displays his struggle to live up to these standards of masculinity in his fiction: “Quiroga’s men are routinely physically lacking—unprepossessing, awkward, sickly or fatally inept” (92). Garth also explains that “men and their relationships with

women are, in Quiroga's world, characterized by abjectness" (92) and that the author displays misogynistic tendencies, since he "consistently links women with the abject" ("Horacio Quiroga's Heroic Paradigm" 457). Going along with this idea of Quiroga's hostile and frustrated relationship with the feminine, Garth focuses on Quiroga's attempts to distance the male body from female corporeality in his literature:

the complexity of Quiroga's ideas pertaining to maleness is bound up with his portrayal of the relations between women and men. These relations are without exception conflicted and rest decidedly on women's corporeality—a distinct emphasis on the female body as the primary identifier of the female gender—as opposed to an ambivalent male physicality that often questions and complicates the role of the male body in the constitution of masculinity. ("Pariahs" 93)

In my analysis of Quiroga's "La meningitis y su sombra" and "Los guantes de goma" I investigate Quiroga's frustrated attempts to gain control over the untamable female body to achieve this fantasy of male dominance over the feminine. In "Los guantes" there is a particular emphasis on the abject female body mentioned by Garth; however, what will be seen in this story is a struggled effort to separate sexualized, uncontrollable, and leaky female corporeality from the male body, a body that was expected to be virile and self-contained. In Quiroga's "Los perseguidos," this male inability to control his own body is also evidenced, but in this case, it is through a sick, weak, anti-social effeminate male who is the epitome of masculine failure.

Gender Transgression, Illness, and the Medical Gaze

In the dissertation's texts, both the masturbating male characters who stray from norms of masculinity to fulfill their own wants and the self-pleasuring female characters who deviate from norms of the *ángel del hogar* to pursue their autonomous desires are depicted as sick. The pathologization of these characters can be understood when taking into account that "the concept of illness, whether bodily or mental, implies deviation from some clearly defined norm. In the case of physical illness, the norm is the structural and functional integrity of the human body"

(Szaz 28). Both male and female characters are subjected to the dissecting, revealing, and scrutinizing powers of the medical gaze. Foucault describes the emergence of the medical gaze in the nineteenth century that sought deviant social subjects:

It was no longer the gaze of any observer, but that of a doctor supported and justified by an institution, that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and intervention. Moreover, it was a gaze that was not bound by the narrow grid of structure (form, arrangement, number, size), but that could and should grasp colours, variations, tiny anomalies, always receptive to the deviant. (89)

In his chapter “Taking Sex in Hand: Inscribing Masturbation and the Construction of Normative Masculinity,” Ed Cohen describes how the male body became subjected to the medical gaze in an attempt to pressure men to conform to the hegemonic masculine ideal:

From the late eighteenth century onward, the increasing circulation of texts about masturbation guaranteed that, once they reached puberty (if not even before), middle-class male bodies would be continually subjected to a wide array of institutional gazes that sought to give precise (sexual meanings to their minute behavioral patterns). (35)

Elizabeth Stephens also argues that “new institutional and discursive constructions of masculinity emerged at this time” and that there was a “medicalization of male sexuality and bodily fluids” (422). Stephens describes how this pathologization of the male body and fluids led to a “spermatorrhea panic,” a disease that was associated with excessive, uncontrollable ejaculation that could strip a man of his virility, making him emotional, timid, scared, soft, and womanish (421, 424). In *Unauthorized Pleasures: Accounts of Victorian Erotic Experience*, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman describes how the spermatorrhea patient was subjected to medical intervention for his failure to conform to the masculine standard of phallic virility:

In the spermatorrhea panic surgeons acted out their mastery over—and perhaps revenge on—the oozing bodies that had tainted their professional identities. This is one important message of the panic and its onerous abstractions of “patriarchy” and “masculinity,” and their bodies were equally subject to appropriation in the name of the phallic ideal. Spermatorrhea surgeons objectified, dismembered, and invaded middle-class male bodies as quickly as they did those of prostitutes and paupers. (48)

As will be subsequently shown, the male protagonists of chapters 1 and 2 of the dissertation share characteristics with spermatorrhea patients who served as countermodels to standards of hegemonic masculinity in medical treatises of the time, which is why they will be subjected to medical diagnosis, punishment and incarceration in mental asylums.

The medical gaze also victimized the female body to unearth and condemn women's transgressive behaviors that went against the ideal of the *ángel del hogar*. Stephanie E. Libbon describes how men used scientific and medical doctrines as an attempt to curb movements towards female equality, which were bursting to the forefront at the end of the nineteenth century:

Despite the fact that women had struggled alongside men to gain greater social freedom, the majority of educated men opposed giving women more civil and personal liberties, believing, rightly so, that these liberties would lead to increased public and private power for women. But to justify this position within the framework of enlightened thought that postulated a rational individual sexed but unaffected by gender, proof of natural inequalities had to be found to counter the appeal for natural rights. Experts and laymen alike now turned to science, and in particular to biology, to defend the position that women were unable to function autonomously inside or outside of the domestic realm. (81)

Tsuchiya also signals the patriarchal strategy of pathologizing and sexualizing the women who strove to be men's equal, while displacing these anxieties of power onto their bodies, a move that we will see happening with the female protagonists of the dissertation: "Although connections have been drawn between deviancy and the body in relation to both men and women, female deviance was automatically transformed into sexual deviance, assumed to manifest itself in the materiality of the body" (Tsuchiya 14). While the male characters of the dissertation risk pathologization for rejecting the male ideal of virile prowess, corporeal self-restraint, and productive and moderate sexual practices, the female characters are deemed sick for their desires

that aligned with emerging feminist discourses rather than with the traditional paradigm of the *ángel del hogar*.

The woman who strove to achieve these “devious” liberating wants would typically be labeled as a hysteric in nineteenth-century society. As Rita Felski notes, “hysteria was to become the exemplary instance of the medical pathologization of the female body, a catchall term that was increasingly used to label any form of behavior not consonant with established norms of femininity” (182). Cecily Devereux supports this claim:

Hysteria emerged through nineteenth-century psychoanalysis as patriarchy’s same old story and same old “disease” but in a new and mystifying apparatus that ramped up the pressure on women to do what the condition of femininity itself called upon them to do if they were “normal.” (25-26)

Lisa Appignanesi argues that hysteria “described a sexualized madness full of contradictions, one which could play all feminine parts and take on a dizzying variety of symptoms, though none of them had any real, detectable base in the body” (126). Tamar Heller also mentions that “a tradition of ascribing hysteria to sexual frustration persisted into the nineteenth century and underlies the theory of Freud” (78). However, when delving deeper, hysteria was also connected with a woman’s emotions, imagination, intellect, unconscious desires, corporeal autonomy, and potential for independence and subjectivity. Elaine Showalter claims that “it was much simpler to blame sexual frustration, to continue to see hysterical women as lovelorn Ophelias, than to investigate women’s intellectual frustration, lack of mobility or needs for [autonomy and control]” (132). Susan Stanford Friedman also comments on the connection between hysteria, a rejection of gender roles, female subjectivity and the secret inner workings of a woman’s psyche in Freud and Breuer’s *Studies on Hysteria* (1895):

This plot in *Studies on Hysteria* revolves centrally around the issue of female subjectivity, just as the plots of many Ibsen plays and nineteenth-century novels do, especially those with female protagonists who attempt in one way or another to break through the

confinements of their lives as women. In their case histories, Breuer and Freud function partially as omniscient narrators whose probing search into the psyche constructs the female subject who must negotiate the confines of the nineteenth-century ethos dominated by the marriage plot and the ideology of femininity. (49)

While the female characters of chapters 1, 3, and 4 of the dissertation are not explicitly diagnosed as hysterics, as they clearly are in chapters 5 and 6, these women are plagued with the disorders of erotomania, obsessive delirium, and hypochondriacal monomania. Although these appear as separate diseases, they all seemed to blend together under the common ailment of hysteria. Carol Groneman links erotomania, a manifestation of nymphomania, to hysteria:

Nymphomania is variously described as too much coitus (either wanting it or having it), too much desire, and too much masturbation. Simultaneously, it was seen as a symptom, a cause and a disease in its own right. Its etiologies, symptoms, and treatments often overlapped with those of erotomania, hysteria, hysteron-epilepsy, and ovariomania, despite doctor's attempts to classify each distinct "disease." (221)

The disorders of delirium and monomania (a disease connected to masturbation that denoted an obsession with a single idea) were also manifestations of hysteria (Mason 109). Jann Matlock describes how the medical accounts from the famous hospital of hysteria in Paris, the Salpêtrière, blended these disorders: "The texts in the registers of the Salpêtrière oscillate between simple labels ('is afflicted with hysteria,' 'is in a state of partial delirium,' 'is afflicted with monomania') and stories—sequences of events or descriptions of symptoms (140). The ailments of erotomania, delirium, and monomania were also blurred. Helen Small found that in the eighteenth century, erotomania was considered "a subspecies of monomania" that "could be distinguished by the presence of delirium" (15). In the dissertation, I show how the authors use the sickness of monomania to project male fears surrounding uncontrollable female desire, while the disorder of delirium serves to project anxieties of a woman's ability to use her imagination to escape the patriarchal constraints of reality to construct her own self-fulfilling fantasies.

The disease of hysteria, like the ailments of delirium and monomania, were linked to female masturbation: “Autoridades médicas como el alumno de Charcot Henri Huchard (1844-1911) señalan la posibilidad de que algunas histéricas, dominadas por la excitabilidad nerviosa, se vean abocadas al onanismo” (201).² Whether under the guise of erotomania, delirium, monomania or hysteria itself, in the texts studied these diseases represent a concealment or suppression of female desires that is played out through secretive masturbatory pleasure. The potential diagnosis of hysteria compelled women to be ashamed of their true selves and to hide their authentic identities, an idea that will be evidenced by the female protagonists studied here. The representations of the “sick” female protagonists of these texts align with ideas presented by the fin-de-siècle Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger: “hysteria was a conflict between innate female sexuality and a false superficial personality that women acquired under masculine influence” (Sengoopta 109). In addition, Weininger believed that the hysterical woman “was repressed in normal life by a false outer self” (Sengoopta 109). Chandak Sengoopta also explains:

In hysteria, Weininger proclaimed, Woman’s genuine self rebelled against repression and impinged on her consciousness. Breuer’s patient Anna O. had used the term “bad self” (*das schlimme Ich*) for her second consciousness. This “bad” self, according to Weininger, was the real self of woman. (109)

Ender reveals how women were pressured to hide this “bad” authentic self by the male medical gaze that worked to suppress their true identities: “In short, then, while hysteria can define a conscience which is experienced as bodily stigma and is thus made visible for the gaze of the physician-moralist, it also sanctions the erasure of the woman’s consciousness” (203).

² I will discuss the connections between masturbation, delirium, and monomania throughout the dissertation.

All of the masturbating female protagonists in the dissertation who transgress gender norms either internalize this male medical gaze or experience scrutiny by an actual medic, leading them to be ashamed of their true selves. As a result, they will attempt to conceal their desires from the public eye, subject themselves to self-harm, become disgusted with their bodies, suffer from emotions of guilt, be plagued with worries of vigilance, and experience horrible nightmares. In addition to subjecting them to the medical gaze, several of the authors attempt to control these threatening female protagonists by pathologizing their displays of sexual desire, degrading them into objects of male pleasure, and subjecting them to punishing deaths. Only in the last two texts of the dissertation do the authors call into question the equation of female desire with sickness, while displaying a more sympathetic attitude to the suffering “hysteric.”

While the experiences of these characters expose women’s struggle to achieve a new emancipated identity for themselves in an era of social change, I show that these “hysterical” women simultaneously act as mirrors that reflect male anxieties and frustrations surrounding emerging notions of female power and patriarchal weakness. In “Mirrors of Masculine Desire: Narcissus and Pygmalion in Victorian Representation,” Martin A. Danahay argues that despite the prevalence of women gazing at their reflections in turn-of-the-century art and literature, “there are very few examples of men, whether mythical or actual, looking at themselves in mirrors to be found in nineteenth-century representation” (35). To explain this absence of men looking in the mirror, Danahay states that “while it is conventionally viewed as permissible, and even ‘natural,’ for women to look at their own reflections with a narcissistic fascination, it is impermissible . . . for men to be too preoccupied with their own looks. Such self-involved desire must be expressed through a swerve into the feminine” (35).

This process of male mirror gazing will be depicted as a “swerve into the feminine” in all of the texts studied. In most cases there is a process of male reflection at play through the “hysterical” female characters, but in one case, male self-contemplation occurs through the lens of an effeminate male hysteric. Not only does the feminine hysteric act as a mirror that reflects male insecurities surrounding the autonomous, emancipated woman, but he or she also functions as a looking glass through which men can contemplate their own embarrassing fears of sickness, corporality, and their shameful fantasies of sexual expression that went against the masculine ideal of erotic control. For example, despite the male obsession with the sexually uncontrollable female hysteric, Ursula Link-Heer and Jamie Owen Daniel note that “‘male hysteria’ became a clinical reality in the latter half of the nineteenth century” (192). Lynne Kirby suggests a mirroring between the female and male hysteric by explaining that male hysteria is “a kind of mirror image of otherness” that emasculated men and had the potential to transform them into “the social and sexual Other” (67). Juliet Mitchell states that “hysterical behaviour was considered more unmanly than it was unwomanly” (18) and that “hysteria in men appears to be the very opposite of masculinity” (159). Male hysteria was used to denote deviations from the masculine ideal, an idea that can help to explain why the male protagonists of chapters 1 and 2 display symptoms of this supposedly “feminine” disease.

Like female hysteria, male hysteria incarnated the ways in which strict gender norms caused sexual repression and suffering. Mark S. Micale describes how male hysteria represented a painful expression of uncontrollable sexual desire since “the male hysterical attack could be a highly eroticized performance,” in which men let out cries, experience pains in the pelvic area, while thrusting in a movement that parallels intercourse (273). Micale also links male hysteria to men’s sexual sufferings provoked by oppressive medical discourses and unattainable standards

of masculinity: “case histories of male hysteria published in the 1880’s and 1890’s are filled with sexual observations and prescriptions that suggest the degree to which troubled sexuality was a component in the psychological suffering of men diagnosed with hysteria at this time” (187). Men plagued with this disease would display their inner torment through hallucinations and suicidal inclinations. They would also tear at their clothes, make vulgar gestures, and suffer from involuntary seminal emissions (190-91). The male protagonists of chapters 1 and 2 will manifest similar symptoms to these patients, displaying their inner crisis of suffering for failing to conform to standards of male “normalcy.”

The Pathologization of Masturbation

In addition to these shared hysterical manifestations in the male and female gender deviants of the dissertation, both sexes viewed themselves as ill and were perceived by society as sick because of their clandestine masturbatory practices. From the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, a masturbation panic swept through Europe, Latin America, and the United States. As Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck argue, “The fear of masturbation constituted, in terms of both its breadth and its duration, a true social phenomenon” (vii). In their article “España y la cruzada médica contra la masturbación (1800-1900), elementos para una genealogía,” Francisco Vázquez García and José Benito Seoane Cegarra discuss how this panic evoked widespread fears surrounding the loss of willpower, the disintegration of selfhood, sickness, and unproductive sexuality:

Entre los distintos productores que intervinieron en ese mercado (higienistas, pedagogos, directores de conciencia, novelistas, arquitectos, artistas, etc.) se efectuó una verdadera lucha simbólica para monopolizar, entre otras cosas, la definición legítima de la salud corporal y espiritual. Aquí se inserta la estrategia sanitaria de lucha contra la masturbación: esta conducta concentraba todas las obsesiones del momento (pérdida de autocontrol, disolución del carácter y de la identidad, desfallecimiento de la virilidad, debilitamiento físico y mental, sexualidad improductiva y sin futuro). (840)

Vásquez García and Seoane Cegarra discuss the belief of Spanish physicians that both men and women of the country were making themselves ill through masturbation. While the pathologization of male masturbation in Spain at the time was previously broached in my discussion of McKinney's article, these researchers discuss the preoccupations with female onanism and suggestions that women may have been more susceptible to this "vice" than men and could learn it early on during childhood:

Citando al teólogo francés Debreyne y al higienista Deslandes, Claret insistía en que «este vicio hace tantas o más víctimas entre las mujeres que entre los hombres. En algunas empieza desde la cuna». Las niñas eran atraídas hacia este «vicio abominable» por una «especie de instinto» que unido a su fuerte «sensibilidad amativa», conducía a más funestos resultados que en los hombres: «afecta más a su sensibilidad y ataca más a su sistema nervioso.» (860)

In his article "Urano, Onán y Venus: La sexualidad psicopatologizada en el Uruguay del siglo XIX," Nicolás Duffau argues that the masturbation panic was also prevalent in fin-de-siècle Uruguay. As previously mentioned, physicians of the country believed that male masturbation "quebraba la idea de 'masculinidad'" (Duffau 30). However, Duffau also discusses the threat that female masturbation posed for society: "El comportamiento sexual femenino también fue psicopatologizado a través de un tipo de manifestación maniática, la ninfomanía que, según la perspectiva médica, estaba emparentada con la masturbación" (32).

The novels and stories studied here illustrate how the male authors implemented medical discourses on both male and female masturbation to pathologize individuals who rejected norms of femininity and masculinity. The self-pleasuring male characters of the texts suffer from ailments labeled as connected to masturbation in medical treatises, such as antisocial behaviors, excessive guilt, insanity, hallucinations, shameful erotic dreams, paranoia, uncontrollable laughter, buzzing in the ears, shyness, thinness, bags beneath the eyes, epileptic convulsions,

suicidal tendencies, feminization, and involuntary seminal emission.³ The female characters are plagued with the masturbatory ailments of erotomania, tuberculosis, obsessive nymphomaniacal delirium, meningitis, hypochondria, monomania, fears of self-pollution, bodily pains, hysterical sufferings, and sexual nightmares. While in some texts the masturbatory practices of the protagonists are quite explicit, in others, the onanistic indulgences of the characters are harder to detect as they are veiled under other diseases associated with the “solitary vice.”

In these works of fiction studied and in medical treatises of the time, masturbation acts as a mirror of the disruption of gender roles in society, which involved an increase in female agency and a demolition of patriarchal power structures. The mere fact that there was a surge in medical, literary, and artistic representations of self-pleasuring women in the nineteenth century signifies the widespread recognition of female sexual desire and women’s progression towards equality. For instance, Thomas Laqueur argues that “masturbation represented the truth about women’s sexuality” as well as “a path to women’s self-knowledge from which all else springs” (74). Laqueur also states that “masturbation was embraced by women’s movements as a sign of freedom, autonomy, and rebellion against status quo” (75). In her thesis *Visions of Feminist (Pom(o)nanism): Masturbating Female Postmodern Subjectivity in American Television and Film*, Jennifer Beth Simmons argues that stigmas surrounding female masturbation in present-day society expose fears surrounding women’s subjectivity, an idea that will also be observed in the late nineteenth-century texts studied in the dissertation:

I want to suggest that even though their representations of female masturbation may still convey lingering repressive attitudes, rather than merely exemplifying additional instances of female masturbation as a subject of levity, scorn, or ridicule, they do when progressively read speak more significantly, if not wholly unproblematically, to the

³ I just mention the symptoms and authors here, but I will develop further discussions on these medical treatises within the chapters.

liberating potential of masturbation as constitutive aid to postmodern feminist subjectivity and community. (14)

In a similar regard, Naomi Wolf claims that the sudden medical fixation on female masturbation represented a male fear of a women's intellectual cultivation, her desires for emancipation, and her rejection of patriarchal control, themes that will be observed in the studied texts:

The Victorian obsession with stamping out female masturbation was often tied to fears about women's education, and often connected to images of girls or women seduced by reading ... This nineteenth-century obsession with the dangers of female masturbation, which emerged in a century in which women secured legislative victory after legislative victory involving access to rights, must be understood as a reaction against the dangers of female emancipation from the patriarchal home. (144)

In *Solitary Sex*, Laqueur provides examples of the female masturbator in artwork from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to show how male artists used this sexual practice as a trope to denote women's knowledge, creativity, and self-creation. In Pierre-Antoine Baudouin's drawing *Solitary Pleasure* (1769), a smiling woman pleasures herself in front of a desk bearing a globe, books, and papers, with a guitar by her side, suggesting that she has been fostering her intellectual and creative talents in her masturbatory stimulations. In Thomas Rowlandson's British drawing *Lonesome Pleasures* (1812), a giant woman pleasures herself in front of female sculptures and has a dildo lying on the ground next to her. According to Laqueur, "we see here a woman making her own destiny" (354).⁴ The dildo on the floor together with the female sculptures suggest that this woman is crafting her own destiny without a man and according to her own desires, a theme that will appear in chapters 1 and 5 through the theme of female autoerotic pleasure. The woman in this illustration is also shown pleasuring herself behind a curtain, while spectators observe her, introducing the connections between masturbation, self-creation and theatrical role play that will be subsequently discussed.

⁴ This drawing will be further discussed in chapter 6.

The female masturbator's rejection of her traditional role and her thirst for power caused physicians to depict her as fearfully virile and as a hermaphrodite, an idea that will be presented in chapter 1. In his masturbation manual *Enfermedades de nervios producidas por el abuso de los placeres del amor y excesos del onanismo* (1807), the French physician Samuel Auguste André Tissot reveals this masculinization of the female masturbator in the following translated passage:

La naturaleza en sus juegos suele dar una pequeña semejanza a las mugeres con los hombres: circunstancia que por no haberse examinado bien hizo creer la quimera de los hermafroditas [...] se hallaron en todos tiempos mugeres imperfectas que se apoderaron de las funciones viriles. (51)

In his treatise “Desequilibrio mental, hiperestesia, e inversión sexual: safismo, hermafroditismo psico-sexual, morfinomanía, mitridatización, histeria” (1906), the Uruguayan physician Bernardo Etchepare reveals how a masturbating female patient adopted male behaviors such as horseback riding, shooting, and entering into the public realm of “male society,” something that will also occur with the female masturbator Aurora in chapter 1. Etchepare describes his patient's preference for “male” activities in the following manner:

Vuelta a París ha continuado su vida de antes sin variación en sus hábitos sexuales. Acentuó cada vez más su carácter varonil. Ha aprendido a montar a caballo, en bicicleta, tira las armas, posee muy bien el juego del florete y tira la carabina a la perfección, al extremo de hacer blanco con frecuencia en las golondrinas. Usa armas y en este momento anda con un revólver. Se complacía en la sociedad de los hombres de algún valer y de cierta fama original, tal como Catulle Méndés, Chincholle, Jean Lorrain, de cuya intimidad pretende haber gozado. (726)

As I will show in chapter 1 on Mayo's *La condesita*, medical accounts of female masturbation also depicted the female clitoris as a firm phallus (Parker 46). In the same line of this fear of the clitoris, masturbation represented a dangerous form of female sexual autonomy that caused a rejection of the male and heterosexual desire. Paula Bennett states that female masturbation was associated with a rejection of marriage and a refusal to submit to male power:

Female sexual self-stimulation had the unlooked-for capacity to undermine the very foundations of the state for it subverted one of the primary sources of the state's power: women's commitment to marriage, their readiness to subordinate themselves—as social and economic subjects and as feeling human beings—to the care and feeding of their children's and their husband's needs. (Pomegranate Flowers 204)

This idea of male rejection is presented in Etchepare's treatise when the physician claims that his patient cannot feel the slightest amount of pleasure from men but does find exquisite satisfaction from clitoral manipulations. Tissot also reveals that female masturbation made women "indifferent" to men:

Un síntoma muy comun á ambos sexos, y que yo coloco en este artículo porque es mas frecuente en las mugeres, es la indiferencia en que constituye esta infame maniobra a sus víctimas para los placeres legítimos del himeneo, aun quando las fuerzas y los deseos no estén apagados: indiferencia que no solo hace a muchas celibatas, sino que también las persigue hasta el lecho nupcial. (46)

As previously mentioned, this connection between female masturbation and male rejection will run throughout the dissertation. A message that accompanies this rejection in several of the texts is that men need to treat women better, going along with April R. Haynes's argument that "Women's centrality to the great masturbation phobia of the nineteenth century ... has long been associated with "reforming men and manhood" (5). The masturbating woman who shuns men in these works demands that the opposite sex respect her, treat her as his equal, and listen to her needs, rather than treating her as an object of sexual pleasure and of male domination. She also demands that the opposite sex stop looking at her as a naïve, innocent, angelic, passionless, and childish being, to recognize that she is a real woman with natural sexual urges and that she is on the same moral, intellectual plane as men.

While medical discourses on female masturbation represent a masculinization of the knowledgeable, independent woman, medical accounts of male masturbation reflect male preoccupations with diminishing patriarchal power. Male patients are described in masturbation

treatises as scared, weak, sick, and feminine, theories that will be discussed in chapters 1 and 2. Whereas the female masturbator was supposedly equipped with a firm, projected phallus, the male masturbator is described as impotent and possessing a flaccid member: “Hay masturbadores a quienes repugna el coito y son inútiles para él; porque sus erecciones son incompletas, el pene esta flojo; por eso prefieren el onanismo” (Mata 258). Similarly, Tissot mentions “Otro síntoma que sigue a los que se entregan al vicio solitario, es una especie de parálisis de los órganos de la generación, de la qual nace la impotencia viril y la gonorrea simple” (99-100). Not only does the male masturbator have a soft member, but it is also depicted as uncontrollably leaking, just like the other parts of his body: “Atacado de una diarrea involuntaria, y de un fluxo continuo de licor espermático derramaba al mismo tiempo por la nariz unas gotas de sangre pálida y aguantosa, y por la boca una especie de baba” (24-25).

While the female masturbator is intelligent, the male masturbator loses control of his mental faculties and goes insane, themes that will also be explored in the first two chapters. These depictions of male masturbation served as a response to the changing male ideal and worked to mold men into hegemonic standards of masculinity. As Haynes argues, “Eighteenth-century sexual writers masculinized onanism precisely because they strove to build manly citizens” (34). As will be shown in chapters 1, 2, and 3, the male protagonists who engage in masturbation desperately attempt to curb their impulses so that they can be “manly citizens,” but they undergo emotional and physical suffering in this difficult effort.

The trope of masturbation is appealing to these authors because it represented a male and female attempt to forge a coherent expression of the self through a fantasy experimentation of roles and identity, during a time when both genders were subjected to an omnipotent, vigilant medical gaze that enforced social conformity. Because the roles that these male and female

characters dream of embodying go against ideals of manhood and womanhood, they feel that it is necessary to undergo a secretive, private performance of the self that escapes the public eye.

These dreamlike performances that take place in the minds of the protagonists are also depicted in terms of guilt, sickness, and deviance. What these characters experience in these forbidden fantasies are tensions between autonomous wants and social expectations.

Masturbatory Fantasy, the Mirror, and Selfhood

Laqueur demonstrates how masturbation incarnated these tensions between private wants and public identity, by arguing that masturbation represented “the creation of the self” and permitted individuals to fulfill their inner passions that would be at odds with societal demands (43). Regarding the widespread masturbation panic from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, Laqueur states that “the history of the new modern regime of guilt is thus part of a larger history of the self, of creativity, of limits, and of excess. It is a guilt born of a newly problematic relationship between the individual and society” (183). Laqueur also asserts:

For the first time in human history, masturbation was embraced as a mode of liberation, as a claim to autonomy, to pleasure for its own sake, an escape from the socially prescribed path toward normal adulthood. It went from being a deviant sexuality of the wrong kind of social order to being the foundational sexuality of new sorts of imagined communities, the basis of a new covenant—or lack thereof—between self and other. (397)

In addition to this idea of autonomy, Laqueur describes how masturbation was viewed as “a theater of the self” or “a place where the private self stood in sharp contrast to public acts and expressions” (225). The characters of these texts undergo masturbatory fantasies at the theater, the opera, masked balls, carnival, and in dances on stage before an audience. The bedrooms of the protagonists transform into theatrical stages when imaginary theater spectators invade this private space to observe the masturbator in their moment of guilty pleasure. All of these scenes

highlight this connection between private self-pleasure and role play, which will be further explored in my discussion of the mirror in several of the chapters.

Some of the characters engage in explicit self-touching to achieve personal satisfaction. Women caress their bodies in front of the mirror, in the bed, or in the shower, and even satisfy themselves physically with dildos. Men engage in scenes of self-touching that result in guilty ejaculatory release. Nevertheless, as I briefly stated before, it is important to note that the notion of masturbation was not always viewed solely as physical self-touching, but more often as a form of imaginative fantasy. Philippe Brenot argues that the “more unbearable and more subversive” part of masturbation was the imagination, “the invisible part of the crime” (38). Similarly, Laqueur states that “it was almost by its nature immoderate, because the imagination was not easily restrained. It had ‘the greatest part of the crime,’ and thus the seat of the imagination—the mind and all that is connected to it—was most severely punished by doing it” (213). In *Keats, Modesty and Masturbation*, Rachel Schulkins presents an attendant idea:

In the anti-masturbation literature that flourished throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, masturbation represented a private and imaginative world of abundance and unrestrained freedom. As such, the attack against masturbation was an attack against the endless desiring self. (61)

Several female protagonists in these works simply use their imagination to fulfill their wants. There are young women who resort to the powers of their mind to craft images of ideal male suitors who have the power to read the mysteries of their bodies and satisfy their sensual curiosities. Women also fantasize about being gently caressed by female friends, who know how to warm their hearts with kind words of emotional affection. The onanistic fantasy of the female friend also allows the protagonist to recognize her own beauty and self-worth, while giving her the courage to be herself and to pursue her autonomous wants, even if it means rejecting social norms. There is also a wife who resorts to dreaming to fulfill her sexual needs left unfulfilled by

her husband; however, because she feels so much guilt for exploring her sensual wants instead of conforming to the ideal of the *ángel del hogar*, these dreams transform into horrible nightmares. Male protagonists also enter a realm of reverie to craft tempting female shadows and conjure hallucinatory reveries of a sexually unrestrained other that they wish to embody.

Like masturbation, the mirror allows for “analyzing and even creating the self in its self-representations to itself” (La Belle 2). Similar to intermingled feelings of pleasure and guilt that masturbation provides, the mirror “constantly grants pleasures and pains to the gazing subjects” (Wang 181). In both cases, this pain can be tied to notions of shame provoked by insecurities about social acceptability (Wang 191). Just as masturbation is about “a private and imaginative world” of the “endless desiring self” (Schulkins 61), in mirror gazing the subject is in complete control; “there are virtually no restrictions on the imagination,” and subjects enhance their pleasure from “manipulating and re-creating images” (Wang 181). These similarities between the two activities can help to understand why in all of the texts studied, physical and mental masturbation are paralleled with mirror gazing. Bernd Jager demonstrates the connection between these two activities when he explains that “both masturbation and mirror gazing play with the dual aspects of the body as both a source and a terminus for a seeing and doing. Both games begin to explore the full reverberating circle of seeing / being seen and of doing / being done to” (229). I will show how the masturbatory fantasies of the protagonists involve this splitting of the self, in which they become the subject and object of their own desires in a process of self-spectatorship. I also illustrate how the onanistic pleasures of the characters involve this same interplay of seeing and being seen, which induces ambivalent feelings of pleasure, shame, and fear.

It is important to underline that mirror gazing in these texts does not always involve an actual mirror, but sometimes a figurative one. B. J. Sokol describes how this form of figurative mirror gazing in Shakespeare's work "stood for meditative or contemplative activity," which is something that will also be observed in these works (70). The mirror gazing / masturbation scenes in the dissertation are shown as meditative, enlightening, and transformative scenarios that help the characters come to terms with their true identities and desires. When these characters gaze at themselves in the mirror (real or figurative) during their autoerotic fantasies, it leads to a splitting of the self that allows analysis from an external perspective:

To see oneself in the mirror, to identify oneself, requires a mental operation by which the subject is capable of objectivizing himself or separating what is outside from what is inside. This operation can be successful if the subject recognizes the reflection as his own likeness and can say "I am the other of that other." (Bartsch 5)

Melchior-Bonnet also describes how mirror gazing can result in a performance of the self that involves seeing oneself in the eyes of others:

Through this doubled gaze, however, both introspective and mimetic, the individual could define himself as a subject. Examining the self in the mirror of "Know thyself" allows the individual to understand himself through the mastering of his consciousness, whereas by creating his image in the mirror of others, he becomes a spectacle for himself under exterior gazes. To see oneself and to be seen, to know oneself and to be known—these are interdependent acts. (156)

When these characters analyze themselves in the mirror, there is an interplay of various gazes upon the self: the pleasurable gaze of a fantasy Other, the judging gazes of society, and the condemning gaze of the medic.

The mirror acts as a space of fantasy and role play that helps the characters negotiate their identities and desires, while also taking into account social norms, which is why I label their self-pleasuring as a type of "staged masturbatory fantasy." The mirror and the masturbatory fantasy cause the characters to undergo a trial of the self, in which they can experiment with their

identities in settings that blur reality/truth and fiction/dream. This self-trial or performance provides a temporary avenue of escape from social restraints but also leads the characters to contemplate the consequences they could face for rebelling against gender norms.

Veronica L. Schanoes describes the mirror's ability to induce pleasurable reverie while simultaneously helping individuals to contemplate their desires and self-reflect upon their relation to the outside world:

Mirrors are not merely stories; they are specifically fantasy stories. Reflections are insubstantial creations of light or thought—and the dual meaning of “reflection” is related to the mirror's status as fantasy. Reflections, like fantasy, are contained only in the mind, are nothing more than a trick of light. And yet without reflections, without either kind of reflections, how on earth would we know how we are in the world, or how we wish to relate to it? (99)

In particular, Schanoes argues that “the mirror reflects girls' and women's fantasies, experiences, and desires under conditions often hostile to their expression. In this way, mirrors are not only stories. They are specifically stories of female fantasy, desire and transformation” (100). As will be seen in chapters 1, 5, and 6, the mirror acts as a gateway of transformation for the female characters as they fantasize about shedding their identities of naïve innocence and submission to become explorers of their desires, exert their agency in the face of male control, and rebel against unjust social norms for women. However, these female characters always experience emotions of shame for expressing these wants deemed unacceptable for women at the time. The mirror also serves as an instrument of masturbatory reverie for the male characters, but these introspective interactions are depicted as remorseful trials of self-observation that cause the protagonists to alienate themselves from their horrifying mirror reflections, since they are confronted with images of sickness, sexual excess, and effeminacy.

Going along with the idea that the mirror is a gateway for fantasy, Melchior-Bonnet describes the looking glass as a type of theatrical stage that results in a blurring between reality

and fiction: “The theater stage, with its amalgam of real and imaginary relationships, offers a space of transition where dream and reality, the psychic world and exterior world cross paths” (183). In addition, Melchior-Bonnet interprets one’s interaction with the mirror as a theatrical performance of the self that sometimes results in struggled self-recognition in the reflection: “Facing the mirror, a mute witness of desires or fears and a theater of face-to-face confrontation, the subject hesitates between projection and perception, between the inexhaustible images of the dream and evidence of reality, and is obsessed with distortion” (252). Jacques Lacan also famously described the mirror stage, a stage in which a child “does not yet experience his body as a unified totality but as something disjointed” in terms of a theatrical rehearsal that leads to the formation of a coherent self:

The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust hastens forward from insufficiency to anticipation—and which contrives for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extend from a fragmented body-image to form of its totality that I shall call orthopedic (qtd. in Dor 95)

As previously discussed, this fantastical performance before the looking glass can serve the purpose of providing individuals with pleasure by contemplating themselves through the gaze of an Other that incarnates an exciting, desirable identity free from social constraints. However, this gratifying gaze upon the self can become clouded with external gazes of judgment and vigilance that become internalized in this process of mirror observation:

To recognize oneself in the mirror does not simply involve an identification of the felt me which is here and the perceived me which is there; rather it also and more importantly involves the dawning and unsettling realization that the felt me has an exterior dimension that can be witnessed by others. (Zahavi 204)

Melchior-Bonnet further illustrates how mirror interactions can provoke a process of self-scrutiny through imaginary external gazes:

Mediating between an essentially relational mode of being and the dawn of the self’s dialogue with itself, the mirror facilitated the narcissistic practice of dreamy meditation,

without letting go of social control. The walls of the mirrored study were not impenetrable—the gaze upon the self is a monitored gaze, a watched gaze . . . The mirror was not consulted in order to scrutinize one’s features in a self-hating way, but rather to realize an image others were expecting, sitting at the junction of a truth too crude to be shown publicly and an artifice that could render it presentable. (142).

Similarly, Shadi Bartsch argues that when individuals gaze at their reflections in the mirror, they become scrutinizing spectators of the self in an effort to achieve autocorrection of their flaws:

But since the figure who judges the mirror image in disgust has taken on the role of a dispassionate audience, this use of the mirror does suggestively reflect upon the idea that a dislocation, or self-splitting, of the ego into judge and judged could have a part to play in the formulations of the ethical self. (23-24)

Bartsch also describes how this gaze of “an internalized viewer” and “inner judge” can produce feelings of shame, which is clearly what will happen with these characters as they explore their masturbatory desires:

This gaze, again, does not have to be understood in any literal sense: shame can also be the product of an internalized viewer that embodies the judgements of the community, and the other who watches can be so internalized that one can be an observer of oneself. (133)

For the characters in these texts, these feelings of remorse are not only provoked by imagined social vigilance during their onanistic pleasures but also by the scrutinizing medical gaze, which presents itself as internalized or through the presence of a physical doctor. As a result, the characters I study in the dissertation struggle to reconcile their private and public identities.

The protagonists long to embrace their authentic selves but, in all of the stories but one, they often fail to achieve a coherent sense of selfhood because they are too scared to embrace their inner desires that are at odds with strict gender norms. In several cases, the characters see terrifying, unrecognizable, distorted reflections of themselves in the mirror due to their internalization of authoritative gazes of social control. What these scenes of masturbation and mirror gazing reveal is that both men and women were struggling to understand their true selves,

to cope with their prescribed roles in nineteenth-century society, and to establish new relations that would pave the way for gender equality.

Aside from the mirroring and interplay of gazes at work within the texts that demonstrate a strenuous male and female effort to rebel against and transform gender roles, the fictitious characters act as tantalizing, forbidden mirrors through which readers themselves can fantasize about new identities. When the readers are taken into the minds and bedrooms of these self-pleasuring men and women, they engage in a secretive form of voyeuristic or scopophilic observation that mirrors the emerging popularity of peep shows in the nineteenth century:

In the 19th century, optical inventions like the kinoscope (1888) replaced the use of static pictures with moving images, making a significant turning point in the depiction and visibility of the body and its movements as entertainment. The novelty of moving images and the opportunity to observe “private scenes” fostered the emergence of an interest in hitherto secret “body practices.” (Krauthaker-Ringa 50)

However, as male and female readers immersed themselves in this voyeuristic fantasy, they too would have been forced into a process of self-judgment by watching the consequences these characters face for pleasuring themselves, such as internalized shame and suffering, self-harm, medical diagnosis, societal scrutiny, and detainment in medical asylums.

The scenes that deal with women pleasuring their bodies in these texts, sometimes in rather explicit, pornographic scenes, in particular appeal to the voyeuristic pleasures of the male gaze that “projects its fantasy onto the female figure” (19). As Mulvey states:

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. (19)

Despite the efforts of the male authors to sexualize, control, and demean the female body through the lens of the male gaze, this gaze of patriarchal authority ends up being counteracted

and frustrated by the female gaze. In these texts, the female masturbator not only becomes the subject and object of her own gaze in a process of self-spectatorship to exert sexual agency, but she also uses her gaze to objectify the male body and render men indispensable in her realm of personal fantasy. María Claudia André and Rocío Quispe-Agnoli demonstrate how the female gaze symbolizes an overthrow of patriarchal authority:

The gaze of the madwoman introduces a disorder, a distorted version of reality that questions socially accepted norms of behavior. One of the outcomes of this gaze that distorts and disorders a reality that has been organized by patriarchal principles, uncovers a crisis of meaning and produces an alternative point of view that raises the critical consciousness of society, revealing the true chaos and madness behind the governing power structures. (8)

The male gaze of pleasure and authority is also disrupted in these texts; men were suddenly pressured to gaze upon objectified and sexualized reflections of their own bodies. While men could previously deny the corporeal side of their beings, medical discourses were blurring traditional distinctions between male and female bodies, compelling men to see a horrifying reflection of their own selves when attempting to derive pleasure from the image of the female masturbator.

Through the underexplored theme of masturbatory mirroring in literary works of fiction from late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Spain and Latin America, my dissertation shows how men and women struggled to form a coherent sense of selfhood, as they felt compelled to hide their private desires that rebelled against social norms. My dissertation also provides a multifaceted view of gender roles and relations in the regions, which were in a period of rapid transition. Through this single theme, canonical and noncanonical male writers across the continent were projecting shared anxieties about not only how women were emerging from the margins to gain a position of central importance in society but also how men viewed themselves to be increasingly marginalized by power discourses that were reformulating the masculine ideal.

These texts provide a unique portrayal of masculine identity at the time by showing the difficulties men experienced upon trying to live up to standards of the masculine ideal, while fulfilling newly voiced female demands. The masturbating male characters are not strong, virile, self-assured, and self-controlled men who succeed in exerting their authority over women. Instead, they are displayed as sick, vulnerable, effeminate, and sexualized individuals who have no sense of willpower. In addition to these suffering male masturbators, there are other male characters who desperately long to understand the mysteries of female desire but end up experiencing feelings of worthlessness, humiliation, and emasculation when failing in this goal.

While female characters are shunned and condemned by society for rejecting the role of the *ángel del hogar*, the women of the texts display the emergence of a more attractive model of a liberated female identity. The autoerotic fantasies of the female protagonists reveal that they have become masters of their bodies, while learning to cultivate their minds, explore their creativity, and become active producers of knowledge. Some of these women also develop a powerful sense of self-confidence that encourages them to pursue their own wants and exert their sexual agency. In addition, the female characters challenge patriarchal control, openly expressing resentment towards men for their attempts to lock women in a place of inferiority, while pressuring them to change their unjust treatment of women. Although these characters are depicted as sick hysterics, an idea that they internalize, this pathologization of the female masturbator is exposed as a strategy to ease male anxieties about a rapid and inevitable movement towards gender equality.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 of the dissertation explores the themes of female and male masturbation in Francisco de Sales Mayo's Spanish novel *La condesita* (1869) to display a disruption of gender

power dynamics in nineteenth-century Spain. I show how the female protagonist Felisa discovers herself through masturbatory encounters in front of the mirror, which she documents in a diary. This joint dynamic of masturbation, mirror gazing, and writing leads Felisa to engage in a process of self-spectatorship through the lens of a friend and lesbian lover named Aurora del Espino. Because Felisa analyzes herself through Aurora, her diary entries are depicted as letter exchanges with this female friend, who engages in parallel masturbatory pleasures in front of the looking glass. Although Felisa is constantly burdened by societal pressures to conform to standards of womanhood, her correspondence with Aurora encourages her to become a masculine, educated, independent woman who rejects marriage and gratifies her own wants. However, this transgressive decision causes Felisa to be subjected to pathologization and to suffer from a punishing death that inhibits the cohesion of her desired, autonomous self. In addition to this example of female masturbatory self-spectatorship, the male protagonist Turbosa is a hysterical, effeminate man who contemplates his own self-image through imaginary gazes of scrutiny as he engages in guilty masturbatory pleasures, causing him to experience an extreme crisis of identity due to his fantasies that involve a rejection of the male ideal.

In chapter 2, on Horacio Quiroga's "Los perseguidos" (1908), the fictional character Quiroga feigns an image of health, sanity, and erotic restraint when in the public eye, but when he is at his home gazing in the mirror, he finds himself replicating the behavior of a sexually unleashed hysterical man by the name of Díaz Vélez. When playing this part before the mirror, Quiroga completely disregards society's demands of masculinity and shuts himself in his bedroom to incessantly pleasure himself until he loses control of his mental faculties. In this fantastical role play of the effeminate male masturbator, the protagonist and his mirroring counterpart imagine crowds of spectators leaving the theater who judge him as he loses control

of his sexual impulses, making the theatrical masturbatory fantasy one of pleasure, shame, and surveillance. While exploring his fantasies in this performance of the self, Quiroga is also constantly burdened by the omnipotent medical gaze that he imagines has the power to detect his secretive practices, bring them to light, and place his transgressive body under the control of the authorities.

In chapter 3, on Quiroga's "La meningitis y su sombra" (1917), the male protagonist Carlos Durán undergoes a masturbatory performance of the self by analyzing his sexual fears and insecurities through the lens of a delusional self-pleasuring woman by the name of María Elvira. When observing himself through María Elvira's gaze of desire and sickness, Carlos Durán is forced to confront his own anxieties of being scrutinized by the medical gaze for having nightly fantasies of a female phantasm. In addition, María Elvira's gaze acts as a mirror that reflects back onto Durán his feelings of impotence, humiliation, and rejection roused by the sexually independent woman who was becoming normalized at the turn of the century. María Elvira's character exposes not only male preoccupations provoked by the female masturbator but also women resorting to the powers of their imagination to satisfy their private erotic wants that society attempted to suppress.

The story explored in chapter 4, Quiroga's "Los guantes de goma" (1909), is an indirect expression of forbidden male masturbatory fantasy that occurs through a fearful, imaginative trial of the self before the mirror. In this story Quiroga creates a subtle identification between the male body and the abject body of the female masturbator in a process of mirroring to display male fears of fluidity and uncontrollable sexual excess. This text also reveals the struggle of young women to explore their bodies and sensual desires, since the female protagonist Desdémona is subjected to medical diagnosis and forced to wear tight-fitting rubber gloves to

curb her onanistic indulgences. Desdémona internalizes the idea that her desires are dirty and pollutive, leading her to suffer from extreme remorse and to excessively scrub her flesh until she dies in a puddle of her own blood.

Chapter 5, on Alberto Insúa's novel *Las neuróticas* (1910), explores the way in which a young woman discovers herself and achieves a sense of selfhood through enlightening masturbatory encounters. Throughout the novel, the female protagonist Herminia interacts with her mirror image in autoerotic explorations, a reflection embodied in her female friend and lover, named Conchita. Because Herminia feels pressured to conform to patriarchal norms, she attempts to mold herself into an object of male desire, conceal her sexual wants, and finally accept societal expectations of becoming a wife. However, her autoerotic encounters, which take the form of lesbian correspondence with Conchita, make her realize that she is putting on a fake mask for society. Conchita symbolizes the fantasy Other that Herminia wishes to be: a strong, self-confident, independent woman who is not afraid to embrace her authentic identity. But Herminia struggles to adopt this self-image because she has been diagnosed as a sick hysteric for her resistance to patriarchal norms.

Chapter 6, on Eduardo Zamacois's Spanish novel *La enferma* (1896), presents the changing marital dynamics between husbands and wives at the end of the nineteenth century, provoked by medical discourses that stressed a woman's natural need for pleasure, as well as feminist arguments surrounding the need to transform marriage into a bond of equality. The female protagonist Consuelo is unable to articulate her sexual desires to her husband because the two of them have internalized medical discourses that deemed the desiring wife as a sick hysteric. Because Consuelo breaks the traditional mold of the angelic, asexual wife, her mind and body are violated by a cruel hypnotist who makes her ashamed of her desires. Consuelo feels

compelled to hide her sensual needs in marriage, so she resorts to a realm of fantasy to imagine her husband satisfying her the way that she wants. However, Consuelo's autoerotic dreams always manifest themselves as nightmares, when she sees the object of her desire transform into a hideous, evil reflection of her guilty passions.

CHAPTER 1: MASCULINE WOMEN AND EFFEMINATE MEN: MASTURBATORY
MIRRORS OF GENDER DISRUPTION IN FRANCISCO DE SALES MAYO'S *LA
CONDESITA (MEMORIAS DE UNA DONCELLA)* (1869)

The analysis of *La condesita* in this first chapter lays the groundwork for the connections between mirroring, masturbation, theatrical self-spectatorship and the rapid transformation of gender roles in nineteenth-century Hispanic society that run throughout the dissertation. Similarly, the discussion of the paranoid and pursued male masturbator Turbosa of this novel will help to illuminate my analysis of the male protagonists of Horacio Quiroga's "Los perseguidos" in chapter 2, who will also suffer from persecutory paranoia from their guilty onanistic indulgences but in a much subtler fashion.

Through my study of the female masturbators of the text, Felisa and Aurora, I show how women's mirror-gazing, masturbatory pleasures and imaginative episodes of self-spectatorship represented a destruction of women's traditional roles and a dangerous usurpation of male power during the nineteenth century. In the novel, the appropriation of male prerogatives through the female masturbator manifests itself in various forms, including a woman's development of self-consciousness, corporeal autonomy, intellectual cultivation, and artistic creativity, as well as social and political awareness. The female masturbator also takes on a male identity by cross-dressing, adopting traditionally 'male' hobbies, engaging in hermaphroditic self-identification, and even replacing the phallus through clitoral stimulation and the use of self-pleasuring instruments. After discussing the threatening masculinization of these self-pleasuring women, I will study the male masturbator Turbosa, who is depicted as a judge, to show how men underwent a process of self-scrutiny to see themselves as sick, vulnerable, and mentally unstable

beings who were suddenly merging with the female sex and being stripped of their patriarchal authority.

La condesita is presented as a fictional diary written from the perspective of a young countess named Felisa de Negroponte, in which she details her masturbatory experiences and process of self-becoming from childhood to adulthood. Although the entire novel takes the form of a private diary, the text is simultaneously epistolary correspondence with Felisa's childhood friend Aurora del Espino, who also documents her autoerotic discoveries that have aided in the formation of her identity:

Hay en este epistolario, venido á nuestras manos por una de esas circunstancias legales de la vida íntima y de las relaciones civiles . . . algunas cartas que son trozos enteros de un diario de ansias y dolencias, de goces y afectos de muy opuesta índole, á que podríamos llamar en rigor SENSACIONES DE UNA DONCELLA y SENSACIONES DE UNA CASADA. (3)

Both the diary and the letter can serve as metaphors for performances of the self, which is what will occur through Felisa's masturbatory fantasies that she reflects upon through writing.

Catherine Delafield states "The fictional diary operates as a second self, acting as both internal personal narrative and a secretly performed life" (1). Delafield also argues that "the life-writing 'second self' is assessed in conjunction with the diary's specific role as a document which is on show or performing a life" (1). The letter can also allow individuals to observe themselves from an external perspective, while negotiating their private and public identities. In *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, James Daybell states: "The very act of writing a letter forced women to represent themselves in relation to others and to create a textual self-infllected by social position and circumstance as well as by gender" (266). Similarly, in her dissertation *The Letter as Mirror: The Construction of the Self in Three Recent Epistolary Novels*, Tanya Lorraine Long Bennett states that "serving as the mirror, the letter functions for women in these novels as a way

to see themselves. Significantly, in this ‘reflecting,’ the letter serves, as well, as a medium for deconstruction of self-images that have been imposed by ideological influences” (13). In regards to Johannes Vermeer’s seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of women writing and reading letters, Laura M. Sager Eidt also views the letter as a type of looking glass for women to contemplate their inner desires, while being simultaneously subjected to a public gaze:

These paintings, then, underscore the women’s self-enclosure and inwardness in the moments of quiet, private self-reflection. . . . On the other hand, however, letter writing and reading are also instances of communication with the outer world, minimal intrusions of the public into the private sphere. (186)

This solitary yet shared correspondence between Felisa and Aurora in *La condesita* acts as a mirror through which they can communicate to contemplate the paths that they can take as women in society, while struggling to fulfill their private desires at odds with social expectations. For example, Felisa rejects marriage offers from Turbosa and remains a *doncella* [maiden], while her friend Aurora marries to fulfill women’s traditional obligations. However, through their correspondence both women decide that neither one of these options proves to be satisfactory for women, leading them to engage in masturbation and a lesbian romance. Both masturbation and lesbianism allow the young women to understand their true desires that remain outside the realm of patriarchal discourse, just like the activity of mirror gazing. In her article “Placer solitario y homoerotismo femenino en *La Condesita: (Memorias de una doncella)* (1869) de Francisco de Sales Mayo: otro peligroso suplemento,” Itziar Rodríguez de Rivera describes how both women receive superior pleasure from masturbatory fantasy and same-sex romance by stating:

Si en el caso de Felisa quedaran dudas sobre si la unión conyugal pudiera haber sido la solución a su problema, la experiencia de Aurora, víctima del mismo desarreglo fisiológico, prueba el total fracaso del casamiento. La única salida viable a los desórdenes físicos y sexuales de “las amorosas” y a las frustraciones matrimoniales de Aurora es el lesbianismo que, sin embargo, sólo es permitido en la novela provisionalmente. (37)

Since it would be unacceptable for a woman to remain single in nineteenth-century society, Felisa joins a convent, where she continues her guilty masturbatory pleasures and eventually dies from tuberculosis, a disease associated with sterile sexual excess. Although Aurora gets married, hoping that her husband will be able to understand “el secreto de una mujer,” she is immediately disillusioned with his sexual abilities, leading her to return to her onanistic indulgences and to seek sexual fulfillment from herself and her friend (179).

Aurora, like Felisa, will internalize the medical gaze that looks to control the female body by subjecting herself to an apparent cauterization of the clitoris to deprive her of “la parte privilegiada de sus nervios” and conform to her position of the asexual wife (173). Aurora will also suffer a punishing death in the closing scenes of the novel, right after her she is depicted displaying her almost nude body before a male audience at the theater, an image that denounces emancipating female fantasies of self-spectatorship, which will be abundant in the novel.

Not only do Felisa and Aurora engage in this private yet public epistolary correspondence in *La condesita* but so do two masturbating male protagonists, a judge by the name of Turbosa and Felisa’s uncle *el vicario* (vicar). Turbosa and the vicar experience the same difficulties as Felisa and Aurora adapting to rigid gender norms that inhibit their personal freedoms; however, in my discussion I will solely be focusing on the character of Turbosa. As Turbosa, Felisa, and Aurora engage in self-spectatorship through these letters; they imagine themselves as subjected to scrutinizing gazes that emerge from people such as a phrenologist by the name of Dr. Bucket, a mentor by the name of Novoa, a family medic named Salces, imaginary ridiculing audiences sitting in their bedrooms, and the director of an insane asylum.

While Felisa and Aurora’s episodes of self-spectatorship provide them with a sense of masculine power that allows them to transgress gender conventions, Turbosa sees himself as a

sick, effeminate man who tries to flee from the mirror to shut out the guilty reflection of himself.

In both the male and female case, the protagonists struggle to reconcile their private and public identities, while fantasizing about liberating themselves from these internalized gazes of judgement and social expectations. Rodríguez de Rivera highlights that

Traspasando y desdibujando los límites entre lo público y lo privado, Mayo indaga en las causas y consecuencias de los excesos de la sexualidad y cuestiona el papel de mecanismos e instituciones de control como la ciencia médica, la religión o el matrimonio. Se podría afirmar que *La Condesita* participa de la ambivalencia fundamental que, según Akiko Tsuchiya, caracteriza a la ficción realista y naturalista: por un lado, el deseo de contener el desorden y la desviación de la norma y, por otro, un poderoso impulso de resistir dicha normatividad, abriendo nuevos espacios de subjetividad o agencia. (27)

In regards to the overarching theme of the novel, Rodríguez de Rivera states that “a medio camino entre la novela popular, el diario privado, el tratado de higiene y el manual médico, *La Condesita* se viste con los ropajes de un estudio fisiológico para presentar un caso de masturbación y homosexualidad femeninas” (26). Rodríguez de Rivera also argues that Aurora and Felisa’s sapphic romance, as well as Aurora’s masculine hobbies, hermaphroditic fantasies and clitoral pleasures reflect Tissot’s aforementioned theories that masturbation could cause women to develop manly traits (36). In addition, Rodríguez de Rivera states that “La actitud de Aurora no sólo denota un deseo de emancipación e independencia femeninas, sino que podría ser leída como una anticipación de sus inclinaciones lésbicas o, como lo denominaban algunos médicos en el siglo XIX, ‘hermafroditismo psicosexual’ (Krafft-Ebing 336)” (38).

In my analysis, I build upon Rodríguez de Rivera’s theories to show how the pathologization and sexualization of Felisa and Aurora’s characters present a deeper fear of female selfhood, emancipation, intellectual cultivation, and artistic talent that was emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. Similarly, the fact that these images of powerful, masculine women are paralleled with depictions of sexually objectified males, impotent men, and

effeminate male masturbators reveals much to the reader about how gender roles were transforming in favor of female equality. In *Sexing the Text: The Rhetoric of Sexual Difference in British Literature*, Todd S. Parker reveals how images of masturbation in medical manuals exposed a fear of gender reversal at the turn of the century, a topic that was broached in the introduction

Men and women serve as physical and moral counterparts in a system that must be able to identify and utilize the difference between male and female. Paradoxically, men and women who respect the proper sexual difference grow more alike: sexual difference here expresses itself as a set of mutual similarities in constitution, countenance, mind, and temper that unite the two sexes in a synergistic whole, whereas the anti-Onanist's negative symptomatology reduces both male and female masturbators to the same debased reproductive state. (34)

Parker emphasizes male anxieties about the ability of female masturbation to grant women with masculine powers in *Onania or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* (1723), the famous anonymously authored text that sparked the masturbation panic, when he describes how “frequent masturbation in the female heats and irritates that body to the point where it approximates the male body” (46). Parker also argues that the female masturbator's clitoris was depicted as a penis, an idea that created a fear of homosexuality:

In *Onania's* sexual epistemology, the masturbatory transformation of female into male results in a monstrous proximity of male and female that obliterates heterosexual categories and leaves the man open to the “danger” of possible homosexual encounters. The phallic woman constitutes such a source of anxiety because “she” is doubly proximate. She preserves the epistemological characteristics of both masculinity and femininity, and her desire is thus unpredictable and inevitably homosexualizing: every sexual contact she experiences requires her to displace some element of the heterosexual matrix with the all too similar traits of her multiply sexed body. (46)

These images of gender blurring and role reversal in medical treatises on masturbation help to illuminate Mayo's decision to work his entire novel around the theme of masturbation. Masturbation will not only expose women's private fantasies of emancipation and usurpation of male privilege to attract female readers, but it will also represent a form of male introspection,

which would allow male readers to reflect upon the widespread crisis of masculinity provoked by women's changing roles, a subsequent victimization of the male body, and a sudden decrease in patriarchal power.

The fact that *La condesita* is depicted as a female diary of self-development written conjointly by two women named Felisa and Aurora who pursue their own wants over marriage suggests that Mayo was inspired by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's nineteenth-century British epic poem / novel *Aurora Leigh* (1856). This novel is also a female bildungsroman that "tells the story of a child's development into adulthood as a series of character-shaping spiritual and physical ordeals" (Avery and Stott 182). In *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, they state:

Aurora Leigh was a much rarer version of the *Bildungsroman* form for it was also a *Kunstlerroman*, a story plotting the maturation of an *artist/writer*, a form that traditionally told of the protagonist's struggle to find not just a settled adult *identity* but also an *art*. And in one last respect *Aurora Leigh* was a very rare species of *Kunstlerroman* indeed for its artist/writer was a *woman*. (Avery and Stott 182)

Avery and Stott also describe how the character Aurora Leigh feels an internal struggle to choose between being an artist and getting married: "Aurora is a woman in love but she is also a poet pursuing her art, two paths which can take her in different directions" (182). In "Gender and Narration in 'Aurora Leigh,'" Alison Case states that the text represents a tension "between the impulse to rebel against the restrictions of the traditional role of Victorian womanhood . . . and the desire to co-opt the ideological power of that role, to form her "perfect artist" on the foundation of a culturally recognizable "perfect woman" (18).

In *La condesita*, Mayo appears to reappropriate Barrett-Browning's novel. Not only do the names of the female protagonists Felisa and Aurora highlight this idea, but Mayo's novel is also depicted as a female diary in which two women document their process of self-becoming. In addition, Felisa and Aurora negotiate their private desires and public identities to develop a

threatening sense of knowledge that allows them to question social norms for women. Like the fictional protagonist Aurora Leigh, both Felisa and Aurora are depicted as female writers who engage in a process of self-spectatorship through their diary entries that act as letters for them to see themselves from an external perspective. This notion of female artistic creativity appears in several other aspects of the novel. For example, Felisa envisions herself as a sculptor who can bring life to her imaginative desires and who also writes novels about Madrid's society, demonstrating her awareness of her inner wants and external surroundings. Similarly, Aurora is depicted as an artist who surpasses the talents of men through her paintings and her performances, acting in homemade comedies that involve a fantasy of female liberation and masculinization. Upon becoming artists of their own desires, Felisa and Aurora suffer from the same inner conflict that Aurora Leigh does: independence and marriage.

In *La condesita*, Mayo splits the single female writer that one can see in Aurora Leigh into two separate beings, childhood friends who accompany each other through the most important parts of their lives. Mayo plays upon the idea that a mirror could act as a woman's friend who helped her come to a sense of self-understanding. An erotic-poetic essay, "El espejo," which appeared in the fin-de-siècle Spanish magazine *La Vida Galante*, highlights a woman's psychic bond with the mirror, describing how the looking glass provided young girls with a type of imaginary "friend" who would aid in her psychological development:

El espejo está relacionado con las principales emociones que forman la historia psicológica de la mujer. Siendo niña se divertía en jugar delante la magnífica luna veneciana que el acendrado buen gusto de su madre había colocado en un ángulo del gabinete, bajo una sombrilla japonesa; el espejo la divertía, la acompañaba, copiando sus gestos, sus ademanes y cantando y riendo con ella. (Zubiaurre 185)

La Belle also highlights the growing importance of the mirror for women in fin-de-siècle society: "In nineteenth-century works the mirror is less used as an image of fashion and adornment and

more as a means of psychic accessibility” (177). La Belle argues that “since the mirror image is both self and other it becomes possible to conceive of a relationship with the glass having a degree of intimacy more intense than any relationship a woman can have with a lover” (67). By interacting with their reflections in masturbatory performances of the self, which are simultaneously depicted as private correspondence with a close friend, Felisa and Aurora become self-conscious, intelligent, autonomous, and creative women who transgress traditional gender norms. Mayo’s decision to present this female bildungsroman under a guise of masturbation can be understood when considering Thomas Laqueur’s aforementioned ideas that “Self-love is precisely the place to start an essential path to woman’s self-knowledge, from which all else springs” and that “it is about pure pleasure and hence about unencumbered autonomy” (76)

Laqueur also describes masturbation as “a trope for creativity” and “a process of self-making,” which is precisely what will be seen with the female protagonists of *La condesita* (69). In addition, as mentioned in the introduction Laqueur viewed masturbation as “a theater of the mind” that is “intimately bound up with the power to imagine and to create” (69). Felisa and Aurora become immersed in a masturbatory theatrical performance before the mirror when they envision arousing external projections of their bodies, craft fictional images of men in their minds to suit their desires, dream about alternate identities for themselves, and take delight in their own self-images by fantasizing about being admired by external gazes.

By transforming this female bildungsroman into a pornographic tale of female masturbation, Mayo undermines male fears of the female imagination, creativity, and subjectivity at the turn of the century. Zubiaurre argues that “men may feel threatened, once again, by women, and particularly by women in pursuit of knowledge. Hence eroticization is a

way to neutralize female power. Moreover, female powerlessness further triggers male desire” (194). Not only does Mayo hide female self-discovery under autoeroticism, but he simultaneously depicts the correspondence between Felisa and Aurora as a lesbian encounter, something that will also be seen in *Las neuróticas* in chapter 5. This image of lesbianism diminishes the male fear of a woman interacting intimately with an external projection of herself to develop a sense of selfhood since, as La Belle has argued, the mirror “is both self and other” (67). This connection between female mirror gazing and lesbianism is highlighted by Bram Dijkstra: “turn-of-the-century philosophers argued that when a woman *kissed* another woman it was indeed as if she were *kissing* her own image in the *glass*” (Dijkstra 147). Mayo’s pornographic altering of these tales of female self-development before the mirror works to ease male anxieties of women’s subjectivity, imagination, intelligence, creative faculties, and the powers of their gaze.

Similarly, Mary Sheriff discusses the dangers of the female imagination, self-spectatorship, and creativity that emerged in the eighteenth-century: “philosophers, doctors, and theologians might agree on little else, but many found common ground on the question of woman’s imagination. There was no doubt about it: to ensure the smooth workings of the social order female fantasy had to be carefully controlled” (100). Sheriff also argues that one of the principal anxieties surrounding a woman’s imagination was her ability to engage in self-spectatorship, which could lead her to fantasize about a new identity for herself:

To many, the obvious solution was to regulate what could be imprinted on a woman’s imagination by controlling her access to both knowledge and culture, especially in the forms of books, pictures, and spectacles ... As we have seen the process of becoming another had long been connected to the enthusiasm of the artist and the spectator. Yet entering into a fictional character or scene could very well lead to a woman’s undoing, for what passed into her imagination by way of reading, looking, or listening could easily arouse dangerous passions. Thus moralists, philosophers, and doctors deemed many kinds of spectatorship perilous for women. (100)

The issue of woman as spectator was tied to the powers of the female gaze, which were coming to the forefront towards the turn of the century. For example, when discussing images of the female spectator in nineteenth-century French art, Temma Balducci observes that “these numerous images from a range of sources that depict women at the theater and other public spaces using viewing aids suggest that female looking was rife across the cultural spectrum” (93). According to Dominique Mainon and James Ursini, the female gaze “possesses an inherent ability to subvert patriarchal power structures” (281). Hilary Fraser illustrates the liberating powers of the female gaze when discussing the female character of Robert Browning’s poem *Inapprehensiveness* (1889):

But the woman continues actively to look, taking pleasure in her gaze, insisting upon her role as observer, and utterly confounding the specular status her companion wishes to confer upon her by refusing to be the willing object of his fantasizing and coercive gaze. (78)

In *La condesita*, both Felisa and Aurora resort to the imagination, self-spectatorship, and gazing to become artists of their own desires. Sheriff mentions that the superior powers of the female imagination granted woman a special artistic talent, making her even more susceptible to pathologization, which is what will happen with Felisa and Aurora:

Medicine, especially when mixed with philosophy, pictured the “normal” woman as endowed with a greater sensibility and a more active imagination than her male counterpart. These attributes made her more susceptible to the passions and more subject to both her own fantasies and the illusions of art. At the same time, a lively imagination, an ability to take on passions portrayed, and the tendency to be moved by art all characterized the creative personality. (58)

In *The Hysteric’s Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle*, Rachel Mesch describes how female writers of the nineteenth century were using their artistic talents to tear down

traditional power structures, usurp the powers of “male intelligence” while demeaning the male sex, something that will also occur in *La condesita*.⁵

Female artists who possessed this kind of intellectual power and creative genius risked being labeled as monstrous hermaphrodites who tried to steal male privilege. For example, Íñigo Sánchez-Llama states:

La identificación entre la autoría intelectual y el género masculino legitima considerar secundario el valor estético de la literatura escrita por mujeres. Las excepciones a esta prescripción normativa tampoco obtienen asentimiento crítico por su carácter «hermafrodita» o «monstruoso». (193)

Both Felisa and Aurora end up being depicted as transgressive female anomalies for their artistic endeavors and episodes of enlightening self-spectatorship that are hidden as autoerotic indulgence. Felisa first develops a series of physical and mental ailments listed in masturbation treatises for failing to conform to standards of womanhood. She also undergoes a severe hysterical crisis for failing to curb her desires, develops tuberculosis, and dies in a state of mental turmoil in the convent, realizing that society entraps women into oppressive roles that make it impossible for them to pursue their own wants. Aurora is also depicted as a sick, hermaphroditic woman who wears male clothes, fantasizes about possessing a dual-sex identity, usurps the phallus through clitoral stimulation, and pleasures herself from dildos, while expressing her disillusionment with marriage in her diary. What results at the end of the novel is an obliteration of both these “monstrous” and masculine female writers who have used the pen to expose the

⁵ Mesch views Rachilde’s French novels *Monsieur Venus* (1884) and *La Jongleuse* (1900) as relentless attacks on masculinity and male bodies, suggesting that Rachilde’s collaboration with decadence was also a means of dismantling the symbolic structures of virility, thus delegitimizing the masculine prowess that supposedly determined and authorized cerebral might. In both novels, the agent of destruction is a female creative figure allied implicitly with the author’s own voice. In other words, the image of the woman writer in these texts is generated in part through the annihilation of male power. (121)

unjust situation for women in nineteenth-century society and to imagine new possibilities for themselves.

The Masculine Liberation of the Female Masturbator

Felisa's gradual autoerotic awakening through self-spectatorship begins in the first section of her personal manuscript titled "Impresiones de la niñez." Felisa describes an occurrence when she was twelve years old, walking down the street with her father and hearing a group of friends discussing a free phrenology session occurring in a nearby café:

—¿Adónde bueno con tanto afán? —les preguntaron los del Príncipe.

—A casa del frenólogo inglés, —respondieron. —Esta noche da una sesión especial, y ha prometido examinar todas las cabezas que se presenten, y emitir su dictamen *gratis*. (9)

The nineteenth-century science of phrenology evolved from the writings of Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) in the 1790s. In *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Sally Shuttleworth explains:

Gall was interested in the external formulations of the skull only as a means of demonstrating his theories of cerebral localization: his belief that the mind was divided into distinct faculties, each of which had a specific location in the brain. The size of each bump on the skull indicated, he believed, the strength of the individual organ lying below. (60)

Shuttleworth goes on to argue that phrenology was linked to the "emergence of new interiorized models of selfhood" and that this science "delved below the surface, examining the secrets of a psyche which was no longer figured as one uniform essence, but rather a contradictory fragmented system" (59, 69). Shuttleworth also explains that phrenology began to expose individuals as complex, divided beings with a multiplicity of competing identities:

By undermining ideas of intrinsic psychological unity, and establishing the notion of internal multiplicity, phrenology laid the foundations for later nineteenth-century explorations into the complexities of the unconscious. In the suggestive words of Gall, phrenology "will explain the double man within you, and the reason why your

propensities and intellect, or your propensities and reason are often so opposed to each other.” (62)

As will be subsequently shown, this phrenology session in *La condesita* serves this exact purpose of unlocking the inner secrets of the protagonists in the text and exposing their divided selves as they struggle to reconcile their private desires and public identities that they put on for society. When Felisa and her father arrive to this phrenological session, the medic, Dr. Bucket, has a cardboard head and he uses a pencil to trace the different parts while explaining their associated faculties (self-love, secrecy, imitation, destructiveness, and consciousness, among others). After this presentation, Dr. Bucket invites the audience members to have their heads observed to unlock the mysteries of their characters, an invitation that causes excitement and reservation: “Todos ardían en deseos de ser examinados, pero ninguno osaba ser el primero” (14). Dr. Bucket is particularly drawn to Felisa when he exclaims “¡Ah! Esta niña . . . ¿no querría ser examinada?” (18).

When Felisa sits in the chair for this mental observation in front of an audience, it creates a theatrical image of self-spectatorship that will fuel her masturbatory fantasies as she develops a longing to discover her private desires by analyzing external projections of herself.⁶ Right before the session, Felisa’s father lifts a thin tulle veil from her face, foreshadowing the subconscious secrets of her mind that will soon become transparent: “El conde de Negroponte acogió benévolo esta invitación del doctor, é hizo sentar á su hija en la butaca, quitándole antes el ligero de tul que la cubría” (18). The doctor immediately unlocks Felisa’s private sexual passions; he states that “he aquí un sugeto en quien está desarrollado de un modo notable el órgano de la amatividad, esto es, la facultad mental que produce la propensidad hacia el amor físico” (18). As

⁶ Rodríguez de Rivera underlines the theatricality of this scene: “Durante la demostración frenológica, el médico funge a la vez como mago de feria que dirige un espectáculo” (30).

Dr. Bucket continues to examine Felisa's head and provide a diagnosis of her inner self, the customers at the café surround her listening intently. Not only is Felisa subjected to these gazes of individuals in society as her erotic inclinations are exposed but also to the gaze of the medic, foreshadowing how she and the other characters will see themselves through societal lenses of judgement upon exploring their private desires:

Todos escuchaban en profundo silencio al frenólogo, que de pié, apoyado un brazo en el respaldo de la butaca, extendía el otro accionando por cima de la cabeza de Felisa. Y ella, con la frente hacia arriba, paseaba sus ávidas miradas por el rostro del doctor, queriendo absorber el sentido de aquellas sus singulares explicaciones. (21)

Felisa's internalization of these gazes from audience members and the phrenologist will be followed by the medic's assertion that she has a deformity on her skull because she has developed amativeness (sexual desire) and consciousness, along with an interior principle of justice and morality (21). Although the medic claims that Felisa has no degree of "personal estimation" at this point in the novel, she does have a propensity towards sexual desire and consciousness, hinting that her masturbatory performances in front of the mirror will produce self-awareness. Felisa's medical examination and performance before this audience lead her to believe that her future lies in these hidden facets of her brain, which will come to the surface in her autoerotic fantasies: "El frenólogo pronunció estas últimas palabras con cierta solemnidad que acabó de impresionar á la ya impresionada Felisa de Negroponte. . . . Su porvenir estaba dentro de su cerebro, y ella lo sabía" (21).

Felisa's process of self-spectatorship and auto-discovery continues when she accompanies her father to the brothel and starts to experience an awakening of desire by acting as a voyeur of conversations between women that are presented as sexually deviant and by listening to their sighs of pleasure when they interact with clients. When Felisa enters, the narrator describes how she sees "una mala mesa con un espejo-tocador pequeño" and in another

place two candles, conjuring an image of light and reflection (22). This reflective image evokes the connection between brothels and mirrors in the nineteenth century. In her dissertation *City of Mirrors: Reflection and Visual Construction in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Elizabeth Anne Carlson explains that “the gaudiness of the department store’s interior, including the abundance of mirrored walls and ceilings, recalled the décor of brothels. As the many drawings by Edgar Degas illustrate, panes of mirrors lined the walls and ceilings of prostitution houses” (212). Carlson also illustrates that “described by a policeman in the 1880’s as ‘twinkling of ornamented mirrors, a profusion of gilt, the glitter of lights,’ the brothel appeared like cafés or department stores that lined the streets of Paris” (212).

This mirroring nature of the brothel that would allow for the prostitute’s corporeal and sexual self-spectatorship relates to Tsuchiya’s argument that the prostitute represents “the deviant woman’s potential for agency through self-subjectivization” (191). Rodríguez de Rivera depicts the scene at the brothel as a fantastical reverie, in which Felisa becomes the subject and object of desire:

Ante la llegada del grupo, las busconas hacen chanza de la presencia de la adolescente en el burdel, un “[p]impollo en flor” con el que se podría hacer buen negocio (23). Felisa queda situada, de manera fantasmática, en el lado de las prostitutas. La escena sugiere una pérdida de inocencia o iniciación en el sexo de la condesita, a quien se imagina como objeto de deseo y posesión. (30-31)

Felisa’s desires are further fomented at the brothel when she hears sighs of pleasure coming from the bedrooms where two prostitutes have disappeared with their clients:

Hacía rato que Felisa estaba notando cierto rumor para ella indefinible, que provenía de la pieza inmediata por donde habían desaparecido ántes las dos damiselas ... Aquel rumor llegó a trocarse en cierta especie de suspiro ó quejido, que coincidió con la exclamación de las muchachas de la sala. Pero, a pesar de la coincidencia, ¡era sin embargo rumor tan diverso! (26)

Through these exciting observations in the brothel, Felisa fantasizes about embodying these women, evoking the fears of female theatrical role play in the nineteenth-century that would allow women to explore new identities for themselves in a theatrical performance of the mind.

When Felisa arrives home, she explains how both the phrenology session and her experience at the brothel disturbed her spirit. These events are depicted as dramas of self-spectatorship when the family mentor Novoa asks her: “—¿Qué tienes Felisa? . . . ¿Te ha llevado tu papá á alguna comedia horripilante?” (28). When Felisa reveals that she has been in a phrenological session, the medic Salces listens intently as her father relates the details of his daughter’s cranial examination, introducing the internalized medical gaze through which Felisa and the other characters will judge their actions throughout the rest of the novel: “Salces era un hombre muy estudioso, y oyó con gran interés esa relación, tanto más, cuanto que en lo concerniente á mí veía confirmadas sus propias observaciones” (28). Both the mentor and the medic Salces start to examine Felisa’s skull in the same way that Dr. Bucket did, agreeing that Felisa possesses “gran amatividad, carencia de estimación personal, mucha concienziosidad” (29).

Later that night, this interplay of gazes upon Felisa sparks her masturbatory longing for self-discovery, which will occur in an introspective solitary exploration before the mirror. Felisa’s fantasy begins when she hears the echoes of the phrenologist and the sighs of the prostitute, while remembering the gazes of Novoa and Salces as they examined her head to expose her secretive sexual passions. These voices and gazes that represent both Felisa’s inner desires and social vigilance bring her closer to self-awareness. In *Vision, Gender and Power in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing, 1860-1900*, Spengler describes a similar phenomenon in Elizabeth Stoddard’s nineteenth-century American novel *The Morgesons* (1862)

by arguing that the gaze of the female protagonist Cassandra allows her to understand her authentic desires, while simultaneously making her cognizant of women's proper social norms:

In the following, I will read Cassandra's visual building as a successful scopic socialization, arguing that Cassandra's visual relations to her surroundings reflect a growing self-awareness and a coming to selfhood, including the development of a female gaze that expresses her desire, despite that fact that the visual encounters also introduce her to social norms that shape female experiences during the nineteenth century. (240)

In *La condesita*, these contradictory images of pleasure and guilt cause Felisa to become immersed in a horrible nightmare, which she labels as her "sueño fisiológico." In Felisa's dream she sees an anatomical image of her insides projected before her, which she scrutinizes as if she were looking at herself in the mirror:

Por una intuición extraordinaria aparecía á mi vista toda la imagen interior anatómica de mi cuerpo. Yo seguía con mis ojos, como en un espejo, todos aquellos nervios que el doctor inglés había dicho formaban una comunicación simpática entre el cerebro y el organismo sensitivo [...] (29)

When seeing her insides, Felisa hears the echoes of the prostitutes in her mind, which cause her to experience emotions of fear and pains all over her body, highlighting her interiorized guilt upon exploring her sexual fantasies that would be condemned by society. However, these feelings of corporeal suffering transform into pleasure when she learns to satisfy her own wants and to disregard external societal pressures. Rodríguez de Rivera highlights how Felisa's observation of an external image of her body grants her a new sense of power that allows her to transgress the scrutinizing medical gaze:

A través del sueño fisiológico, se produce una fisura entre el yo y el cuerpo de Felisa, que se convierte en objeto de sus observaciones. Sin embargo, esta toma de distancia también le confiere a la protagonista cierta autonomía y poder, ya que pasa de ser un objeto de estudio sometido a las miradas de otros —los médicos, los asistentes a la sesión de frenología, el Sr. Novoa— a desempeñar una exploración psico-fisiológica de su propio cuerpo en el terreno de lo onírico. (30-31)

Rodríguez de Rivera also argues that Felisa's self-analysis in her dream displays the powers of female vision and spectatorship, which men feared would allow them to usurp traditional male prerogatives (31). The liberating powers of Felisa's gaze upon herself will be revealed when she gets out of bed, lights a candle, takes off her clothes, and observes her nude self before the mirror (30). When admiring her naked body, Felisa continues to flee from the male medical gaze that looks to dissect her body and diagnose her with illness, while becoming a sculptor of her own desires:

Si ántes había experimentado todos los grados de repugnancia del escalpelo del anatomista disecador, ahora iba gustando sucesivamente todas las voluptuosidades fisiológicas del cincel del artista creador.

¡Ay! ¿Cómo poder expresar aquellos deleites que, según la fábula, debió experimentar Prometeo, cuando después de labrar estatuas, las tocó con el fuego del cielo para darles sentimiento?

Y mi tacto también fué fuego de sensual revelación. (30)

When Felisa envisions herself as Prometheus, “the Greek god who defied Zeus to steal fire for humankind,” Mayo exposes male apprehensions of female creativity and intellectuality (Dougherty 3). Linda M. Lewis argues that female writers such as Barrett Browning (the author of *Aurora Leigh*) used this particular god as “an icon of their own radical artistic creativity” (24). There is also a double threat of female artistic creativity expressed in Felisa's “sueño fisiológico,” since she is documenting her imaginative erotic sensations through writing in a private diary. The creative, artistic associations with Felisa's masturbatory awakening will be paralleled with her friend Aurora's onanistic self-discovery, which she also puts into writing in her diary entries. Similarly, Aurora's autoerotic awakening is connected to painting, representing homemade comedies, and observing sculptures in museums, activities that allow her to become a spectator of herself, while conjuring arousing images in her mind to suit her fantasies.

When Felisa wakes up the next morning, a ray of light penetrates her bedroom, causing her to experience a feeling of paralysis, symbolizing her self-awakening that has occurred through this corporeal self-exploration.⁷ Felisa's blossoming of self-consciousness is further demonstrated when she describes how this interaction has granted her a sense of morality: "Los ojos de mi espíritu se habían abierto á la ciencia del bien y del mal; pero, como otra Eva en el Paraíso, conocí también que estaban desnudas mis carnes" (31). Felisa's newly acquired moral knowledge reflected male preoccupations of women exploring their sexual desires, which could lead them to abandon their traditional role of the *ángel del hogar* (angel of the home). In *Desiring Women*, Karyn Sproles explains:

It was asserted that women were descended from fallen Eve and thus retained some kernel of innocence before the forbidden fruit was first enjoyed. With no knowledge of good and evil, all of a woman's energies were to be directed into fulfilling her complementary duties as devoted wife and loving mother. For a woman, the tension between duty and unrestrained desire was not a conscious battle to be manually fought and won but a matter of remaining ignorant, because she was thought to be insufficiently capable of controlling her desires once aroused. (20)

Sproles discusses how this male anxiety of female knowledge was tied to the practice of self-pleasure, which would make women aware of their bodies: "Knowledge might lead to that which Victorian medical texts forbade: masturbation. But this concern, too, can be seen as a screen for the greater anxiety over women's knowledge of their bodies' reproductive power" (21). As will be subsequently shown, Felisa's knowledge of her body sparks knowledge on several other topics such as social and gender norms, as well as newly developed political models for women in other countries, all of which shape her into a strong, independent woman who refuses to conform to traditional conventions of womanhood.

⁷ This will be similar to how rays of light shine over Herminia's body in *Las neuróticas*, when she experiences a masturbatory awakening in the shower while interacting with her friend Conchita, who acts as a mirror through which Herminia can discover herself.

Felisa's awakening of intelligence will be further illustrated when she describes a French lithograph in her home labeled "*De qué modo viene á las jóvenes la penetración, la inteligencia, el ingenio, la malicia*" (31). Felisa also begins to read a plethora of novels, including books about the mythological transformation of gods (e.g., Jupiter turning into gold rain to have sex with Danaë), hinting that her masturbatory dream will lead to her own spiritual self-transformation (32). After reading these books and novels by the French feminist author George Sand (1804-76), who took on the guise of a male writer, Felisa's intellectual capacities sharpen and she begins to rehearse portraits of Madrid's society in writings in the form of novels (33). This drafting of novels about her society symbolizes Felisa's budding social awareness that has been caused by her masturbatory discovery and that will sharpen as she interacts with her mirror image guised as her childhood friend Aurora del Espino, with whom she will self-reflect upon the position of women in society.

This analysis of Madrid's society in her fictional writings will be followed by her actual entrance into society, while accompanied by Aurora:

Pero yo tenía una amiga de la infancia, casi de mi misma edad, una condiscípula de piano, que ya en su casa propia, ya en la mía, habíamos dado lección juntas. Aurora del Espino era su nombre.

Había nacido entre nosotras una especie de simpatía, aumentada por las bromas que nos daba el medico Salces, llamándonos las *amorosas*, á causa de la configuración igual de nuestras nuca en el sistema frenológico. (37)

Felisa's piano practices with her friend point to the idea that Aurora is an incarnation of her mirror image, who appears to her in autoerotic explorations and who will aid in her sexual development throughout the years. In *Four-Handed Monsters*, Adrian Daub reveals that "the connection between masturbation and piano playing is anything but new. Alan Corbin points out that, long before the birth of psychoanalysis, Edmond de Goncourt established the connection

between piano playing and female masturbation” (99). In chapter 4 of *A History of Private Life*, Alain Corbin further clarifies that “in four stock scenes from nineteenth-century literature, the piano played by a solitary woman, usually in the evening, can be seen to fill the roles of friend, confidant, soul mate, and to aid in self-expression” (533). The fact that these girls were labeled as “las amorosas,” because they supposedly presented the same physiological propensity towards masturbation further suggests that the young women act as mirror images, displaying the powers of female subjectivity acquired by gazing upon the self from an external perspective.

Aurora’s character acts as a looking glass for Felisa to contemplate the different roles that women can assume in nineteenth-century society. In *Becoming Women*, Carla Rice describes how in personal interviews conducted with women in present-day Canadian society, women acknowledged using the mirror to contemplate their future selves, which is what Felisa does through the lens of Aurora. In spite of the lapse of time, the description holds then and now:

In childhood, virtually every participant became conscious that being looked at was associated with being female and that relating to one’s body as an image was foundational to femininity. Through self-scrutiny and watching others look at them, all experienced their bodies as visual emblems of themselves and as subject to outside standards. This was not wholly negative. Many recalled the pleasures of gazing on their girl bodies and the possibilities of imagining their future female selves. (71)

La Belle also describes how the mirror can allow women to contemplate alternative identities for themselves: “The mirror creates the self, the psychic and social construct, as the sense of a unitary (or at least not radically fragmented) identity slowly comes into being through processes of literal objectification and the testing of alternative modes of self-conception” (52). Felisa accompanies Aurora to parties and the theater, emphasizing the idea that she represents an external image of herself through which she can play different roles as a woman in society (38). Not only is the theater a site of self-spectatorship, but attending parties can also be seen as a mirror-gazing experience

Mirror-gazing is generally a private experience, an occasion for self-examination. But in looking into a mirror one also travels imaginatively outside oneself, visualizing how one appears to others. This is frequently a rehearsal gesture, a preparation (even, perhaps, a literal “making up”) for engagement with others. Like the party itself, the mirror dramatically juxtaposes private experience and public image. Two-dimensional and reversed, mirror images unavoidably symbolize the divided self. (Ames 98)

When Felisa accompanies Aurora to these parties and to the theater, she describes it as her entrance into society, where she is introduced to the realm of courtship (38-39). While Felisa is somewhat entertained by the presence of men, her masturbatory explorations have allowed her to imagine different possibilities for herself outside of the confines of the *ángel del hogar*. Instead of viewing these interactions with male suitors as a gateway to marriage, Felisa interprets them as liberating outlets to escape boring conversations with other women revolving around typical “feminine” matters such as fashion and dances. She also tells the reader that the reason why she views courtship in this nontraditional manner is because her masturbatory “sueño fisiológico” illuminated her potencies, while awakening her own inner desires that are shielded from societal expectations:

La verdad era, no que los hombres me causasen repulsión, todo lo contrario; pues, aparte de las cuestiones de galanteo, hallaba yo en su trato más amenidad que en el de las mujeres, quienes no sabían salir de su sempiterna charla de dijes, modas, danzas y fútiles amoríos.

Pero desde aquella noche memorable que en medio de un sueño extraordinario se iluminaron mis potencias, se fijaron mis deseos, hallaron un camino mis angustias sensitivas, [...] desde aquella noche en que, cual otra Eva seducida por la serpiente, vi que estaban desnudas mis carnes y tuve vergüenza, [...] desde aquella noche, ¡cuántas y cuántas veces busqué en mis soledades aquella revelación de mi sueño fisiológico! (39)

This remembrance of her self-discovery before the mirror puts Felisa into contact with an inner voice emerging from her conscience that tells her she should not get married, emphasizing the idea that masturbation would provide women with a powerful sense of self-awareness that could lead to a rejection of traditional roles: “Y por esto, cuanto más me abandonaba á esos

ensueños, más resonaba en el fondo de mi conciencia una voz apagada y melancólica, que me decía a manera de dulce reproche: —¡Felisa, Felisa, tú no serás esposa” (39). Felisa spends several years fomenting the thought that “no debía ser la mujer en matrimonio de hombre alguno” (39). Felisa wonders what her family, her servant Próspero, and her medic would think about this decision, that she is unable to interpret herself, while waiting for a sign to reveal the mystery: “Mi madre, mis amigas, mi aya, el viejo Próspero, el señor de Novoa, el medico Salces, ¿adivinaron alguna vez lo que por mí pasaba? No lo sé; mas nunca la más leve indicación vino á revelármelo” (39).

This mystery will be revealed to Felisa through Aurora when her manuscript immediately switches over to a chapter titled “Aurora del Espino,” in which the narrator describes the characteristics of Felisa’s friend. The narrator depicts Aurora as an incarnation of a woman’s stages of development throughout her life, who can paint for the reader a perfect image of women’s roles in Madrid in the nineteenth-century. For example, the narrator describes how Aurora’s diary will discuss her experiences as a child, young single woman, a coquette, and a married woman:

Si fuera posible dar á luz en toda su integridad un diario de sensaciones escrito por Aurora del Espino durante un espacio de quince años, diario en el que no sólo se anotan sus impresiones de niña, sus ánsias de doncella, sus coqueterías de mujer, sus penas de casada, sus desfallecimientos y arrebatos, sus placeres y desengaños, sino que interpolados con esos recuerdos de sí misma se refieren los sentimientos de los otros, las bajezas de muchos, la generosidad de muy pocos, el egoísmo de casi todos,[...] se tendría un cuadro perfecto de la sociedad madrileña á fines de la primera mitad del siglo XIX.
(40)

Felisa stays with Aurora during childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and death. She is also with Aurora when she contemplates marriage, meets her future husband, and ponders his marriage proposal. After Aurora gets married, Felisa and Aurora will also engage in an intimate “interview” in which she inquires about her friend’s happiness and asks if she made the right

decision. For this reason, she can be seen as a mirror through which Felisa can negotiate her private masturbatory desires and societal expectations that looked to compel women into heterosexual relationships that would begin with courtship and ultimately end in marriage.

Felisa and Aurora's friendship can also evoke male fears of female bonding in the nineteenth century, which could allow women to form powerful intimate relationships with one another to satisfy their personal wants outside of the realm of patriarchal discourse. For example, Janet N. Gold describes how female bonding in the writings of the aforementioned Cuban-born Spanish author Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is depicted as a "type of camaraderie between or among women that exists in opposition to or as a rejection of what women perceive as male standards or structures" (84). Gold also discusses the intimate bond between the female protagonists Teresa and Carlota of Avellaneda's novel *Sab* (1841), a relationship that shares similarities with Felisa and Aurora's friendship that will eventually transform into a lesbian romance. For example, in *Sab*, Carlota marries the man of her dreams, while her friend Teresa remains in a convent, paralleling Aurora's marriage to her ideal man and Felisa's entrance into a convent in *La condesita*. Gold suggests the possibility of a lesbian relationship between Teresa and Carlota in Avellaneda's novel by describing private encounters between the two women that occur after Carlota becomes disillusioned with her husband:

After she realizes that she has become a slave to the social convention of marriage, she longs for contact with Teresa because she understands that only Teresa, a victim of society in her own right, can understand. So now 'su único placer era llorar en el seno de su amiga sus ilusiones perdidas y su libertad encadenada' (215). They spend long hours in Teresa's convent cell in endless conversation. (If only Avellaneda had shared with her readers what transpired during those long hours in Teresa's cell, the 19th century Cuban novel might have given us what Virginia Woolf so longed for in the British novel!). (85)

In *La condesita*, Aurora will also seek the support of her friend Felisa after she is disappointed with her marriage, vowing to resume her autoerotic practices and her close relationship with her

friend. Both Felisa and Aurora will satisfy their desires by locking themselves in the bedroom together for hours in a secretive “interview” hidden from the reader’s view, which is later labeled as an episode of sapphic passion. As previously discussed, Rodríguez de Rivera reveals how nineteenth century medical treatises reflected male preoccupations surrounding lesbianism, describing it as a form of pathological illness (38). In *La condesita*, the pathologization of Felisa and Aurora’s lesbian bond reflects male anxieties towards sexual relationships between women that were discussed in these treatises. However, this sapphic romance goes beyond the sexual, since it allows Felisa and Aurora to explore their inner emotions, fears, and desires with someone who can understand their true wants and relate to their experiences of oppression in patriarchal society.

Before the culmination of the lesbian interaction between Felisa and Aurora, there is an interplay of mirroring between the two protagonists, which paves the way for auto-discovery through self-spectatorship. Aurora is depicted as an object of public admiration for one to gaze upon, sometimes in the company of Felisa, emphasizing the idea that she is a mirror for Felisa to negotiate her self-image through the eyes of others:

Cuando la joven Aurora atravesaba los salones con su porte majestuoso, su flexible talle, sus ondulados bucles de un rubio rojizo, fijando su penetrante mirada en derredor, se alzaba un murmullo general de admiración. Las mujeres la contemplaban con cierta envidia; los hombres [...] con cierto respeto los reflexivos, con cierta invencible audacia los fatuos.

Si iba acompañada de la condesita, como llamaban á Felisa de Negro ponte, la atención de los convidados se dividía entre ambas amigas. (41)

In *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Miranda Gill

describes how women could bathe in their vanity by fantasizing about being admired by others.

Gill includes a nineteenth-century print titled *A Mirror in the Eyes of Others* (1844), by the

French artist J. J. Granville, in which a woman sits in a theater booth while a group of male

spectators, whose heads are replaced by large eyes, gaze upon her. In regards to this print, Gill comments:

With her implausibly low décolletage and elaborate hairstyle, the woman monopolizes the total quantity of male desire and female envy in the theatre. The figure appears similar to the femme a la mode, portrayed in many novels and physiologies of the July Monarchy as an expert in inventing eccentric styles in order to capture the public gaze and gratify her vanity. (56)

This supposed female craving for public admiration can serve as an emblem of Felisa and Aurora's masturbatory obsessions with their own images, which they not only contemplate through their own eyes before the mirror and through the eyes of external spectators.

The narrator of *La condesita* depicts Aurora as a female attendant at the theater who enjoys public attention, while simultaneously painting her as a dangerous emblem of secrecy who must be censored, displaying the dangers of female spectatorship in the nineteenth century:

Y los que miraban en el Prado de San Jerónimo ó en el paseo de la Florida a la bella Aurora del Espino lanzar á escape su frágil cochecillo ó su brioso corcel; los que la contemplaban radiante de galas é indiferente de rostro en su palco de la Ópera; los que la veían festiva y animada, ya en su casa, ya en su quinta de Pozuelo, [...] todos ellos más dispuestos quizás á censurarla que á admirarla, no imaginaban cuantas bendiciones secretas caían sobre la desconocida del rubio cabello. (44)

When the text later switches over to Aurora's personal manuscript, it becomes clear that her preference for being observed at the theater and the opera is connected to her masturbatory pleasures that emerged during childhood. In her manuscript she describes how she always went to homemade comedies but never to the actual theater, which suggests that these were imaginary encounters within her mind: "Desde muy niña había concurrido yo á comedias caseras, pero nunca á ningún teatro público. Poco más de trece años tendría cuando me llevaron por primera vez a una ópera italiana" (166).

Carlson describes the opera as a theatrical space where the audience and actors became blurred in a process of mirroring:

For an evening, anyone could wear the costume of the bourgeois, mingle in their space and see themselves reflected in the opera's mirrors and gas-lit chandeliers. . . . In the Grand Foyer, there was no king to watch, everyone within the space was both audience and actor; the distinction between performers and the audience was not obvious. The spectacle of the "galerie des glaces" at Versailles was interactive at the Opera—panoptic and specular. (46-47)

Balducci also associates the nineteenth-century opera with self-spectatorship, while connecting this public event to the emerging powers of the female gaze in French paintings such as Mary Cassatt's *In the Loge* (1878). Balducci mentions how this painting has been interpreted as a representation of "woman's active looking," while critiquing the idea that "women in public were constantly subjected to a male gaze" (89). Penny Huntsman presents a similar idea about this painting by stating

Cassatt appears to have consciously subverted the 'male gaze' in her take on a theater-box scene. By putting herself into the position of the male artist she actually subverts the 'male gaze.' This lady has no frills, no pretty bonnet or flowers; she is a lone spectator of the show, buttoned up to the neck with empathetic control of the gaze—she is empowered—her vision is active not passive. (239)

Several of Cassatt's paintings of women at the theater and the opera deal with not only female gazing but also mirroring and duplicity, such as the painting *Two Young Women in a Loge* (1882). Martha Lucy argues that in this painting "the theme of the split self again emerges through mirror reflection and is then reiterated by the side-by-side placement of the two girls" (275). Lucy also states that this scene at the opera can be interpreted "as one figure split in two, into the self's simultaneous roles as subject and object" (275). Lucy's interpretation of this opera scene bolsters the argument that Felisa and Aurora are mirror reflections of one another and that they represent nineteenth-century fears of female self-spectatorship that would lead to an empowering sense of subjectivity by seeing oneself in the gaze of an other.

In Aurora's manuscript she describes how the powers of her gaze are awakened when she attends an opera for her first time. In this panoptic atmosphere of seeing and being seen, Aurora

delves into a world of pleasure that reminds her of stories that she read during her childhood (166). When the music begins, so does Aurora's performance of the self, leading her to faint and lose consciousness (167). In this subconscious state of gazing, Aurora is overcome with desire and then imagines being transported into a fantasy realm where she can be a crafter of her own fantasies:

Todavía recuerdo las emociones inexplicables que circularon por todo mi sér, infiltrándose por no sé dónde, pero inundándome de cierta beatitud y contento, que me embargaban el sentido y me ahogaban en una corriente de voluptuosas delicias. Durante el primer acto me imaginé transportada á otro mundo desconocido, y ciertamente, yo no debí entender ni percibir nada de los objetos que á mi lado estaban, bebiendo y aspirando únicamente aquellos raudales de sensitiva armonía. (167)

Just as Felisa's masturbatory discovery before the mirror awakened her intellectual faculties, Aurora's performance of the self at the theater provides her with a new power of rationalization:

Esas sensaciones musicales fueron para mí una verdadera revelación. Desde entonces comencé á experimentar un cambio completo en mi manera de raciocinar. Comprendí que había en la vida misterios que yo no alcanzaba; y tanto más me pareció ser así, cuanto que por la lectura de cuentos y novelas, á que yo era muy aficionada, veía que mi entendimiento estaba á oscuras de todo lo que hacía referencia á amores, sentimientos, pasiones, afectos del corazón y otras ideas para mí enigmáticas, y de las cuales hablaban los autores como de cosa muy corriente al alcance de todo lector. (167-68)

Aurora's delight in being seen at the theater is accompanied by her vocation as a flirt, symbolizing an alternative identity that Felisa can assume: "Al revés de Felisa de Negroponte, Aurora del Espino no rechazaba á sus adoradores. Los escuchaba, los atendía; pero por último le servían de juguete" (46).

Aurora, unlike Felisa, fantasizes about the male body, symbolizing an attempt to follow heterosexual norms, but even these fantasies are depicted as solipsistic turning back onto her own self, as she crafts images from her own imagination. For example, Aurora does not dream of actual young men, but rather paints fictitious images of naked pre-pubescent boys:

De los muros de su gabinete pendían varios cuadritos pintados por ella, representando grupos graciosos de niños desnudos, copiados del natural con una exactitud de líneas, una morbidez de carnes y entonación de colorido que sorprendieron á más de un afamado artista del sexo masculino. (42)

Aurora's gaze not only evokes the powers of female artistic ability and sexuality, but it also manages to objectify the male body. Zubiaurre discusses a similar phenomenon in a drawing from the nineteenth-century Spanish erotic magazine *Cosquillas*, in which a female painter is multiplied into two different mirror images of herself. While this woman is depicted as engaging in self-spectatorship, she simultaneously paints a male nude and tells him: "Try to sit still, I am going to add the final touches" (182).

Aurora also admits to using her imagination to craft an image of the perfect man in her personal manuscript when detailing her masturbatory initiations in the Museo del Prado. In their article "Seeing and Being Seen," Dimitra Christidou and Sophia Diamantopoulou explain that "although embodied experiences are what museums and exhibits offer as their very essence, McClellan argues that 'encouraging visitors to look and see has long been recognized as the principal task of the mainstream art museum'" (13). Christidou and Diamantopoulou also describe the museum as a similar space to the theater, where individuals can engage in imaginative self-spectatorship while admiring works of art:

The sense of vision is further foregrounded in the dominant discourse of exhibition marketing materials with visitors being invited to "see" the exhibition and "look at" the exhibits, as well as in educational programmes and resources which ask visitors either to locate artworks or re-create images of these artworks [i.e. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)]. Museums are thus constructed as "a space of observation" with visitors relying heavily on their vision and the interpretation of museums, while performing subtle shifts between gazing and glancing, prolonged silence and queuing in front of popular exhibits. (brackets in the original; 13)

While at the museum, Aurora confesses her preference for gazing at paintings of nude men, suggesting that the paintings hanging in her *gabinete* could have been inspired by her observation of these artworks that she has reinterpreted to suit her desires:

Yo me apasioné de todos los cuadros en que campeaba la figura al natural, y me extasiaba horas enteras ante los desnudos, ante las encarnaciones de la escuela italiana. Mis ojos estudiaban la forma de los contornos, el colorido de las tintas, la morbidez de las carnes, el plegado de los paños; pero la imaginación les daba nueva forma, nueva apariencia, nuevo sér; y aquellas figuras así vivificadas venían á reflejarse con nueva impresión allá en lo más íntimo de mi organismo. (169)

Aurora also makes her way over to the sculptures, imagining that they are actual men in society (169). This fusion between sculptures and real-life men in Aurora's mind will later prove to be a dangerous activity when she creates an ideal image of a husband in her mind and realizes that he does not exist, leading her to resume her masturbatory reveries.

Aurora's disenchantment with real men blossoms during this museum visit when she describes how she would always think about these male sculptures when one of her male suitors tried to charm her, but became instantly disgusted when she realized that he was a real man of flesh and blood. For this reason, she has decided to become a coquette who toys with men, but has no actual intention of being with them:

A los catorce años, ya me consideraban como una coqueta cumplida.

¡Cuántas veces se acercaba á decirme una lisonja un joven cualquiera, y mientras me hablaba, yo me estaba acordando de la figura de Adonis ó de Apolo en el Museo, y mi caballere me representaba en todo su desnudo cual hermoso adolescente ó bellissimo mancebo, y yo le sonreía cariñosa, y me dejaba coger la mano! [...] Créame en el Olimpo de los dioses [...]

Mas de repente venía su aliento ó su mano sudorosa á recordarme que era humano mortal y no habitante del etéreo el que me dirigía la palabra; y huyendo de él con estrepitosa carcajada, le dejaba trastornado y confuso en medio de una frase almibarada. (170)

After these episodes of self-spectatorship at the opera and the museum in Aurora's manuscript, she goes to church and becomes aroused by statues of Jesus, which can be read as a

type of spiritual awakening and auto-awareness. Upon studying these statues, Aurora hears the sound of the music from the opera the night before, which creates a mystical union between her body and spirit: “Pero este examen y este estudio iba acompañado en mi fantasía de las formas que yo le atribuía al tenor ó al barítono á quien había oído cantar la noche anterior [...] ¡Siempre la idea espiritual unida á la materia carnal!” (171). This fusion of mind and body is also present when Aurora gazes at herself in two large mirrors that hang in her *gabinete* that she uses to scrutinize her persona in depth, just as Felisa did during her “sueño fisiológico:”

Y allí encerrada, una de las ocupaciones más importantes de ejercer mi curiosidad fue la de escudriñar toda mi persona y apurar hasta sus últimos términos las líneas y contornos, las sinuosidades y repliegues de mi carnal estructura.

¡Con qué avidez miré y remiré... inquirí y examiné... comparé y profundicé todos los menores detalles de mi humano ser!

¡De cuántas maneras coloqué las movibles lunas, de cuántas suertes busqué sus reflejos, con qué sutileza interpuse otro manual espejuelo para darme mejor cuenta de las recónditas formas! (171-72)

During this masturbatory self-observation, Aurora reiterates in her mind her preference for autonomy and imaginative reverie over male sexuality: “Las aspiraciones ocultas de la mujer, ¿concluyen siempre en su absorción por el hombre? ¿Y es esto amor, es esto la pasión?” (172). This question leads Aurora to the museum again, but this time she becomes aroused by a statue of a hermaphrodite, illustrating her autoerotic fantasies as a dangerous usurpation of male power. While in public, she sits in the corner of one of the occupied benches in the room and attempts to pleasure herself thinking of the double-sexed sculpture she just saw. This robbing of male authority continues when the statue remains imprinted on Aurora’s mind and she runs home, takes off her clothes, and looks at herself reflected in two mirrors:

¡Ah! ¡En aquel instante acabé de comprender cuál era la parte privilegiada de mis nervios!

¡Oh amor físico... oh sensualidad revelada!

.....

No, el amor no es el hombre; no, el amor no es la mujer. (173)

Given that Aurora later subjects herself to a clitorectomy to curb her masturbatory habits, this privileged part of her body can be interpreted as a reference to her clitoris. This particular part of her body, which produces gratification without the intervention of a man, causes her to become overwhelmed with a sensation of dizziness as she remembers her previous episodes of self-spectatorship at church and the museum.

In “Victorian Medicine Was Not Responsible for Repressing the Clitoris: Rethinking Homology in the Long History of Women’s Genital Anatomy,” Alison Moore describes how the female clitoris was represented as a woman’s principal site of pleasure, a discovery that began to normalize women’s sexual desires (54). In her article “Critical Clitoridectomy,” Paula Bennett depicts the clitoris as an emblem of female power that transcends beyond the sexual when she states: “With the clitoris, theorists can construct female sexuality in such a way that women become sexual subjects in their own right, taking their sexual, social, creative and political power into their own hands” (188). Not only is the clitoris depicted as a dangerous emblem of female agency in *La condesita*, but it also represents a supplement to male sexuality. This male fear of the clitoris’s ability to replace the phallus is illustrated by Sarah W. Rodríguez when she describes how nineteenth-century physicians viewed the clitoral orgasm as a substitute for “penetrative” and “procreative” sex that women should have been having with their husbands. Rodríguez argues that “When women behaved outside this normality—by masturbating or by not responding to their husband’s embrace—their sexual instinct was seen as impaired and disordered” (326).

In her manuscript, Aurora reveals that her lack of need for male sexuality also has origins in her discovery of dildos at a younger age.⁸ When traveling with her family in Paris Aurora visits a dress-maker and tries on a corset in a private dressing room, where she discovers a box on the floor containing what appear to be dildos: “Contenía dicha caja varios instrumentos de gruesos y longitudes diferentes. Yo tenía una vaga idea de la existencia de los tales instrumentos; además, su forma era tan significativa, que me revelaba cuál pudiera ser su aplicación” (177). Aurora asks to buy one of the dildos from the dressmaker and to be taught “su [...] mejor uso” (177) and realizes that she does not need a man when she discovers the pleasures it provides her. Sally O’Driscoll portrays the widespread depictions of women using dildos in eighteenth-century literature as a recognition of female sexual desire that was disrupting the notion of a woman’s passive nature, while simultaneously rendering men dispensable:

A significant element in the early broadsides is the suggestion that if men cannot perform sexually, women will use whatever means necessary—usually a dildo—to procure sexual satisfaction. The notion that sexual desire cannot be denied, and that both men and women share an urgent sexual need, opens up the practice of sexuality beyond what would now be considered the heteronormative. (50)⁹

O’Driscoll describes how the notion of female pleasure with the dildo reflects male fears of female masculinization, emphasizing the idea that female masturbation caused a blurring of gender boundaries as women usurped male authority and privilege: “Once this scheme is set in place, the dildo plays a major role in ephemeral literature about female masculinity; fear of and contempt for women predominate in these new representations, which use the dildo to focus their

⁸ Rodríguez de Rivera has noted the role of these objects in Aurora’s sexual development (39)

⁹ This connection between female masturbation and male erasure will run throughout the other texts of the dissertation as female protagonists find supplementary ways to pleasure themselves, whether it be through dreaming, self-touching, or relationships with intimate friends.

outrage” (50). Aurora’s dildo explorations immediately make her realize that she has no need to get married and transform herself into a slave, or an instrument of male control:

desde que fui iniciada en el gabinetito de la modista de París, ¿qué necesidad tenía yo de degradarme en unión con el otro sexo ruin, egoísta, dominador, exigente, siempre injusto para la mujer, siempre dispuesto á no ver en su compañera sino una esclava de sus caprichos, un instrumento de sus deleites, un escabel de sus pretensiones, un estorbo repugnante cuando no sirve a sus pasiones? (179)

This contemplation will later manifest itself in reality when Aurora gets married and is disillusioned by her husband’s sexual abilities because she has developed knowledge of her body and explored other outlets to pleasure outside the realm of heterosexual intercourse.

Aurora’s usurpation of the phallus and rejection of male sexuality coincides with her fantasies of abandoning her identity as a submissive woman to intrude into the realm of male power. The narrator tells us that Aurora “gustaba de cambiar algunas veces su traje femenino por el del otro sexo, ya en representaciones de comedia casera, ya en algún ejercicio varonil, en que más de un hombre no podía competir con ella” (44). This image of Aurora acting in “homemade” theatrical performances suggests that these are imaginary rehearsals before the mirror that represent a female fantasy of escaping traditional gender norms. Aurora’s fantasy of discarding her submissive femininity is also depicted through her preference of “masculine” activities such as horseback riding, shooting, driving a carriage, and attending bullfights.

These theatrical fantasies of female liberation are curbed by the medical gaze when Felisa and Aurora develop a series of ailments from their masturbatory pleasures such as buzzing in her ears and excessive languor. The medic Salces recommends that Felisa employ “la energía de voluntad” (60) to cure her sickness; however, she is unsure how to do this, causing her to experience internal suffering: “Yo no comprendía muy bien eso de sobreponer mi voluntad al dolor, y queriendo enérgicamente no sufrir, cesar de sufrir” (60-61). Aurora also appears to be

suffering from onanistic negative consequences when Felisa tells the reader: “Aurora me hizo notar un síntoma que luego supe era gravísimo. Se le habían redondeado deformemente las uñas. Al oír la observación de mi amiga, el medico Salces se sonrió tristemente” (65). In addition to this onset of supposed autoerotic symptoms and medical scrutiny, Felisa is shamed for her masturbatory habits by a gypsy, who then predicts Aurora’s future marriage, symbolizing the internalized pressure to conform to societal demands of womanhood (73).

Despite this pressure to marry, Felisa envisions a new model for women to follow in Spanish society by proposing to Aurora that they imitate the political transformations in the United States to favor gender equality: “Si en vez de pretender los derechos civiles y políticos que las mujeres pretenden en los Estados-Unidos para igualarse á los hombres, pretendieran los derechos propios, exclusivos de mujer, el mundo iría de otra manera” (97). The friends also engage in a discussion about marriage representing a form of slavery for women, which as Pura Fernández has signaled echoes John Stuart Mill’s theories in his feminist text *The Subjection of Women* (244).¹⁰ These feminist reflections end in a silent embrace between the two women, marking the beginning of their lesbian romance that serves as an emblem of a woman’s intimate interactions with the mirror as she engages in self-reflection: “Y las dos amigas se estrecharon las manos, y enlazaron sus brazos por cintura; y sentándose en una piedra sillar de alcantarilla, permanecieron largo rato silenciosas en esta cariñosa postura” (99). While engaging in this silent embrace, the young women appear to exchange gazes. When seeing themselves through each other’s eyes, the narrator describes how Aurora begins to wonder why Felisa has rejected marriage. “Felisa, pura á los ojos de Aurora, Felisa que se acusa de indigna para ser esposa [...] Aurora, que, como su amiga, abusa de sí misma, y no adivina cuál pueda ser esa indignidad de

¹⁰ This text will be discussed in chapter six.

Felisa” (99). This meditation and self-observation through the lens of an other emphasizes the idea that these female friends are mirror images who allow them to contemplate their inner desires under the guise of the practice of masturbation, while pondering the idea of giving in to societal expectations to end their guilt and internalization of the medical gaze.

The narrator hints that these girls come closer to pursuing their own wants over marriage when they continue in a silent embrace that could lead them to “espontanearse,” or to engage in an intimate relationship with one another that would resemble a form of mirrored desire:

La soledad del campo, la meditación en que habían caído ambas amigas, y hasta el amoroso abrazo que las enlazaba, [...] todo convidaba á espontanearse. Y sin embargo, las dos amigas no se espontanearon.

¡Ay! Si en ese momento se hubiesen declarado ellas una á otra; si el secreto de sus sensaciones aisladas hubiese dejado de ser un secreto; si, despejado el arcano, Felisa pundonorosa y Aurora despreocupada hubiesen reflexionado sobre lo absurdo de que una misma causa sensual produjera consecuencias morales tan diversas, [...] ¡ay! entonces no habría desde aquel instante tomando un giro tan opuesto la existencia de las dos jóvenes. Meditaron, pero no se hablaron. (99)

Because the friends did not share their inner secrets with one another in this moment, there continues to be a divide between Felisa and Aurora. Social pressures win over private desire when Aurora decides to marry the prince, leaving Felisa to experience an extreme degree of loneliness. However, the friends manage to stay in touch through letters, an emblem of self-reflection: “Su antigua amiga Aurora seguía en París, y su correspondencia con ella era el único desahogo de su corazón” (156).

Felisa’s solitude causes her to suffer from “una erotomania aguda,” which is witnessed by the medic Salces. The medical gaze makes Felisa feel extremely embarrassed of her desires and to flee from the public eye in an attempt to conceal her passions (161). However, Felisa is unable to escape the medic’s all-knowing, scrutinizing gaze, when Salces publicly diagnoses her with

erotomania to her uncle and the judge Turbosa, while comparing her uncontrollable passions to animalistic desire (162).

Felisa's erotomania is cured by a visit from Aurora, who has now been married two months and is passing through Madrid to continue her honeymoon with the Prince. In this visit there is a private interview between the single woman and the wife: "¿Qué pasó en la entrevista de las dos jóvenes? ¿Qué sentimentales confianzas se hicieron la nueva esposa y la doncella? Algunos datos poseemos [...] que las conveniencias hipócritas de la sociedad nos prohíben revelar (163-64). This secretive contemplation between the friends who have chosen different paths in their lives resembles a private interrogation before the mirror that helps Felisa to shape her desired destiny.

After this interview, Aurora decides that she will sit beside Felisa's bedside all night, a decision that causes Salces to remind her "Aurorita, ¿te acuerdas cuando á tí y á tu amigueta os llamaba yo *amorosas*?" (164). When Aurora asks him the motive for his question, Salces answers: "Porque ahora que eres ya esposa, comprenderás lo que daba á entender a recomendarte que disimularas la nuca con tus cabellos" (164). Since the nick-name of "las amorosas" was created to denote Felisa and Aurora's joint mental propensity towards masturbation, this question suggests the idea that Aurora must abandon her own desires now that she has decided to become a wife. However, Aurora seems to prefer her friend or the looking glass over her husband when she shuts herself into the bedroom with Felisa, and the reader is later informed that "Aurora del Espino ha sido esta noche una nueva Safo de Lésbos" (165). This scene depicts lesbianism as an outlet of liberation for the female characters to explore their desires that are suppressed under patriarchal authority and left unfulfilled by the opposite sex. Similarly, since a woman's intimate interaction with the mirror was depicted as a lesbian relationship with another woman, this

encounter represents another solipsistic turning back onto the women's own desires, which were discovered through various episodes of masturbation and self-spectatorship.

When Aurora leaves Madrid, Felisa remains a single woman plagued by her masturbatory habits, leading her to enter into a convent. However, Felisa shortly learns that the other nuns also masturbate, causing her to fall into temptation once again. Felisa suffers from fatal consequences for failing to curb her masturbatory habits over the years when she develops tuberculosis, a disease “associated with sexual excess, especially onanism” (Carpenter 58). As Felisa spends her days spitting up blood, a reminder of her transgressive pleasures, she is subjected to the medical gaze once again when Salces arrives and questions her to confirm his suspicions of her onanistic indulgences: “El médico, que de tan antiguo conocía el temperamento y vicisitudes de la paciente, le hizo varias preguntas para corroborar la sospecha que concibió al momento. No había duda: la condesita estaba amagada de tisis” (194). As Felisa's tuberculosis worsens, she comes closer to death, but one day she is surprised by another visit from Aurora, who has just returned from Russia with her husband, the Russian prince.

When the two girls see each other, their conversation resembles yet another mirror interrogation that reveals the outcomes of the different paths they have taken:

—¿Eres dichosa, Aurora?

—No[,] querida mía.

—Si con lo que aquí he aprendido... nos hubiésemos consultado... hace cinco años...

—Yo no estaría casada, Felisa mía.

—Ni yo ... moriría... ahora... ¡Ah! (196)

Through the lens of Aurora's persona Felisa can contemplate a trial of marriage to decide whether or not this is a good option, or if it would be better to remain a single woman. However,

in this case, neither choice is satisfactory for women, as society tries to limit their freedoms in every position they assume.

In her private manuscript, Aurora reveals why she is unhappy in marriage. Although she had found through the use of dildos that men were not only despicable, egoistic, dominant, demanding, and unjust but also superfluous, she becomes interested in the foreign qualities of the Russian prince that seems to correspond to the perfect image of a man she had composed in her mind through the paintings of nude boys and fantasies of sculptures depicting naked, perfected men: “¡Oh! ¿Hay un hombre, me pregunté a mí misma, qué así puede leer en el secreto de una mujer? Y cuando creí convencerme que el príncipe, en efecto, leía así en mí, no por sarcasmo sino por delicada pasión, [...] no dudé ya más: acepté su mano” (179). Nevertheless, later on she realizes that she had created a nonexistent masculine ideal. Her inner reflections reveal how her continuous self-pleasures have made her very aware of her sexual desires, posing her husband with the challenge of properly satisfying her. However, it is obvious that the prince is unable to fulfill her needs: “¡Oh decepción!... Con toda su pasión, con todo su ardor, con toda su ilimitada sumisión a las exigencias todas de voluptuosidad... mis goces son incompletos. ¡Amarga, amarguísima realidad! (179).

Aurora also reveals that this dissatisfaction has led her to resume both masturbation and her relationship with Felisa, activities that suggest that she prefers to maintain her bond with the mirror that has provided her with so much pleasure throughout her life

He vuelto á mis hábitos de doncella... ¿Y para esto he tomado marido? ¿Para esto he trocado mi independencia femenina por el vanidoso é ilusorio título de mujer casada?¹¹ . .

¹¹ In chapter 4 the female protagonist Herminia of *Las neuróticas* will also realize that it is a bad decision to get married to a marquis, just to have the public title of a rich wife.

¡Ah! Yo ignoraba que había aún placeres en la vida de mujer. He vuelto á ver a mi amiga Felisa... ¿Cómo hemos podido tratarnos durante tantos años sin comprendernos, sin revelarnos nuestras sensaciones secretas?

¡Ay! Si los deleites que ambas hemos pasado esta noche juntas, los hubiera yo conocido antes... ¡Ay! ¡No sería yo hoy día princesa de Emiepatopff! (179)

This final mutual understanding between the women in their interview of the “doncella” and the “casada” that occurs in the convent shows how the joint acts of masturbation and mirror gazing can provide women with the powers to reason, rationalize, observe, understand their unjust social position, and imagine new possibilities for themselves.

Unfortunately, this revelation between the two women ends with a kiss of death that inhibits the final forging of female independence and selfhood. When Aurora tells Felisa that she would not be married if they had revealed to one another their secret sensations years before, Felisa exclaims that by the same token she would not face her imminent death (196). Dijkstra argues that “woman’s desire to embrace her own reflection, her ‘kiss in the glass,’ became the turn of the century’s emblem of her enmity towards man” (150). A woman kissing her image in the glass also symbolizes a female desire to get in touch with her inner self and understand her identity. By forging this female kiss in the mirror with death, Mayo obliterates male anxieties surrounding women’s sudden “enmity” towards men at the time that has been illustrated throughout *La condesita*, while prohibiting the final reconciliation of Felisa and Aurora’s identities that would symbolize the construction of a conscious, intelligent, independent, and strangely masculine female self.

In the final words of the novel, the male desire to obliterate the self-sufficient masturbating woman becomes even clearer when the narrator states that Aurora “comprendió que su condición amatoria, tan excesivamente desarrollada, podía conducirla á la locura del erotismo [...] Se sometió a la cauterización de aquel su emblema orgánico del amor físico” (197).

The cauterization of Aurora's clitoris strips her of the privileged site of her sexual knowledge, erotic self-sufficiency, and phallic power. In his article "A Comparison of 19th Century and Current Attitudes to Female Sexuality," John Studd argues that this medical practice was very real in the nineteenth century because the clitoris was not only viewed as an emblem of "moral decline," but was also "widely understood to be an important source of disease," such as the "sicknesses" of masturbation and nymphomania (274). The fact that Aurora's cauterization is self-imposed suggests that she has deemed her masturbatory pleasures and gender transgressions as immoral, which would project the idea to female readers that following this model of female emancipation is unacceptable. Similarly, traditionalist male readers of the nineteenth century would be relieved at knowing that this hermaphroditic usurper of male privilege has been reduced to a position of feminine powerlessness, inferiority, and lack.

The narrator also seems to criticize Aurora for her masturbatory fantasies that have led to such "ideal" expectations in her husband that leave her unsatisfied: "Pero si su sensualidad se calmó, su sensibilidad moral se agravó, meditando que se hallaba unida en matrimonio con un hombre, dignísimo ciertamente, pero que no podía compartir sus aspiraciones demasiado ideales, demasiado excéntricas quizá" (197). Not only is Aurora a female anomaly because she is a demanding wife who expects her fantasies to be fulfilled, but she also cannot fulfill her duties of maternity, symbolizing the incompatibility of her "selfish" desires with the self-sacrificing vocation of the mother.

Because her thirst for self-gratification and independence make her unable to adapt to the model of the *ángel del hogar*, Aurora must also die, and where does she initiate that process of dying and leaving the society in which and for which she lived? She meets her demise in the very place where her episodes of theatrical self-spectatorship began: the opera. However, while in

Aurora's masturbatory fantasy that was awakened at the opera, she was an active subject gazing upon herself to contemplate her inner desires, this time she becomes an objectified, degraded image of male desire. Aurora is almost naked in her box seat, allowing men to admire her as she lets go of her fur coat, reorienting her into an image controlled by the male gaze:

Y Aurora del Espino, viviendo para los pobres y viviendo para los placeres mundanales, [...] pocos meses después del fallecimiento de su amiga, saliendo una noche del palco de la Ópera, donde todos los concurrentes pudieron admirar sus bellas formas casi desnudas, como era la moda elegante, arrojó de los hombros su pelliza de marta para entrar en el lecho, del que á los tres días la sacaron cadáver.

Y ciertamente, no fue entonces el pecado de Onán el que la condujo a la tumba. (198)

The fact that Aurora is leaving the theater in this scene suggests an end to female self-spectatorship, mirror gazing, and masturbatory fantasy. The novel ends with both Felisa and Aurora's punishing deaths, as well as a shift from female subjectivity to female objectivity.

As can be seen through this analysis of Felisa and Aurora's characters, female masturbation works as a trope to display the sudden widespread expression of women's personal wants at that time. Masturbation also allows for an eroticization of the woman who demands these freedoms, creating a source of male fascination and viewing pleasure as they become voyeurs in these scopophilic scenes of female self-pleasure. However, beneath this attempt to objectify and sexualize the female masturbator, there are lingering fears of a woman's intimate relationship with herself, in which she gets in touch with her body and challenges her traditional submissive role in patriarchal society on various levels. The representation of the female masturbator as merging with the male reveals how the sexes were suddenly becoming more alike through the movement of gender equality during the time.

The Feminization of the Male Masturbator: Turbosa's Guilty Trial of the Self

Now that I have discussed the masculinization of the female masturbator to show a movement towards women's emancipation in the nineteenth century, I will turn to a discussion of the male character Turbosa in the same novel. While Felisa and Aurora became equipped with male powers during their masturbatory self-explorations, Turbosa is stripped of his virility, transforming into the dreaded female hysteric. Turbosa's process of sickness and feminization evoke the previously mentioned medical treatises in the introduction that looked to victimize the male body and passions at the time. Turbosa's horror towards his corporeality cause him to experience a severe crisis of identity as he tries to deny the "feminine" side of his persona to practice erotic restraint and conform to the masculine ideal. Turbosa is forced to self-identify with the female masturbators of the novel when he observes them imitating his spasms upon losing control of his passions, projecting back onto him a shameful image of sickness, effeminacy, fluidity, and erotic excess. Turbosa, both a magistrate and judge, is introduced in a chapter titled "La conciencia del juez." The fact that Turbosa is a judge evokes the idea that gazing at an external image of oneself ignites a process of self-observation that involves "self-splitting, of the ego into judger and judged could have a part to play in the formulations of the ethical self" (Bartsch 23-24)

At the beginning of the chapter in the novel, after announcing Turbosa's juridical responsibilities, the narrator describes how he is aging prematurely because he is a masturbator, just like several other men in society, as well as young women such as Felisa and Aurora (48-49). Mayo creates a blurring of gender distinctions by suggesting that both men and women suffer from uncontrollable voluptuous cravings. This sudden fearful identification between male and female bodies in nineteenth-century medical discourse continues as Turbosa, Felisa, and

Aurora become mirror images while sitting in the *gabinete* one night warming themselves by the fire, engaging in philosophical discussions. In chapter 2 on “Los perseguidos,” the protagonist Quiroga will also be sitting in front of the fire when he is confronted with the animalistic gaze of his alter ego Díaz Vélez, who forces him into self-judgement as he loses control of his passions.

This image of the fire serves as an emblem of light and reflection that induces a state of reverie and introspection. Richard Leahy highlights this idea by describing how in Elizabeth Gaskell’s nineteenth-century British novels “the fire becomes both symbol and cause of this act of reverie; within its alchemical variability there is a mirroring of the disparate emotions on display in Gaskell’s works” (75). Leahy also states that “the potential of contemplation before the fireside varies from subtle flicker to a blaze, as the all-consuming power of the fire reflects passionate conflagrations of thought” (75). The fire’s ability to produce private reverie can explain why it was connected to masturbatory pleasure in the nineteenth century. In his treatise on onanism, *Enfermedades de nervios producidas por el abuso de los placeres del amor y excesos del onanismo* (1807), the French physician Samuel André Auguste Tissot states:

Los braseros que muchos acostumbran tener en sus gabinetes son otro estimulante externo que produce efectos perniciosos, sobre todo cuando se conservan por la noche. La lumbre de las chimeneas, de cualquier modo que se disponga, y sea cual fuese la materia combustible, produce los mismos males cuando las puertas de la habitación no están abiertas; pues entonces el fuego consume el oxígeno, y a consecuencia se llenan las piezas de exhalaciones flogístico-mefíticas. (177)

The fire was also equated to one’s inner-burning desires in this period, as illustrated by Sherriff:

Through the metaphor of fire, nymphomania connects not only to the passions and sexuality, but also to enthusiasm. In fact, Bienville figures nymphomania as a fire and uses related tropes to convey that disease’s causes and effects. Referring to those struck with nymphomania, he calls it a “fire that devours them,” “a fire that could suddenly ignite itself with a greater force.” He speaks of the inflamed atmosphere that surrounds nymphomaniacs, describes the “burning heat” that they experience. (132)

The fire will indeed evoke an image of burning sexual passion, as all three of the protagonists will lose control of their erotic impulses and break out into a spasm of orgasmic passion.

At the beginning of this scene, the narrator describes how Felisa's mother is sitting in the corner of the *gabinete* sleeping, Felisa is sewing by the nightstand and Aurora sits with a "maligna sonrisa" counting the *rosetones*. While on the surface the *rosetones* can refer to Felisa's crochet designs, this word also evokes the architecture of rose windows, which create multiple kaleidoscopic reflections. This play on words foreshadows the mirroring and spectatorship that will occur through the ocular interchanges of the protagonist.

Turbosa is depicted as a spectator of these women as he furtively glances at each one of them. "Y, por último, el magistrado Turbosa, que parece distraído paseando fugitivas miradas por el cuadro que presentan aquellas tres mujeres de tipos tan diferentes" (50). Before this process of theatrical self-analysis in the eyes of an Other, the heat from the fire causes the characters to experience a strange paralysis of their spirits, hinting that their sexual desires will come to the surface in a subconscious exploration of the self: "Hay en todos estos personajes algo que parece darles ese aire difícil y encogido que paraliza la conversación y entumece el espíritu" (50). This fantastical self-analysis continues when all of the protagonists suddenly take on different personas as they sit in a semicircle surrounded by the reflective illumination of the hearth: "Veinte minutos después ardía un fuego chispeante en la chimenea, y sentados todos formando semicírculo, mostraban otra actitud, otra animación muy distinta de la que tenían al principio" (51). The fire's induces a state of introspection when Felisa compares the flames to souls in purgatory that lead the spirit to engage in philosophical meditation: "—Decía usted, Sr. de Turbosa, —dijo Felisa, —que esas llamas azules que se desprenden como ánimas en pena por entre el humo de la leña, predisponen el espíritu á la meditación filosófica..." (51). This

image of internal suffering depicted by the firelight leads Turbosa to give a discourse on unity and duality:

Ustedes saben muy bien, señoritas, que en filosofía se siguen dos sistemas en materia de reproducción, el de la unidad y el de la dualidad. Los que profesan la unidad creen en las generaciones espontaneas de los seres, esto es, prescinden del amor. Los que admiten el segundo sistema, no comprenden que pueda haber reproducción sin la concurrencia de dos individualidades separadas que se aman, que se buscan, que se unen, que crean otra individualidad semejante a la suya. (51)

Turbosa's discourse evokes the philosophical idea that the self is a contradictory, divided being, which leads to an "alienated soul," a comment that can explain Felisa's remark about the

"ánimas en pena" that led to this very discussion. In *The Phenomenology of the Mind* (1807),

Hegel states:

In Stoicism, self-consciousness is the bare and simple freedom of itself. In Scepticism, it realizes itself, negates the other side of determinate existence, but, in doing so, really doubles itself, and is itself now a duality. In this way, the duplication, which previously was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is concentrated into one. Thus we have here that dualizing of self-consciousness within itself, which lies essentially in the notion of mind; but the unity of the two elements is not yet present. Hence the *Unhappy Consciousness*, the Alienated Soul which is the consciousness of self as a divided nature, a doubled and merely contradictory being. (119)

In Turbosa's case, his sense of duality and self-division is attributed to the mind/body dualism that has traditionally been used to denote male superiority over women, but that was starting to become disrupted at the turn of the century as medical discourses confronted men with the corporeal side of their beings. In *Plural Masculinities: The Remaking of the Self in Private Life*, Sofía Aboim states that "in the religious thought of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) the Aristotelian dualism between matter and spirit appeared clearly associated with male superiority over imperfect female bodies, creating a system of hierarchal difference difficult to elude within Christianity" (16). Aboim goes on to argue that

Examining the nature of mind/body dualism in the earlier philosophies of Aristotle, Hegel or Descartes, the feminist philosopher Susan Bordo (1993) claims that this founding dichotomy has contributed to solidifying the division between male and female as the transmutation of the opposition between mind/active and body/passive, thus reifying gender characteristics as fixed categories. The fact is that while men have been associated with the mind or the soul (St. Thomas Aquinas' superior form), women have been imprisoned in the body (the inferior matter subordinated to form). (16-17)

Turbosa's recognition of his dual consciousnesses and suppressed feminine nature comes to the surface as he sees a horrifying reflection of himself through the lens of Felisa and Aurora.

Aurora believes that Turbosa is a supporter of unity rather than duality, because he is a masturbator who only cares about fulfilling his own egotistical wants, a comment that provokes embarrassment in the judge. "—¡Ah! Ya empiezo á comprender, —prorumpió Aurora. —Usted es partidario de la unidad; solo siente para sí, para sí solo, no para otro. Por consiguiente, á nadie tiene amor [...] Es el sistema del egoísmo... ¿no es así?" (51). Aurora fixedly gazes at Turbosa, causing him to lower his gaze to the floor in shame, suggesting that this question has provoked a self-interrogation in the magistrate (52). Although Turbosa can escape Aurora's gaze of judgement by staring at the floor, his outward masturbatory symptoms will expose the truth, illustrating the powers of the medical gaze to expose individual's private secrets:

Hay ciertos síntomas exteriores que, por imperceptibles que sean, revelan todo un mundo de sensaciones íntimas y que no se escapan al fisiologista observador.
Si Aurora hubiese poseído esta ciencia, habría notado que, al propio tiempo que Turbosa no sostenía su mirada, aparecían en sus mejillas dos chapetas rojas bien marcadas, y que su frente se bañaba de un ligero sudor, provocante en seguida de esa tosecilla seca y ronca que se atraviesa en la garganta y paraliza la voz. (52)¹²

Following these external signs of Turbosa's hidden passions, he confesses his mystical interactions with the feminine side of his nature. Turbosa explains how men come into contact

¹² This is similar to scenes in "Los perseguidos," when Quiroga imagines that his sexual impulses have led him to develop an outward appearance of an effeminate hysterical man who struggles to hide his secret from the public eye.

with the feminine when they are immersed in the state of dreaming, while describing the feminine as a strange, shadowy, vapory, and humid spirit that fills the room. Once this feminine spirit makes her appearance, she exposes men's carnal nature and envelops men in a silvery dew and engulfs men's beings, creating a fearful fusion of identities (55).¹³

This magical fusing with the feminine continues when Turbosa's eyes suddenly develop a fluorescent glow and he is lifted from his seat, being forced by some magnetic power to reach his arms out to Felisa and Aurora. The girls simultaneously lift from their chairs upon being infiltrated by some strange electric fluid that causes them to imitate Turbosa's actions:

Y mientras así se expresaba Turbosa con la voz anhelante y los ojos fosforescentes, se iba levantando de su asiento y extendiendo sus manos hacia las dos jóvenes en actitud magnetizante [...]

Y las dos jóvenes se fueron levantando también, como impulsadas por un fluido extraño que así las electrizará... (55)¹⁴

This strange mirroring of actions and imitation evokes theories of moral contagion in the nineteenth century. In his article "Moral Contagion and the Will: The Crisis of Masculinity in Fin-de-Siècle France," Christopher Forth describes moral contagion as the unhealthy influence of external forces that had the potential to destroy men's sense of self-discipline, which was a primary demand of the masculine ideal in early twentieth-century society. Forth also argues that

¹³ This idea will also be presented in Quiroga's "La meningitis y su sombra" when the male protagonist Carlos Durán interacts with a female hysteric described as a shadow in his dreams, eventually causing him to realize that this sick, sexualized woman reflects his own repressed sexual anxieties and fantasies. In addition, this same dreamlike corporeal identification between the sexes will occur in Quiroga's "Los guantes de goma," when a man falls asleep and dies, having his identity usurped by a masturbating, mentally unstable woman. Similarly, in Quiroga's "Los perseguidos," there will be a merging of male and female traits in the protagonist's guilty autoerotic reveries that cause a strange vapor to fill his bedroom.

¹⁴ In chapter 6, this will be seen as similar to the way in which the female protagonist Consuelo of Eduardo Zamacois's *La enferma* is controlled by a magnetic and electric fluid that bonds her to the hypnotist and forces her to give in to her repressed impulses.

this turn-of-the-century fear was often linked to an individual male battle to control inner sexual drives:

In this sense moral contagion represented a double capitulation to the other outer world of “contagious” ideas and to the inner world of affects and drives: the external “other” seemed to form an alliance with the sensual “other” within. Not only does this suggest an *eruption or uprising* as well as a penetration, but it indicates that on an unconscious level the individual welcomed the collapse of the will that contagion entailed. (63-64)

Forth links moral contagion to imitation by quoting nineteenth-century French physician Gabriel Tarde: “A slow contagion from mind to mind, a tranquil and silent imitation, has always preceded and paved the way for these rapid contagions, these noisy and captivating imitations that characterize popular movements” (67). In *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics*, Laura Otis also describes how nineteenth-century male writers were preoccupied with the idea of a “dual consciousness” that could come to surface in a state of sleeping and dreaming when one’s self could be annihilated or influenced by some external force, transforming men into feminine beings (Otis 49-50).

This theme of imitation and dreamlike susceptibility to a sexualized feminine power is emphasized when the protagonists all simultaneously fall back down to their seats, undergoing a strange fainting sensation that symbolizes an entrance into an inmost state that will invite the contagious womanly influences (55). By imagining that he is no longer in control of his actions but rather magnetized by Felisa and Aurora’s presence, Turbosa undergoes an interior “orgasm.” In nineteenth-century medical discourse, convulsions of the male body were used to denote involuntary seminal emissions that provoked fears of feminine fluidity:

What is specific about spermatorrhoea as an articulation of concerns about ejaculation for masculinity and the male body is the kind of male fluidity it represents. Whereas, for instance, ancient Greek and Roman regulations surrounding proper forms of ejaculation centered on anxieties about the spasm as an expression of lack of control and loss of will—as Peter Brown notes, classical physicians feared male ejaculation because they

saw it as uncontrolled convulsion, a seizure disturbingly close to that of epilepsy— spermatorrhoea articulates a fear of male leakiness, of an oozing fluidity (Stephens 209).

Turbosa's "orgasm" that is currently imperceptible to the public eye causes him to imagine being engulfed by the feminine when he evokes the same hallucinatory female divinity that enters into men's dreams and usurps the powers of their consciousness:

Y después, como haciendo un esfuerzo supremo, como agitado por las convulsiones, de un orgasmo interior, Turbosa exclamó:

—¡Ay, hijas mías! Tal es la mujer intuitiva, la divinidad de los sueños. Ella es nuestra inspiración en nuestras soledades, ella dirige nuestras acciones, ella dispone de nuestra conciencia. (56)

When delving into the buried aspects of his psyche, Turbosa confesses that these dreams of a feminine ghost occur as he sits at his desk at night, reviewing pages from one of his legal cases, which will later be exposed as his own self-trial that will result in a self-prescribed death sentence for his guilt of masculine non-conformity. Upon processing this trial, Turbosa hears laughter from an invisible world. "Y, perdida mi razón, he oído una carcajada del mundo invisible" (56).

The strange laughter that echoes in Turbosa's mind as he engages in the writing process illustrates his guilty confrontations with his own self-image as he is overcome with desire. Matthew Meyer highlights the erotic symbolism of laughter by stating: "In one sense, the concern of early Christian thinkers is that laughter leads to immoral sexual behavior. Thus, it is often associated with female giggling and prostitution, and laughter is often understood to be 'an instrument of erotic seduction'" (159).¹⁵ The fact that this laughter is coming from some

¹⁵ Laughter also serves as an emblem of uncontrollable sexual desire in "Los perseguidos," when the protagonist Quiroga is overwhelmed with strange impulses to let out a "carcajada," and to spit in his hand when he sees his feminine alter ego Díaz Vélez. Similarly, the character Quiroga will develop a convulsive smile in a shameful erotic encounter with his double in a public café as he loses control of his passions.

invisible world emphasizes that Turbosa has attempted to dispel his corporeal, feminine nature from his mind, but it is inevitably exposed when he engages in a mystical process of self-judgement.

As Turbosa's shameful desires come to the surface, he experiences a choking sensation, for his internalized pressure to repress his passions, the same feeling that will plague the protagonist Quiroga of "Los perseguidos," when he attempts to express his autoerotic cravings. Turbosa then reveals that the echoes of laughter in his mind have brought him to a state of consciousness: "¡Aquella carcajada era mi conciencia de juez!... Así he firmado [...] todas mis sentencias de muerte" (56). Turbosa's confession is followed by a fit of uncontrollable, hysterical passion, which will be imitated by Felisa and Aurora, as they gaze at the judge, depicting them as mirror reflection through which the magistrate contemplates his abominable self-image of sickness, excess, and effeminacy: "Las dos amigas contemplaron aterradas aquel singular espasmo, pero con manifestaciones diversas. Felisa experimentó cierta especie de temblor nervioso; Aurora prorumpió en una sonrisa histérica" (56).

This process of imitation pressures Turbosa to analyze himself through the medical gaze, when the medic Salces and the mentor Novoa walk in to the *gabinete*. Salces's intrusion into the gabinete is depicted as a silent entrance that is not noted by anyone sitting by the fire, suggesting that this is a form of imaginary vigilance caused by Turbosa's internalization of the doctor's gaze (56-57). Salces approaches Turbosa to observe his outward ailments that reveal the truth behind his private self that is only exposed in his dreams, in the silent solitude of the *gabinete*, and in his office as he engages in the writing process late at night:

Salces se acercó á Turbosa, y al ver lo encendido de su rostro y el sudor que le bañaba, al sentir su respiración precipitada, adivinó cual pudiera ser la causa; tanto más por los efectos que observaba en ambas amigas, efectos parecidos á los que comunica la epilepsis y el histérico por la fuerza de imitación. (57)

This outburst of male hysteria is depicted in terms of imitation, emphasizing the idea of moral contagion that symbolized a surrender of male willpower to an imaginary feminine force that was actually “a sensual other within” (Forth 63-64).

As seen thus far, Turbosa’s crisis of selfhood is largely influenced by his internalization of the medical gaze, which will continue when Salces observes the judge’s rapid pulse, enlarged veins, and bodily heat. Salces acts as a mirror for Turbosa to scrutinize his transgressive passions when the medic intently stares into the judge’s eyes (57). This recognition of himself in the eyes of a scrutinizing, authoritative other overwhelms Turbosa with shame: “sus párpados se inclinaron al suelo; y al volverlos á levantar, fue de esa manera vaga y recelosa, cual la del reo que siente su degradación y su vergüenza” (57).¹⁶ With the sudden intrusion of these external vigilant gazes of societal control, the three characters in the *gabinete* seem to snap out of this inner state of dreaming that unlocked the buried facets of their psyche to reassume, or appear to reassume, their ‘normal’ behaviors (57). Despite Turbosa’s attempt to veil the hysterical, feminine side of his persona, the narrator depicts this as a difficult transition, since the reader is given a privileged glimpse into the truthful identity of the judge: a male masturbator who wastes his seminal fluid in solitary pleasures. The medic and Novoa engage in a private conversation that can barely be heard, in which Salces exposes Turbosa’s excessive ejaculations: “Abuso de sí mismo... Emisión involuntaria... Pérdida espontánea del aura vital” (57). The idea that this diagnosis is depicted as parenthetical and can be barely heard creates an image of omnipotent vigilance that will burden the other characters of the text.

¹⁶ In *La enferma*, Consuelo repeatedly expresses her fear of the hypnotist’s gaze because it represents a gaze upon the self that unlocks the secrets of her persona. Consuelo also says that the medic’s gaze causes her pain because seeing her own self-image of female nonconformity overwhelms her with severe guilt (see chapter 6).

This inescapable surveillance causes Turbosa to go insane when he is haunted by the gazes of hallucinatory spectators in his bedroom in a subsequent chapter titled “Abuso de sí mismo.” This chapter begins with a description of how the magistrate denies marriage, engages in obsessive masturbation, cuts off contact with his friends, and finally seeks solace in the privacy of his own home working obsessively, reading, and writing legal documents to harshly punish those cases that pass his desk. During these private moments of contemplation, while he passes stern judgment on the actions by others, Turbosa also becomes the subject and judge of his own court case.

Turbosa’s self-trial evokes Seneca’s theory that in the process of self-examination “the individual must put himself on trial and play the parts of the accuser, judge and intercessor alike” (Bartsch 200). Turbosa’s voices of judgement are veiled under the voices of colleagues who pressure him to carefully analyze legal situations to determine the appropriate verdict, but at the same time, with their tacit social finger pointing, or because of his feelings of guilt, they are pressuring him towards a personal trial of masturbatory guilt: “Su diestra mano firmaba muerte para otros, al mismo tiempo que su izquierda arruinaba en desvarío sensual su propia naturaleza orgánica” (127).

Not only does this process of solitary writing induce a fearful state of self-observation, but it is also depicted as a private expression of masturbatory release. While Turbosa extends his “pen,” a phallic symbol, to sign death sentences, he convulses, splattering ink around his signature. In *The Yard of Wit: Male Creativity and Sexuality, 1650-1750*, Raymond Stephanson highlights the connection between writing and men’s private desires in the eighteenth century: “Notions of quill as yard, as intercourse or masturbation, censorship as castration, and ink as seminal flow reflected a cultural nervousness about the sexualized connection of a male body

and mind even while these tropes helped to sustain the newer constructions of masculinity as a sexualized interiority” (122-23). Similarly, Lawrence R. Schehr argues that the act of writing serves as a metaphor for male masturbation:

A singular activity that occurs in isolation, separate from any community and divorced from any absolute knowledge. He moves one hand along a somewhat cylindrical object until a liquid is released. No other is to receive the liquid, the dried traces of that liquid may or may not be noticed as a subsequent point as tell-tale signs of the activity. Masturbation and writing are thus linked and divided by the fear that writing may metamorphose into the sin of self-abuse and by the similarity of the two activities that makes simultaneity impossible. (215)

The opposition between the right and left sides of Turbosa’s in this writing process highlights theories surrounding the duality of the brain in the nineteenth century. Anne Harrington describes how phrenologists at the time, such as the aforementioned Gall, mapped “human consciousness onto the convulsions of the two cerebral hemispheres” (618). Harrington also mentions medical discourses surrounding the idea that a lack of equilibrium and balance between these two parts of the brain could lead to insanity:

In the healthy brain, one of the two hemispheres is almost always superior in power, and exercises control over the volitions of its fellow. In cases of disease, however, where “one cerebrum becomes sufficiently aggravated to defy the control of the other,” insanity can set in as the two hemispheres pursue independent courses, their separate wills struggling against each other, their separate thoughts jumbling together. (618)

Relatedly, in her article “Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ and the Double Brain,” Anne Stiles emphasizes how these theories of the double brain applied to men’s divided sense of selfhood caused tensions between moral behavior and guilty desire:

The most likely origin of Stevenson’s conception of multiple personality disorder as it appears in *Jekyll and Hyde* is the theory of the double brain, first developed by Continental physiologists such as Austrian anatomist Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) and later imported to England by such physicians as Sir Henry Holland (1788–1873) and Arthur Labroke Wigan (d. 1847) during the first half of the nineteenth century. “[M]an is not only truly one, but truly two,” Jekyll relates, apparently supporting theories suggesting that each brain hemisphere might house a separate personality, indeed a separate soul (p. 43). Jekyll’s lament that “these polar twins should be continuously

struggling,” likewise evokes contemporary scientific views that the left and right hemispheres not only differed in their abilities, but also occasionally exhibited contrasting desires and moral inclinations (p.49). (882)

Under the light of these medical discourses, Turbosa seems to be suffering from a related disorder as he converses with imaginary beings in his bedroom, who are nothing more but competing images projected from his psyche that represent his inner battle between reason/self-control and sexual desire. Turbosa eventually slips into a state of insanity due to this inability to reconcile his split identity, but first he will develop a series of other ailments associated with masturbatory excess in medical treatises of the time.

Turbosa becomes emaciated, pale, and depressed, while suffering from hypochondria. He develops a purple shadowing on his eyelids, loses the ability to concentrate, becomes antisocial, and suffers from rapid palpitations that oppress his chest.¹⁷ Turbosa transforms into his own judge and medic once again when he starts to study himself to understand the cause of his sufferings:

Entonces fue cuando comenzó á estudiar hasta en sus menores detalles todos los progresos de su singular dolencia, para poder consultar con fruto la opinión de un facultativo entendido, calculando quizá que los pacientes de esa clase de males son calificados por lo general de aprensivos é imaginarios (128).

In this self-study, Turbosa realizes that his sickness is attributed to his excessive, involuntary seminal emissions that occur in the middle of the night, while he is immersed in a state of dreaming:

De ese estudio sobre sí mismo resultó que una de las causas que parecían debilitarle más eran ciertas emisiones involuntarias durante la noche; y, ¡descubrimiento singular! aborreciendo como aborrecía despierto al bello sexo, se imaginaba asociado con él en

¹⁷ These are all listed as symptoms of masturbation in Tissot’s aforementioned treatise. Díaz Vélez of “Los perseguidos” also suffers from the ailments of thinness, pallor, bags beneath his eyes, and palpitations. In addition, Díaz Vélez is depicted as an antisocial being who takes to his bed and hides within the darkness of his secretive home (see chapter 2).

libidinosos sueños, a los cuáles seguía luego una postración enervante por espacio de uno ó dos días. (128–29)

The fact that Turbosa suffers from these seminal emissions while immersed in a state of dreaming further suggests that his masturbatory pleasures are depicted as a type of moral contagion, where he envisions that he is no longer in control of his actions but rather engulfed by some strange feminine influence that forces him to against his will.¹⁸ Turbosa's excessive ejaculations eventually cause him to slip into a state of insanity, a common symptom of male masturbation listed in medical treatises. In *Men, Women and Madness*, Joan Busfield discusses how "anxieties about the loss of semen were also manifest in the prohibitions surrounding male masturbation. Excess masturbation, it was believed, could lead to insanity, and a special form of masturbatory insanity was identified" (151). The narrator suggests that Turbosa's failing mental and physical health is attributed to his inability to continue his juridical duties, a comment that illustrates that his selfish, corporeal desires have triumphed over internalized social expectations, which have continually forced him to curb his passions: "Ni leyendo ni estudiando podía retener el conocimiento necesario para desempeñar sus funciones judiciales y sus deberes sociales" (129). Despite Turbosa's decision to pursue his inner wants, he is still burdened by excessive guilt for his inability to assert intellectual control, as he is overtaken by the corporeal side of his being. Turbosa's "impotencia intelectual" horrifies him so much that he contemplates suicide, an idea that will also appear in "Los perseguidos," when Díaz Vélez begins to resemble a terrified animal running towards a shotgun for his extreme masturbatory guilt and fear of vigilance.

¹⁸ There are clues that Quiroga of "Los perseguidos" is suffering from involuntary seminal emission when he sits down at his desk to write in the silent solitude of his home, while describing how the tip of his oil lamp usually experiences light explosions. Similarly, when Quiroga is in Díaz Vélez's bedroom, his alter ego will pressure him to "explode," a desired release that is associated with liquid throughout the story (see chapter 2).

To solve his dilemma, Turbosa finally realizes that it is necessary to get help from the medic Salces. When explaining his situation, Salces already seems to know everything about the judge's case, depicting him once again as an internalized, omnipotent power (130). Salces confronts the judge about his avoidance of the medical gaze, exposing him as a transgressive male who cannot be controlled by societal institutions of power that sought to mold both sexes into their prescribed roles:

Advierto, amigo Turbosa, que ha disminuido la brillantez de sus ojos y su penetrante expresión, y que su mirar tiene algo de vago y confuso... Huye usted de encontrar mis ojos, como si le faltara confianza para arrostrar mi mirada; vuelve rápidamente la vista y la baja al suelo, aparentando timidez ó vergüenza. (131)

Because Turbosa has attempted to escape these mechanisms of authority, he begins to view himself as a criminal:

—Sí, —respondió el magistrado, y evitando en efecto la mirada del facultativo; —es una circunstancia que no puedo vencer, y que irresistiblemente me obliga á parecer como un abochornado reo... Es un síntoma muy extraordinario que no sé á qué atribuir, pero que me aflige sobremanera cuando en él medito. (131)

In "Los perseguidos," Díaz Vélez is also depicted as a delinquent for failing to conform to demands of masculinity when he is arrested after running out of the house naked with an empty water jug, a symbol of his unfulfilled sexual thirst. This interrogation further resembles themes that will appear in "Los perseguidos" when Turbosa explains to Salces that he has dreams of being pursued, evoking the very title of Quiroga's story, which will also depict men who have persecutory hallucinations caused by autoerotic guilt. In addition to insanity, Salces goes on to describe a plethora of other ailments caused by onanism, such as digestion issues, intestinal disorders, weakness, breathing troubles, tuberculosis, and apoplexy. When the medic's descriptions are complete, Turbosa envisions himself almost signing his own death sentence

(137). However, Salces tells the judge that he can easily overcome these ailments, since he now knows the hidden cause of his sufferings:

—¿Por qué, amigo mio? Conocido el mal, pronto está remediado el efecto: quitando la causa... He anunciado á usted que se lo diría con tanta franqueza, ahora se lo digo. La causa de su dolencia es el abuso de sí mismo... Todos los síntomas cesarán en cuanto ese abuso cese. (137)

The fact that Salces presents himself as a friend to Turbosa, illustrates the idea that “the word *consilium* suggests the advice of a friend or authority figure more than anything else, a notion paralleled by the idea that a friend and a mirror can share the same purpose, to tell you what you cannot see yourself” (33). Bartsch also describes that this mirror/friend in ancient philosophical texts is presented as a public gaze that allows individuals to judge themselves in the eyes of society: “In other words, the friend in these texts plays the role of the (social) mirror elsewhere, aiding in the acquisition of *sophrosyne* by the elimination of unbecoming behaviors, a process linked with self-knowledge” (53).¹⁹

It appears that Salces has served this very purpose for Turbosa when he proceeds to list even more ailments that plague male masturbators, forcing the judge into a state of guilty introspection. As Turbosa pieces together the medic’s discourse, he is forced to contemplate truths about his persona that had never been revealed to him so clearly (138). Turbosa begins to understand the physical and moral consequences of his actions through a study of himself and through the words of the medic (139). Salces’s inescapable presence lingers within Turbosa’s mind as he engages in a solitary interrogation about the dangers of seminal emission that he struggles to accept:

Así su raciocinio interior concluyó con una interrogación, signo todavía de duda:

¹⁹ This idea that the mirror acts as one’s friend that can expose hidden truths about themselves will appear in several of the other texts of the dissertation.

—Y las pérdidas que experimento de noche y de día, ¿de qué causa inmediata proceden? ¿Cuál es la parte dañada que las origina?

—El daño está, amigo Turbosa, en la debilidad del aparato generador, esto es, la excesiva irritabilidad y relajación de los vasos espermáticos. (139)

These guilty interrogations eventually lead Turbosa to go completely insane in the following chapter titled “La casa de locos.” The narrator explains that while Turbosa was able to follow the medic’s orders for a short time, he eventually suffered from a persecutory temptation to pleasure himself: “volvió á hacer nacer la tentación hacia un hábito tan arraigado de antiguo, que era en cierto modo irresistible en él. Tal vez si hubiera cambiado de método de vida, no se habrían renovado las ocasiones de esa tentación implacable y perseguidora” (142). Turbosa’s indulgence in masturbation also causes him to be overwhelmed with hallucinations of being pursued—another parallel between his character and the male protagonists of “Los perseguidos”:

Y como la conexión entre el cerebro y la potencia sexual es tan íntima, se apoderaron de su mente las más extrañas alucinaciones, imaginándose que era un ser perseguido, cuya vida corría riesgo de ataques homicidas.

En cada reo, que como magistrado tenía que juzgar, no veía sino un asesino dispuesto a estrangularle, á él solo, y solamente a él (144–45).

Turbosa also hears imaginary voices in his head from individuals who believe he should be sentenced to death, reiterating his unspeakable fears of being judged and punished for his inability to conform to the masculine ideal (144–45). This connection between masturbation and persecutory paranoia is presented in a contemporaneous treatise by Etienne Esquirol titled *Tratado completo de las enagenaciones mentales* (1856). The French physician describes a case of a male patient who had persecutory hallucinations of vision and sight after indulging in excessive onanism:

Un hombre gozando de buena salud y una rica fortuna, se entrega a la masturbación y sin otra causa que el sentimiento de los recuerdos horribles de la revolución que él creía laudable al principio, hizo muchas tentativas de suicidio; frecuentemente tomaba un par

de pistolas, no queriendo sino este medio para suicidarse[...] Después de dos años, me ha confesado que tenía alucinaciones de la vista y oído. Creía estar perseguido por agentes de policía, les veía y oía al través de las paredes de su cuarto, reforzadas con planchas de correderas, por las que se puede ver y oír lo que se dice. (190–92)

In Francois Lallemand's work, *A Practical Treatise on the Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment of Spermatorrhoea* (1853), the French physician also states that male masturbators afflicted with spermatorrhea would suffer from “a series of hallucinations, generally bearing on plots against life or imaginary persecutions; and lastly, above all, a profound disgust of life; and, in consequence, an instinctive and continual impulse to suicide” (292).²⁰ As Turbosa is unable to shut out these echoes from his guilty conscience, the medic Salces thinks it best that he stop his juridical duties that force him into this autoerotic state of self-observation. However, Turbosa continues to seek the solitude of his bedroom, where he can continue his self-dialogues and auto-interrogations that cause him to make strange grimaces.²¹ Turbosa believes that these haunting projections from his psyche are individuals spying on him, leading him to seek privacy in his bathroom, where he bursts into hysterical fits of laughter as he indulges in self-pleasure, a behavior that denotes his womanly transformation (145).

Eventually this fear of vigilance causes Turbosa to enter a mental asylum, which is also what will happen with Díaz Vélez when going insane from his persecutory delusions in “Los perseguidos.” In *La condesita*, the narrator explains that the director of Turbosa's insane asylum,

²⁰ Although this is a text written by a French physician, it is referenced in several Spanish medical texts such as Pedro Mata's *Tratado teórico-práctico de medicina legal y toxicología* (1903), Augustine Grisolle's *Tratado elemental y práctico de patología interna* (1847), and an 1860 edition of the Spanish medical newspaper *El Siglo Médico*.

²¹ Díaz Vélez will also grimace at Quiroga in “Los perseguidos” as Quiroga tries to fight off this repressed reflection of himself.

Dr. Mad, is a colleague of Esquirol, suggesting that Mayo borrowed this French physician's previously mentioned theories on male masturbation and persecutory paranoia:

El doctor Mad, que así se llamaba el dueño y director, comprendió al instante el origen del mal, aún antes de las explicaciones que le dio Salces.

Precisamente era uno de esos facultativos fisiologistas, discípulo del famoso Esquirol, que en todos los casos de melancolía, delirio, manía, demencia é idiotismo, buscaba la causa primaria en el abuso sexual de los pacientes. (146)

After Dr. Mad asserts that seminal emission is the main cause of craziness in men, Felisa's uncle goes to visit Turbosa along with the medic Salces. Since the vicar uncle is also a masturbator, this visit acts as an episode of self-spectatorship for him to question his own vices. Doctor Mad takes him and Salces to rooms of insane men who have ruined their mental faculties through masturbation. At the end of this tour, the vicar seems to be looking for a cure for his own self-pleasures: "Y ¿qué medios directos ha encontrado usted [...] para impedir que esos infelices se abandonen así á tales torpezas?" (153). Dr. Mad argues that it is necessary for men to control their natural appetites and immediately afterwards asks the priest if he wants to see the department of the clinic that establishes "communication between the two sexes," a question that on the one hand evokes the sudden fearful male identification with female sexuality at the turn of the century, but also a not-so-veiled criticism of the celibacy of priests: "No hay otros sino regularizar los apetitos naturales, poniéndolos en consonancia con la vía indicada por la propia naturaleza... Vengan ustedes, si gustan, y visitarán el departamento que tengo destinado á la comunicación entre ambos sexos..." (153). Mayo puts an end to this scene before providing a glimpse into this correspondence between men and women in the asylum, leaving the reader to decipher the meaning of the medic's invitation:

No seguiremos más en su curiosa visita a los amigos de Turbosa.

Salieron muy satisfechos de la casa de locos, con la esperanza de que el doctor Mad, que tan perfectamente conocía los resortes sensuales que impulsaban á la demencia, sabría encontrar la manera de paralizarlos en el sensualista togado. (153)

While the reader does not see into this department of the asylum, this comment would have forced nineteenth-century male readers into a process of self-judgement by being indirectly informed that giving into their desires would lead to a dangerous swerve into the feminine. In the very last pages of the novel, the narrator reveals that Turbosa's imprisonment in the insane asylum temporarily curbed his masturbatory impulses, but that when he was released, he went right back to his "antiguos hábitos," and as a result suffered from "idiotism" (what we would now call having an extreme intellectual disability).²²

This final image of Turbosa reveals societal anxieties towards being able to control individual's private desires and solitary behaviors at the time. Just as Felisa and Aurora's characters possess uncontainable bodies and unruly passions that transcend medical control and patriarchal authority, Turbosa is depicted as a transgressive male anomaly that refuses conformity to the male ideal. The analysis of all three of these characters shows how both sexes were striving to achieve different personal freedoms that they were temporarily able to reach through onanistic reveries. Felisa and Aurora's masturbatory experiences show how women were fighting for social equality, sexual expression, corporeal autonomy, intellectual cultivation, and overall independence. Turbosa's autoerotic dreams reveal the secret male desire to embrace the "feminine" side of their beings, so that they would be able to unleash their natural sexual desires and finally achieve a sense of unity between mind and body that seemed nearly impossible during the period due to the oppressive medical discourses that stigmatized male corporeality. In *La condesita* this paralleled quest for liberation represents a threatening increase in female power regarded as a hermaphroditic masculinization, while patriarchal authority has been significantly

²² In *Idiocy: A Cultural History* Patrick McDonagh highlights this strange connection between idiotism and masturbation in nineteenth-century medical discourse (17-18).

diminished through objectivization of the male body, a prohibition of male sexual freedoms, a female rejection of male sexuality, and a sudden expectation for men to renounce their egotistical nature to cater to the needs of women. This sudden disruption in gender roles will be explored in various facets in subsequent chapters to show how men and women were negotiating their identities at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER 2: “¡SI SIGUE, EXPLOTA! CONTAGIOUS PERSECUTORY PARANOIA AND MALE MASTURBATORY BONDING IN HORACIO QUIROGA’S “LOS PERSEGUIDOS” (1908)

The analysis of Turbosa’s character in *La condesita* revealed how men in nineteenth-century society were undergoing a crisis of identity for their inability to express their natural sexual impulses, which were harshly condemned by medical treatises of the time. The male protagonists of Horacio Quiroga’s “Los perseguidos” also struggle to reconcile their identities and experience a form of schizophrenic persecutory paranoia due to their efforts to shut out their guilty mirror images that reflect back their forbidden desires of sexual liberation. However, what is relevant about “Los perseguidos” is that Quiroga expresses this widespread nineteenth-century dilemma in terms of intimate male bonding and collective male suffering. While in *La condesita* Turbosa envisioned himself as being enveloped by a female ghost in his dreams that forced him to give into his passions, the protagonist Quiroga hallucinates that he is being pursued by a hysterical man, by the name of Díaz Vélez, who lures him into masturbatory pleasure. Whereas Quiroga fears and loathes Díaz Vélez, he simultaneously expresses feelings of compassion and affection towards this mentally unstable, effeminate, and sexualized individual. Quiroga also experiences strange desires to follow Díaz Vélez, to speak with him and to be close to him, symbolizing his frustrated effort to get in touch with his repressed inner self that he feels forced to hide from the public eye. Quiroga also communicates with Díaz Vélez through letters, which eventually lead them to engage in a joint mirrored masturbatory encounter where they release the pent-up desires that have pursued them throughout the story and caused them severe emotions of remorse. However, after being convinced by Díaz Vélez to liberate his desires, Quiroga becomes

frightened at witnessing this man undergoing a horrifying episode of insanity that will result in public humiliation, detainment by the authorities, and a final incarceration in an insane asylum, where he will be interrogated by a physician to correct his deviant behaviors.

The author Quiroga's portrayal of persecutory paranoia, and the strange relationship of his eponymous character with Díaz Vélez in "Los perseguidos," has attracted attention from recent scholars, who have tended to associate the male protagonists' intimate relationship and shared paranoia with homosexual desire. Emir Rodríguez Monegal suggests "that behind the narrator's attraction to his acquaintance Díaz Vélez there lies an unconscious homosexuality" (qtd. in San Román 924). In his article "Amor Turbio, Paranoia and the *Vicissitudes of Manliness in Horacio Quiroga*," San Román also argues that Quiroga's attitude towards Díaz Vélez "displays sadism and is best seen in terms of the active-passive homosexuality that replicates dominant heterosexual relations" (930). Although Quiroga's rather intimate interactions with Díaz Vélez could appear as homosexual on the surface, it is crucial to note that a man gazing at himself in the mirror does indeed form a physical and emotional bond with a reflection of a masculine other, who is an external projection of the self. While a woman masturbating or gazing at her own reflection was depicted as a form of lesbianism in *La condesita*, in "Los perseguidos" the self-pleasuring man interacts with an external projection of himself, which also appears as an individual of the same sex. Medical manuals of the time even equated male masturbation with homosexuality. For example, Thomas Laqueur states

To begin with, masturbation shared the closet in the eighteenth century with men's love for other men. . . . Erotic male friendship and the private vice shared the sexual secrecy that became so important a part of modern consciousness. Masturbation and homosexuality will share coming out of the closet in the late twentieth century. (256)

Following this thread, what we see in "Los perseguidos" is a dreamlike solitary masturbatory encounter between self and imaginary other, and not necessarily a homosexual encounter

between two distinct men. I agree with Todd S. Garth's suggestion that these two men are one and the same: "Horacio makes clear that Díaz's monstrosity is also his own. . . . By the middle of the story he *becomes* Díaz Vélez, one of and one with the pursued; or more accurately, Horacio and Díaz Vélez, through their mutual feline gazes of curiosity, mistrust, desire and feigned indifference, become each other" (69–70).

This simultaneous division yet merging of these men can be understood through my previous discussions of moral contagion, which "represented a double capitulation to the other outer world of 'contagious' ideas and to the inner world of affects and drives: the external 'other' seemed to form an alliance with the sensual 'other' within" (Forth 63). In the story Díaz Vélez tempts Quiroga with his animalistic gaze as well as his invitations to eat sweets and drink coffee. Díaz Vélez causes Quiroga to become overwhelmed with strange impulses to spit in his hand, to break out into hysterical laughter, and finally to undergo a strange convulsive "explosion" in the bedroom that will lead to an outburst of insanity. Quiroga receives letters from Díaz Vélez bearing a threat of contagion, which lure him to his house. In addition, the ability of Díaz Vélez's presence to provoke temptation in Quiroga is demonstrated through recurring images of rain, liquid release, wetness and storms, which imply ejaculatory desire and sexual turmoil.

Andrew Lakoff's discussion of paranoia in the story bolsters this idea that what we are seeing is a case of a man being overtaken by imaginary external influences that attack his sense of willpower: "This state of being pursued is characterized by a sense that one is being manipulated in sinister ways, that one is subject to the schemes of invisible others who penetrate the mind and overcome the will" (864). Lakoff adds that

The narrator's "psychological game" is an experiment with the subjective boundaries of sanity. But the risk in this game of feigning being other is that one may, in simulating, in fact become the other. Nonetheless Díaz Vélez's lucid madness remains distinguishable

from Horacio's simulated madness by the ineluctable presence of an other within—the beast that lurks behind Díaz Vélez's intelligent eyes. (866–67)

Christopher E. Forth believed that moral contagion reflected “a crisis of masculine identity” at the turn of the century, which is precisely what we will see in “Los perseguidos” (62). In his dissertation, *Paranoia and Spanish American Narrative*, Geoffrey W. Guevara-Geer argues that the theme of paranoia in Quiroga's story can reflect a crisis of male selfhood: “This dynamic of persecution and anxious influence affords a glimpse of the predominant aesthetics and psychology of the twentieth century. Lugones and Quiroga's modernist game of a scientifically unresolved identity crisis replays itself again and again in the later paranoid tales of Borges and Cortázar” (864).

While I agree with Guevara-Geer, I show that paranoia serves as a trope to display a man's split identity as he struggles to battle with the “sensual other within” that constantly pursues him upon trying to stave off his guilty masturbatory desires. Quiroga's reluctance to recognize himself in his mirror image is revealed by the mysterious darkness that envelops Díaz Vélez's persona and his gaze, Quiroga's continual disjoining of that character's name, his fear of Díaz Vélez's gaze, and his struggled attempts at linguistic expression when he is in his presence. Quiroga also strives to spell out Díaz Vélez's name as they mutually gaze at each other in silence, but experiences difficulty in doing so, symbolizing the rejection of his authentic self that he hides from society.²³ This incapacity for verbal and written expression will illustrate Quiroga's crisis of identity in other scenes of the story when he is confronted with Díaz Vélez's

²³ There is a similar scene in chapter three when the male protagonist Carlos Durán of Quiroga's “La meningitis y su sombra” locks eyes with María Elvira and she spells out his name, an action that I interpret as Durán's process of seeing himself in his suppressed reflection.

gaze, such as when he sits down to write a letter to his friend Lugones, a masturbatory metaphor for communicating with the mirror, but suffers from severe writer's block.

Several male masturbators of the nineteenth century expressed this crisis of the self through letters that they wrote to physicians who authored treatises on onanism, which is what we will see with Quiroga and Díaz Vélez in the story. Quiroga and Díaz Vélez will attempt to express their inner sufferings to one another through letters, which will put them into a mystical contact. Quiroga's imaginary interactions with another sick, male masturbator cause him to feel compassion for this other individual and to realize that he is not alone in his battle to control his sexual impulses. Sonja Boon states that letters to the authors of masturbation manuals "provided the opportunity for individuals to conceive their psychic and somatic sufferings in textual form. In the process, these individuals created textual selves, articulating bodily autobiographies, if you will, identities deeply shaped by bodily experience" (4). Boon argues that the majority of these sufferers who described their experiences were men:

We are, for the most part, privy only to the narratives constructed by male sufferers of various forms of sexual dysfunction, all of whom were writing not only within a culture of moral disapproval but also under the gaze of a doctor who overtly linked excessive sexual practice with psychic and somatic disarray. (195)

Boon suggests that these letters created a form of bonding between the male patients: "Bodily suffering brought people together, creating imagined communities founded on the shared experience of bodily disorder" (63). In his book chapter "'The Roots of the Orchis, The Iuli of Chestnuts': The Odor of Male Solitude," Christopher Looby emphasizes this idea:

Much of the pleasure of reading this anti-masturbation text or any other is owing to the way it brings the reader into imaginary proximity to the masturbating body of the sexual deviant. In its construction of this proximity—the spectacle of the masturbating body close at hand—the text demonstrates how the ostensibly anti-social practice of autoeroticism (notoriously the 'solitary vice') is embedded, in the period in question, in a homosocial context that renders masturbation a phenomenon of collective male concern (the masturbator, in this literature, is almost always a boy or a man). (163)

There is evidence to suggest that the author Quiroga read these letters in masturbation manuals; however, this evidence provides a case of female rather than male corporeal suffering. Juan Carlos González Espitia has noted that Quiroga's short stories "A la señorita Isabel Ruremonde" and "Al autor de La dame seule," expose the author's familiarity with medical discourses on masturbation.²⁴ Quiroga's short story "A la señorita Isabel Ruremonde" is likely to have been inspired by a letter in the masturbation manual *Estravios secretos ó el onanismo en las personas del bello sexo*, published in Spanish in Madrid in 1831, but originally published in French in 1828 by the physician Jacques-Louis Doussin-Dubreuil. Doussin-Dubreuil's treatise opens with a letter to a masturbating French girl titled "A la señorita en Francia," an almost identical title to Quiroga's work. Similarly, both Doussin-Dubreuil's patient and Quiroga's Isabel Ruremonde are interrogated about their emaciation caused by clandestine onanistic addictions. In Doussin-Dubreuil's letter to his female patient, the physician inquires: "¿De dónde viene, señorita, el cambio que se ha verificado con tanta prontitud? ¿Ese enflaquecimiento tan estremado?" (6). In Quiroga's story, Isabel's mother worriedly inquires: "¿Sufres mi hija? ¿Qué sientes querida mía?," and the narrator decries with medical phlegm: "Señorita imprudente —repito —¿es perdonable que hiciera usted tan poco caso de la vida?" (93). Although Isabel Ruremonde lies and insists that she is fine, there is no way for her to hide her extreme weight loss: "Y no obstante bien visible era su delgadez, y bien se notaba que mentía, la enferma señorita" (6).

In conjunction with this suggestion of Quiroga's familiarity with masturbation manuals, in *La invención del cuerpo: medicina y sociedad en el Uruguay del novecientos*, Pedro Barrán

²⁴ In regards to these stories, González Espitia states "The diagnosis of the illness that afflicts both protagonists is elusive. We only know that the problem originates in the relationship between the young women's hands and their bodies, seemingly from 'the excesses' and 'imprudence' of some unascertainable contact that creates a sickness much like pulmonary tuberculosis" (173).

describes the prevalence of the masturbation panic that informed medical thought in Uruguay in the nineteenth century:

En 1865 Adolfo Brunel había considerado a la masturbación ‘un hábito vicioso,’ pero en 1892 Luis Bergalli ya la definía como un ‘vicio’ que podía dar origen ‘a consecuencias funestas y motivar grandes enfermedades después.’ Todos los médicos del Novecientos se horrorizaron ante las consecuencias del ‘vicio solitario.’ (62)

Barrán also argues that medical discourses linking male masturbation with insanity made their way into Uruguay at the turn of the century:

Sin embargo, la psiquiatría clásica había advertido vínculos entre la sexualidad y la enfermedad mental. Los “*excesos*” de todas clases, con el onanismo y el coito al frente, fueron señalados por los psiquiatras del siglo XIX como factores causales o predisponentes de la locura. En el medio uruguayo en 1862 Adolfo Brunel expresó este punto de vista, “*dando a las causas morales una gran preponderancia*” en la etiología de la enfermedad mental, y, dentro de ellas, “a la edad de las pasiones y los excesos.” (135)

As previously seen in my analysis of *La condesita*, these discourses linking male masturbation to insanity were also tied to notions of persecutory paranoia, the disease that will plague the protagonists of “Los perseguidos.” In Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* —which was first published in German in 1886, subsequently revised several times, and translated to French by 1895—the sexologist continues this linkage between persecutory paranoia and masturbation mentioned in Esquirol and Lallemand’s treatises, but directly links it to an embarrassing feminization of the male. Krafft-Ebing presents a case of a neurasthenic young man who had an “abnormal” level of sexual desire, leading him to engage in unrestrained masturbation and coitus: “Abstinence proved very painful to him. He also gave up masturbation, and was then troubled with pollutions. A year and a half ago he became sexually neurasthenic, had diurnal pollutions, became thereafter ill and miserable, and, after a time, generally neurasthenic, finally developing paranoia” (316).

All of these are characteristics that will parallel Díaz Vélez's persona throughout "Los perseguidos." Before long, Krafft-Ebing's patient's uncontrollable ejaculations overwhelmed him with a fear that he was transforming into a woman and that everyone in the street identified him as an effeminate masturbator, while publicly insulting him for his womanly demeanor:

He felt that his scrotum and penis were gone, and that his genitals were changed into those of a female. He felt the growth of his breasts; that his hair was that of a woman; and that feminine garments were on his body. He thought of himself as a woman. The people in the street gave utterance to corresponding remarks: "Look at the woman! The old blowhard!" (316)

In regards to another case linking male masturbation to persecutory paranoia and feminization, Krafft-Ebing writes:

Since the beginning of 1885 the patient had given up coitus, in which he no longer experienced pleasurable feelings. He masturbated frequently. In 1888 he began to have delusions of suspicion [...] In 1889 he was again received in advanced stages of paranoia *masturbatoria persecutoria* (delusions of physical persecution). In the beginning of May, 1889, the patient attracted notice, in that he was cross when he was addressed as "mister." He protested against it, because he was a woman. Voices told him this. (317)
As will be shown later in my analysis, this situation presented in Krafft-Ebing's treatise

will be reminiscent of Quiroga's fear of being publicly identified as a masturbator as he trails his alter ego Díaz Vélez in the street, observes his feminine garments, and watches him undergo convulsive hysterical attacks that lead him to have womanly bags beneath his eyes. Quiroga depicts himself as undergoing a process of self-diagnosis when he envisions his pursued double seeking medical assistance in the pharmacy and then when he observes many other outward signs of sickness, venereal excess, and feminization in Díaz Vélez's character: his thinness, shy demeanor, debility, hysterical laughing, convulsive smiling, antisocial behavior, agitated breathing, congestion, mysterious explosions that occur while he is in bed, hallucinations of persecution, suicidal inclinations, and his final humiliating outburst of insanity, when he runs out of his house completely naked screaming for water in front of public spectators.

Throughout the story Quiroga is specifically pursued by Díaz Vélez's gaze, a watchful scrutiny that causes Quiroga to subject himself to medical diagnosis and public inquiry. As will be shown in my analysis, Díaz Vélez's disturbing vigilant gaze emerges from the street and intrudes into the intimate space of the domestic sphere, where Quiroga hopes to enjoy the solitude to freely fulfill his passions without anyone knowing. Quiroga also imagines himself being torn from the secretive realm of the home into the public space of the street, where he ashamedly sees himself through the eyes of passersby whom he believes can detect his forbidden inner desires that would expose him as a hysterical, effeminate masturbator. I interpret the scrutinizing gazes of these onlookers, as well as Díaz Vélez's inescapable judgmental stare, as reflections that appear to Quiroga as he studies himself in the mirror.

There are subtle indications that Quiroga enacts a theatrical performance before the mirror as he self-reflects on his forbidden erotic predicament through letter writing, just as Turbosa does in *La condesita* when his private writing, or mirror gazing, produces series of illusory spectators who watch him, insult him, and decide his punishment for failing to conform to the masculine ideal. Similar to the imaginary onlookers projected from Turbosa's mind who appear in his bedroom to shame him, when Quiroga is writing in his own home, he fantasizes that crowds leaving the theater have entered through an open door of his house to watch him in this moment of private masturbatory confession to his "friend." As will be shown in the analysis, these theater spectators fuse into the single disturbing gaze of Díaz Vélez, therefore illustrating that Quiroga's pursued double is an alternate identity that he has adopted in his drama of the self before the mirror. Although there are scenes in the story that take place in the house of Quiroga's friend Lugones, in public spaces such as the street, the tram, and the café, as well as in Díaz

Vélez's bedroom, I view these instances as imaginary encounters, in which Quiroga becomes a spectator of himself.

Quiroga begins his personal anecdote of meeting the paranoid and effeminate Díaz Vélez for the first time by describing how he was in his friend Lugones's house on a rainy night. The mirroring nature of Quiroga and Lugones's conversation becomes evident when they get up at the same time to gaze through "los vidrios" to observe the rain rapidly pouring and whirling in the wind to form convulsive charges of light:

Una noche que estaba en casa de Leopoldo Lugones, hace una infinidad de años, la lluvia arreció de tal modo que nos levantamos a mirar a través de los vidrios. El pampero silbaba en los hilos, sacudía el agua que empañaba en rachas convulsivas la luz roja de los faroles. Después de seis días de temporal, esa tarde el cielo había despejado al sur en un límpido azul de frío. Y he aquí que la lluvia volvía a prometernos otra semana de mal tiempo. (3)

The simultaneous rising of these men, along with their paralleled staring through the glowing, water-soaked panes of glass implies that they are gazing through the looking glass as two friends, side by side. The image of these friends peering through the glass together evokes the previously mentioned idea that the mirror acted as a mediator that would allow one to recognize one's own faults, come to terms with one's true identity, acquire self-knowledge, and analyze oneself through an imaginary social mirror (Bartsch 53). Later I will show that by conversing with his "friend," Quiroga begins to analyze himself through an imaginary "social mirror," which is illustrated by Díaz Vélez's constant vigilant intrusions from the public space of the street into the privacy of the domestic sphere, where Quiroga attempts to fulfill his uncontrollable desires at odds with the masculine ideal of erotic restraint. The mirroring nature of this scene of Quiroga and Lugones gazing through the window together is further revealed when the conversation in front of "los vidrios" is later depicted as correspondence between the two men. This detail is

significant, given the aforementioned idea that writing letters can serve as a metaphor for gazing at oneself in the mirror through an external perspective.

As Quiroga comes face to face with his mirror reflection, both a social mirror and a friend, he recognizes his inner sexual turmoil, which is depicted by the violent storm that thrashes against the windows and his prediction that the downpours will last throughout the rest of the week.²⁵ Quiroga will later make another explicit connection between Díaz Vélez and the rain, when he returns to Lugones's house the next night that it is raining and expects to find "el otro," or in other words Díaz Vélez:

En la primera noche de lluvia fui a lo de Lugones, seguro de hallar al otro. Por más que yo comprendiera como nadie que esa lógica de pensar encontrarlo *justamente* en una noche de lluvia era propia de perro o de loco, la sugestión de las coincidencias absurdas regirá siempre los casos en que el razonamiento no sabe ya que hacer. (9)

This stormy downpour outside transitions to a scene of Quiroga warming his body by Lugones's stove, an action that flatters his "flaqueza invernal." Fire and heat will be recurring themes throughout the story and will be paralleled with images of private introspection, liquid release,

²⁵ In *Sex Expression and American Women Writers, 1860-1940*, Dale M. Bauer describes the connection between the storm and erotic passion in Kate Chopin's story "The Storm": "Kate Chopin's 'The Storm' (1898), for instance, depicts women's sexual desire as nothing less than a down-pour. For Chopin, women's—not men's—sexual urgency is so torrential that it constantly threatens to overwhelm social relations" (26). In *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism*, Joseph A. Boone also comments on how nineteenth-century modernist writers used images of flowing water to depict the erotic passions of their protagonists, such as the female character Lucy Snowe of Charlotte Brontë's English novel *Villette* (1853):

But why water? To bridge the temporal gap between Lucy's reticent narrative and these early modernist texts it may be helpful to consider an often-cited metaphor in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: his characteristic of the libido as a powerful "stream that always threatens to spill over into unsuspected "collateral channels" when its "main bed has become blocked" . . . Likewise, throughout the *Three Essays* Freud repeatedly refers to "mental dams" that the ego erects to "impede the course of the sexual instinct and "restrict its flow." Libidinal desire, it is clear, tends to flow over and needs to be curbed. (64)

and insanity, highlighting the idea in my analysis of *La condesita* that the fire could produce reverie and stimulate masturbatory desire. Note also that the male protagonist Turbosa was also sitting by the fire when he broke out into a spasm of orgasmic pleasure, which eventually gave way to his persecutory delusions. As Quiroga warms himself by Lugones's fire amidst this downpour, the theme of insanity suddenly comes up. Lugones tells him about the strange things that he saw a couple of days prior at a mental asylum:

Volvimos a sentarnos prosiguiendo una charla amena, como es la que se establece sobre las personas locas. Días anteriores aquel había visitado un manicomio; y las bizarrías de su gente, añadidas a las que yo por mi parte había observado alguna vez, ofrecían materia de sobra para un confortante vis-a-vis de hombres cuerdos. (3)

This discussion of insanity leads the two men to hear a bell ring in the street, announcing Díaz Vélez's presence: "Dada, pues, la noche, nos sorprendimos bastante cuando la campanilla de la calle sonó. Momentos después entraba Lucas Díaz Vélez" (2). In this introduction Quiroga immediately notices Díaz Vélez's fixed, illuminated gaze: "Los ojos, sobre todo de fijeza atónita y brillo arsenical, llamaban fuertemente la atención" (4). As seen in the introduction, seeing one's own reflection involves gazing at oneself through the eyes of an other, revealing why Quiroga will repeatedly focus on Díaz Vélez's gaze throughout the text.

The fact that Díaz Vélez's gaze projects an "arsenic glow" hints at his poisonous, contagious nature that will tempt Quiroga as he struggles to fight off his inner sexual impulses. Díaz Vélez's fixed glowing stare that intrudes into this moment of agitated storms and fire gazing can also indicate his nymphomaniacal symbolism. In *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness: The Eberbach Asylum and German Society 1815–1849*, Ann Goldbert connects fire to nymphomania while describing how inner attacks of unquenchable passion could be observed through one's lustrous eyes:

Usually the possession of sexual desire was conceived in the imagery of fire: fiery red and hot faces, wild, “gleamingly animated eyes.” . . . For centuries a metaphor for sexual passion, the image of internal fire encapsulated essential features of nymphomania: its uncontrollability and danger, its explosive quality, and its fluidity. (89)

Goldbert also mentions that “about another patient it was noted that with ‘fixed and flashing eyes, she grabs at every man who comes before her, and the caressing and other fondling reveal the love flames flaring up in her’” (90). The transgressive sexual nature of Díaz Vélez’s gaze will further be depicted through images of animality, feline evil, and temptation in subsequent scenes of the novel.

Quiroga’s process of self-judgement through the gaze of this individual will begin when Díaz Vélez remains silent for a long while gazing at Quiroga and observing him, which makes him feel uneasy:

En un instante en que me volví a Lugones, alcancé a ver que aquel me observaba. Sin duda en otro hubiera hallado muy natural ese examen tras una presentación; pero la inmóvil atención con lo que hacía me chocó. Pronto dejamos de hablar. Nuestra situación no fue muy grata, sobre todo para Vélez, pues debía suponer que antes de que él llegara nosotros no practicaríamos ese terrible mutismo. (4)

In *The Subject of Psychosis: A Lacanian Perspective*, Stijn Vanheule argues that this process of coming to know oneself in the mirror involves self-alienation, external observation, madness, and paranoia, which are behaviors that Quiroga will engage in as he struggles to recognize himself in the gaze of his reflection:

In line with his ideas on the parallel between madness and the mirror stage, Lacan qualified any kind of self-knowledge that is obtained during the mirror phase as ‘paranoid’ and as ‘alienated.’ He points to the externally oriented basis of self-knowledge, which seems to be constructed in three steps. The first step in the construction of self-knowledge concerns the detection of an image in the outside world, or more broadly a unit of information that is alien to the subject. In the mirror stage this is the mirror image, which in a second step is perceived to refer to the subject, and

experienced revealing something about its own being. Given its revelatory character in a third step the image is adopted via identification (26).²⁶

Going along with Lacan's idea that one's coming to knowledge through mirror gazing would move from a sense of alienation to identification and self-knowledge, Quiroga initially views Díaz Vélez as a sick, insane other but slowly starts to engage in a process of exterior analysis through this "other's" gaze that he continuously describes in terms of intelligence.

After encountering Díaz Vélez's stare in this initial moment of scrutinization, Quiroga describes how this man's gaze was only directed towards him, while presenting their locking of eyes as an exterior examination of his own soul:

Lo que más recordaba de él era la mirada con que me observó al principio. No se la podía llamar inteligente, reservando esta cualidad a las que buscan en la mirada nueva correspondencia pequeña o grande — a la personal cultura, y habituales en las personas de cierta elevación. En estas miradas hay siempre un cambio de espíritus: profundizar hasta dónde llega la persona que se acaba de conocer, pero entregando francamente al examen extranjero parte de la propia alma. Díaz no me miraba así; me miraba a mí únicamente. (8)

Quiroga's nonrecognition in this "other" can be observed in his initial meeting of Díaz Vélez when he notices his dark clothes, opaque coloring, and black eyes: "Díaz era entonces mucho más delgado que ahora. Su ropa negra, su color trigueño mate, su cara afilada y sus grandes ojos negros daban a su tipo un aire no común" (4). The darkness surrounding Díaz Vélez's persona is complemented by images of sickness, timidity, and sexual desire. For example, like Quiroga, Díaz Vélez is very thin, evoking the medical notion that masturbation would lead to emaciation, which was previously seen in my discussion of Quiroga's "A la señorita Isabel Ruremonde." In addition to Díaz Vélez's thinness, he is very shy, and only speaks when being addressed: "En los

²⁶ In my analysis of "La meningitis y su sombra" in chapter 3 I will show that María Elvira's gaze serves as a mirror for the male protagonist Carlos Durán. When being confronted with her gaze, Durán will go through a similar process of coming to knowledge by gazing at himself in the mirror, which involves self-alienation.

primeros momentos Vélez habló poco. Cruzóse de piernas, respondiendo lo justamente preciso” (4). Díaz Vélez’s quietness in this scene will later be paralleled with his antisocial behavior when he shuts himself in his abnormally dark house for consecutive days, fearfully hiding in bed, while conversing with himself and avoiding social interactions. The previously mentioned French physician Francois Lallemand, who also commented on the ability of male masturbation to cause “imaginary persecutions,” describes how male patients who excessively pleased themselves would become timid, fearful, and antisocial for no apparent reason, just like Vélez.²⁷ In regards to one patient, Lallemand states: “timidity carried him to a ridiculous extent; panics of fear even during the day; character gloomy, taciturn, restless and irritable; horror of the least noise, and all of society” (118).

Díaz Vélez also projects a phallic image of desire. His name evokes the nineteenth-century Argentine military officer Eustoquio Antonio Díaz Vélez, and his hair glistens like a “casco luciente.” By depicting Díaz Vélez as a soldier with a shiny helmet on top of his head, Quiroga subtly equates him with a penis. In her article “Naming of Parts: Gender, Culture, and Terms for the Penis among American College Students,” Deborah Cameron indicates that

There are other terms which do not directly name weapons but which clearly evoke warfare and destruction, such as stealth bomber, destroyer and a series of terms involving the word helmet (polished helmet, shiny helmet, purple helmeted love warrior). The helmet presumably is a fanciful allusion to the shape and position of the glans, but its military connotations are clear (especially in the last item). (371)

Stephanson presents this same analogy by arguing that there was “an older symbolism which associated male genitalia with contexts of military victory, war trophies, or aggressive penile display” (34). As will be subsequently shown in the analysis, there are other subtle clues that link Díaz Vélez’s persona with an image of the male genitals, such as when Quiroga admires his

²⁷ This idea also appeared in my analysis of *La condesita* in chapter 1.

head, elbows, arms, legs, the wrinkles on his pants, and the ribbon that dangles down from his hat while possessing a guilty temptation to touch these parts of his body. This depiction of Díaz Vélez as a soldier who entices Quiroga to give into his cravings throughout the story also reflects nineteenth-century medical discourses that depicted a man's internal fight with his passions in terms of warfare. In "Bodies Doubles: The Spermatorrhea Panic," Ellen Bayuk Rosenman explains this idea:

Man and body are not perfectly aligned in an attitude of domination; in fact, what needed to be dominated was the body itself. A new set of metaphors represented sexual self-denial in heroic terms. Evoking sport and war, doctors compared this mastery to training for a race or a boxing match. They spoke of taking up "arms" in the "conflict" with the body. Acton's term for victory is 'continence.' His exhortations sublimated the masturbating hand into the abstract will, which "grasps" the body's desires with a "firm . . . hold," keeping them securely in check. (372)

These images that evoke the male genitals and warfare are followed by Díaz Vélez's tempting, contagious nature when he breaks the awkward silence among the three men by stating that he received a wide variety of *chancacas* (a sweet made from cane sugar molasses). Díaz Vélez says that his friend in Salta gave him these sweets and he wished to share them with Quiroga and Lugones on that very rainy night: "Él mismo rompió el silencio. Habló a Lugones de ciertas chancacas que un amigo le había enviado de Salta, y cuya muestra hubo de traer esa noche" (4). Díaz Vélez's desire to share these sweets with his friends will be a recurring theme throughout the story, and as will later be demonstrated, his offers of sugary indulgence eventually succeed in tempting Quiroga when he reaches for the sugar bowl in a café while observing Díaz Vélez's hysterical sexual surrender of willpower, but pulls his hands back ashamedly when he notices he is being publicly observed. These sweets can represent a subtle form of moral contagion, since Díaz Vélez got them from a friend in Salta and he is now sharing them with Lugones and Quiroga. The fact that Díaz Vélez tempts the men with his sweet dessert, and that eating sugar

will later be associated with secrecy and embarrassment, further reveals that Díaz Vélez is a morally contagious influence within Quiroga's psyche that entices him to give in to his sexual cravings. In her book *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America*, Wendy A. Woloson establishes a connection between secretive masturbation and private indulgence in sweets at the time:

Later in the century, when manufacturers began making chocolates and bonbons on a grand scale, advisors' warnings gained stridency as they clarified the interconnection between food, sexual appetite, self-gratification and self-pollution. . . . Outside temptations led women to "perdition": Candies, spices, cinnamon, cloves, peppermint and all strong essences powerfully excite the genital organs and lead to the same result (vice)." Insidiously, women usually partook of these external temptations alone, away from reproachful eyes. Such privacy merely encouraged said self-pollution, and threatened to unleash powerful, uncontrollable desires within women themselves. (154)²⁸

When Lugones decides that he wants to indulge in Díaz Vélez's *chancacas*, Quiroga also becomes morally infected by this contagious influence; his prior assurance of sanity disappears and he describes how the men's craziness had returned: "Roto el hielo, a los diez minutos volvieron nuestros locos. Aunque sin perder una palabra de lo que oía Díaz se mantuvo aparte del ardiente tema" (4). In this moment, the theme of insanity is described as an "ardiente tema," which hints at the connection between mental instability and burning sexual desire that will reappear throughout the text.

The burning topic is revealed when Díaz Vélez begins to relate an anecdote of a man who suffered from persecutory paranoia and imagined that the streets were filled with enemies out to get him. As seen with Turbosa in *La condesita*, both insanity and persecutory paranoia were listed in medical treatises as a result of masturbatory indulgences that would destroy men's mental faculties. Díaz Vélez also asserts that this man became paranoid upon recovering from

²⁸ I will show later in the analysis that when indulging in sugar and coffee, Quiroga becomes feminine and hysterical.

marasmus brought on by typhoid. First of all, the mention of marasmus (undernourishment) is significant, since in Doussin-Dubreuil's manual the medic describes a female patient who also suffered from marasmus after incessantly pleasuring herself: "se dice de una joven de doce trece años, cuyo estómago se había desarreglado de tal modo por esta detestable maniobra, que se llegó a reducir al más completo marasmo" (67). The mention of typhoid is also significant since in his medical manual *A Treatise on the Diseases Produced by Onanism, Masturbation, Self-Pollution* (1839) the nineteenth-century French physician Leopoldo Deslandes directly links typhoid fever with venereal excess:

Thus all authors who have written on the diseases of warm countries, consider the act of venery, as one of the most active occasional causes of yellow fever, of malignant fevers, of cholera morbus, and generally of the severe diseases contracted by Europeans. A similar disposition may be seen in young men, who pass many hours in the infected atmosphere of hospitals, and particularly in dissecting-rooms, if they indulge with females or in onanism: typhus fevers have been caused by it. (47)

As Quiroga listens to Díaz Vélez's story, he is given the impression that it is a theatrical farce, while noting this man's intelligence, evoking the idea that the mirror could allow one to develop a sense of self-knowledge through an imaginary process of external self-observation: "Como era muchacho de cierta inteligencia, comentaba el mismo su caso con una sutileza tal que era imposible saber que pensar, oyéndolo. Daba la más perfecta idea de farsa; y esta era la opinión general al oírlo argumentar picarescamente sobre su caso" (5). The theatrical nature of Díaz Vélez's story will be revealed when Lugones tells Quiroga that Díaz Vélez was actually analyzing himself from a third-person perspective when telling this story, and that *he* was the pursued individual: "Eso ha pasado efectivamente. Solo que el amigo es él mismo. Le ha dicho en un tono la verdad; tuvo una tifoidea, quedó mal, curo hasta por ahí, y ya ve que es bastante problemática su cordura" (7). This process of self-observation continues when Díaz Vélez states that although his pursued "friend" had supposedly recovered from his paranoid delusions, he had

recently seen him in the pharmacy seeking assistance. In this encounter the back of Díaz Vélez's "friend" is turned to him, symbolizing Díaz Vélez's inability to see himself in this patient seeking medical treatment, and his attempt to deny his own mental instabilities. Díaz Vélez's failure to recognize himself in his sick reflection is also revealed when an "intruso" enters the pharmacy without being seen by Díaz Vélez and his "friend" and taps his fingers on the counter to call the attention of the absent pharmacist (5). Using Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919) as a reference point, Melchior-Bonnet describes how one's mirror image can appear to them as an intruder that is unrecognizable to the spectator, much like Díaz Vélez's experience in this scene of him trying to convince himself that he is not sick:

The famous text in which Freud recounts how he thought he saw a stranger enter his train compartment just as a violent jolt suddenly opened the door to the lavatory has familiarized us with this "uncanny" feeling, the face of the intruder, not of an other, but of the other in one's self: 'I hurried to help him, but was quickly taken aback when I realized that the intruder was none other than my own image reflected in the mirror of the connecting door. And I remember that this apparition gave me profound displeasure. (223)

Similar to Freud's experience, Díaz Vélez undergoes a fearful recognition in this "other" when his "friend" suddenly notes the intruder's presence, causing him to quickly turn around and gaze straight into his eyes with a fixed, animalistic stare: "Bruscamente mi amigo se volvió al intruso con una instantaneidad verdaderamente animal, mirándolo fijamente en los ojos" (5). The friend's bestial gaze will parallel Díaz Vélez's immobile, feline stare that suddenly surprises Quiroga in moments of deep introspection that allow his guilty buried desires to come to the surface.

While Díaz Vélez's "friend" locks eyes with the intruder, he starts to remember a horrible memory that occurred in his distant past (5). Díaz Vélez's terrible memory that is aroused through the gaze of another parallels a comment that Quiroga made at the beginning of the story,

in which he discusses how Díaz Vélez has had an awful influence over him for an undetermined period of his life, but that it was not until the heated rainy night conversing with his own friend Lugones that he actually met his suppressed reflection: “Este individuo ha tenido una influencia nefasta sobre una época de mi vida, y esa noche lo conocí” (5).

After Díaz Vélez leaves Lugones’s house, he tells Quiroga that this encounter at the pharmacy was probably true, but that Díaz Vélez was actually the one seeking medical assistance when being interrupted by the gaze of an intruder: “También es muy posible que lo del mostrador sea verdad, pero habiéndole pasado a él mismo” (7). When Quiroga hears that Díaz Vélez is actually the sick, pursued one in need of medical assistance, he sees a flash of light before his eyes, illuminating the darkness that once clouded his mirror reflection incarnated in the black eyes and dark clothes of the mysterious man who has interrupted his intimate conversation with a friend on this heated, rainy evening, and which has aroused anxieties of madness: “Apenas oí esto un relámpago de lógica explicativa iluminó lo oscuro que sentía en el otro” (7).

This revelation before the mirror leads to a process of self-spectatorship when Quiroga steps out of the private confessional realm of his friend’s house and subjects himself to imaginary public gazes as he walks down through the streets of the city, sensing that others will recognize his uncontrollable sexual desires. After Quiroga leaves Lugones’s house, he goes to wait for the tram, a recurring form of transportation throughout the story when Quiroga interacts with Díaz Vélez and that was associated with sexual arousal in the nineteenth century.²⁹ While

²⁹ In *The Civilizing Machine: A Cultural History of Mexican Railroads, 1876-1910*, Michael Matthews comments: “The connection between locomotive travel, especially the experience of mechanical agitation, and sexual arousal emerged as a subject of analysis for nineteenth-century psychiatry. Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, for example, argued that the passenger’s

Quiroga is “waiting for the tram,” he shakes off the water that has wettened his feet from the puddles in the street. “Llegué a Santa Fe y esperé un rato el *tranvía*, sacudiendo los pies” (8). Not only does Quiroga mention feet in this particular scene, but he will do so on other instances as he follows Díaz Vélez down various streets in what appears to be an “erotic chase” (San Román 930). These images of feet are significant since Carl Jung has linked this body part with the male genitals: “The foot, as the organ nearest the earth, represents in dreams the relation to earthly reality and often has a generative or phallic significance” (239). This scene of Quiroga waiting for the *tranvía* while shaking liquid from this particular part of his body creates an image of masturbation and ejaculation. The sexual nature of the foot is later employed when Quiroga finally spots Díaz Vélez in the street after searching for him for a long while, and he pulls his “foot” out of the pathway, but is unable to resist his temptation to follow Díaz Vélez. When going down this path, a car wheel caresses his pant-leg, causing him to become strangely distracted by horse’s hooves.

The autoerotic overtones of Quiroga waiting for the *tranvía* continue when he becomes restless and then decides to take a stroll. As Quiroga walks through the streets, he suddenly picks up his pace and then sinks his hands into his pockets, an action that suggests a clandestine attempt at masturbation: “Aburrido, decidime a caminar; apresure el paso, encerré estrictamente las manos en los bolsillos, y entonces pensé bien en Díaz Vélez” (8). In Diane Mason’s *The Secret Vice: Masturbation in Victorian Fiction and Medical Culture*, she discusses how the male protagonist Eugene Wrayburn of Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65) puts his hands

experience and fear of unstoppable motion out of their control was paralleled with the sensation of their own sexuality racing unrestrained” (95).

in his pockets while rocking his body by the fire to satisfy his autoerotic longings, much like Quiroga in this instance and other scenes of the story:

Here he gives himself away through the physical gesture: “Eugene Wrayburn rose, and *put his hands in his pockets*, and stood with a foot on the fender, *indolently rocking his body* and looking at the fire.” Given that Lightwood has just mentioned “Lizzie,” the focus of his excitement, his actions appear to be distinctly autoerotic. (112)

As a direct result of Quiroga putting his hands in his pockets and thinking “bien”, that is, in a focused fashion, of Díaz Vélez’s feline gaze, he remembers with special clarity the deranged man’s sexualized stare of madness, a look that Quiroga refuses to recognize as his own. “No pensaba qué era ni que podía ser yo, ni había en su mirada el más remoto destello de curiosidad psicológica. Me observaba nada más, como se observa sin pestañar la actitud equivocada de un felino” (8). Quiroga’s remembrance of Díaz Vélez’s feline stare in this instance is a representation of his guilty urges as he places his hands in his pockets, given that nineteenth-century male authors used the cat as a symbol of sexual temptation. For example, Mason describes how the female protagonist Laura of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) has a horrifying hallucination of a black cat sitting on her bed that “recalls her arguably masturbatory experience as a six-year-old” (64). In “Tengo una gata blanca” (1904), a short story by the nineteenth-century Peruvian author Clemente Palma, the cat is a mirror of the narrator’s torturous desires. When addressing this voluptuously cruel white cat, the narrator tells her that she is a voluptuously cruel reflection of his disturbed “vida interior” (11). The narrator of this story also describes how the cat pursues him with a fixed, glowing stare while rubbing her body against his, paralleling how Díaz Vélez tempts Quiroga with his immobile feline stare:

A menudo la fierecilla con mimosa timidez de mujer roza su cabecita y su lomo contra mis piernas, y viendo mi taciturna indiferencia, sube a un sillón vecino, y desde allí fija en los míos sus redondos ojos, y sus pupilas se dilatan, y brillan con las mil facetas de un caleidoscopio que tuviera un abismo en su centro. (11)

The erotically alluring nature of Díaz Vélez's cat eyes is also exposed when Quiroga remembers the feline gaze of "el loco" and then imagines that his admiration of Díaz Vélez's "perversity" will lead this individual to rapidly rub his hands together in a private enjoyment:

Después de lo que me contara Lugones, no me extrañaba ya esa objetividad de mirada de loco. En pos de su examen, satisfecho seguramente se había reído de mí con el espantapájaro de su propia locura. Pero su afán de delatarse a escondidas tenía menos por objeto burlarse de mí que divertirse a sí mismo. Yo era simplemente un pretexto para el razonamiento y sobre todo un punto de confrontación: cuanto más admirase yo la endemoniada perversidad del loco que me describía, tanto más rápidos debían ser sus fructivos restregones de manos. (8)

Not only do the mention of "delatarse a escondidas" and "divertirse a sí mismo" indicate a secret, solitary form of enjoyment, but so does the image of Díaz Vélez rubbing his hands while indulging in this entertainment. As Quiroga is confronted with this arousing, yet fearful image of himself masturbating, he suddenly expresses his surprise that Díaz Vélez is freely enjoying himself, when he could easily be caught in this shameful act: "Faltó para su dicha completa que yo le hubiera preguntado: —¿Pero no teme su amigo que lo descubran al delatarse así? Ahora que sabía yo en realidad quién era el perseguido, me prometía provocarle esa felicidad violenta, y esto es lo que iba pensando mientras caminaba" (8–9). This recognition that someone could be watching leads Quiroga to realize that *he* is actually the one being pursued by imaginary demons that burden him with guilt, when he tries to provoke this "felicidad violenta" through rapid hand rubbing, a fear that will come to the surface as he walks through the street and imagines that public onlookers can detect his forbidden pleasures.

Although Quiroga vows to satisfy Díaz Vélez's perverse thirst for happiness, he does not see his repressed alter ego for fifteen days. However, Lugones does contact the narrator to tell him that Díaz Vélez dropped off some candies for his friend: "Supe por Lugones que había vuelto a su casa, llevándole las confituras—buen regalo para él" (9). Although Quiroga claims

that these sweets are a good gift for Lugones, immediately afterwards his friend tells him that the pursued individual also left some for him, since he did not know the address to his home: “Me trajo también algunas para Vd. Como Díaz no sabía dónde vive — creo que Vd. no le dio su dirección — las dejó en casa. Vaya por allá” (9). As previously mentioned, Díaz Vélez bringing Quiroga candies serves as a symbol of the narrator’s inner longing to satisfy his sexual appetites. Upon hearing about the candies, Quiroga inquires if Díaz Vélez is still in town, to which Lugones responds “Sí, supongo que sí; no me ha hablado una palabra de irse” (9).

Quiroga predicts that he will see Díaz Vélez on the next night of rain, while assuring himself that he is sure that he will lose control of his ability to reason when seeing this man again, an assertion that is affirmed by the voice of his “friend” Lugones: “¡Tenga cuidado! Los perseguidos comienzan adorando a sus futuras víctimas. Él se acordó muy bien de Vd.” (9). This warning from his friend, who acts as a mirror, leads Quiroga to put himself in Díaz Vélez’s shoes, so that he can finally understand the consequences he would face if *he* were to entertain himself: “No es nada. Cuando lo vea va a tocar a mí divertirme” (9).

Quiroga indeed amuses himself the following day in the street when he interacts with “el otro” in a series of scenes that reflect his pervasive fear of being publicly exposed as an effeminate, hysterical, and mentally unstable masturbator. San Román highlights the erotic nature of Quiroga’s trailing of Díaz Vélez down the street, describing it in terms of repressed homosexual desire: “When the unnoticed Quiroga excitedly follows his victim through the street, the erotic air of the chase is conveyed not only by the voyeuristic tone but also the explicit stress on the visual perspective from behind, a combination which emphasizes Díaz’s position as receptor in a homosexual relationship” (930).

While I agree that this “chase” is extremely sexual, I view this as a series of scenes in which Quiroga desperately tries to unite with his suppressed mirror reflection to achieve a sense of self-fulfillment, but he struggles to do so for fear of society discovering his true identity, which goes against the masculine ideal. As Quiroga trails behind Díaz Vélez in the street, he gazes through several windows, emphasizing that he is inspecting himself in an imaginary social mirror: “Caminaba hacia el norte, mirando de paso todas las vidrieras, sin dejar pasar una, como quien va pensando preocupado en otra cosa” (10). When Quiroga finally distinguishes Díaz Vélez in this process of gazing at himself in the windows, the author pulls his foot out of the road, an action that overwhelms him with an elusive desire that he tries to suppress but simply cannot avoid. While trying to resist his urge to follow Díaz Vélez, Quiroga descends down the street in a stumbling fashion as if he were being dragged against his will. Suddenly, a car wheel brushes against Quiroga’s leg, causing him to stare at horse hooves. Quiroga gets lost in thought admiring the horse hooves, which are reminiscent of the “feet,” a part of the body analogous to the genitals. He then senses a need to catch up to Díaz Vélez, symbolizing his desire to unite with his suppressed reflection to end his sense of self-fragmentation that constantly inhibits his attempts to achieve sexual gratification: “Detúveme de nuevo, seguí con los ojos las patas de los caballos, hasta que un automóvil me obligó a saltar. / Todo esto duró diez segundos, mientras Díaz continuaba alejándose, y tuve que forzar el paso” (10).

When Quiroga catches up to Díaz Vélez, his frenzied nerves finally feel in equilibrium, and he experiences a sense of wholeness and self-satisfaction upon being able to cling to his fantasy. “Cuando lo sentí a mi certísimo alcance todas mis inquietudes se fueron para dar lugar a una gran satisfacción de mí mismo. Sentíame en hondo equilibrio. Tenía todos los nervios conscientes y tenaces” (10). The author’s desire to satisfy his onanistic longings intensifies when

he gets so close to his reflection that he can touch him, then regulates his steps to the same exact rhythm, suggesting that he and Díaz Vélez are the same person: “Díaz Vélez continuaba caminando y pronto estuve a dos pasos detrás de él. Uno más y lo podía tocar. Pero al verlo así sin darse ni remotamente cuenta de mi inmediatez, a pesar de su delirio de persecución y psicologías, regulé mi paso exactamente con el suyo” (10).

After this complacent merging of selves, Quiroga observes Díaz Vélez’s head, elbows, fists, the wrinkles in the cloth at the back of his knees, and the heels of his shoes—a carefully crafted combination of words that evoke the male genitals. In this moment of masturbatory satisfaction, Quiroga’s fear of having his fantasy interrupted by guilt, shame, and an internalized medical gaze is brought to the surface when he imagines that his sexual excesses have led him to take on a feminine appearance, as he stares at Díaz Vélez and notices that he is wearing “invisible, yet visible” heeled shoes and a hat that is adorned with a ribbon. This scene relates to Krafft-Ebing’s aforementioned case of a male masturbator who envisioned himself as pursued, worried that he had taken on a womanly demeanor and imagined that people in the streets publicly insulted him. Upon being overcome with a fear of feminization, there is a sudden erasure of time, and Quiroga has a strange sensation that he had already been in this same situation “millions of years before,” highlighting the fantastical nature of this encounter. The narrator vaguely remembers closely trailing behind Díaz Vélez in the streets trying to catch up to him, as in this very moment, but being overcome with a mental blockage that prevented him from fulfilling his desire:

Tenía la sensación vertiginosa de que antes, millones de años antes, yo había hecho ya eso: encontrar a Díaz Vélez en la calle, seguirlo, alcanzarlo — y una vez esto seguir detrás de él — *detrás*. Irradiaba de mí la satisfacción de diez vidas enteras que no hubieran podido nunca realizar su deseo. (10–11)

By describing his struggled effort to come into contact with Díaz Vélez, Quiroga reveals his perpetual longing to get in touch with his own body and desires. Although he wants to unite with his repressed mirror reflection, this imagined physical and face-to-face eye contact with Díaz Vélez overwhelms him with a pervasive fear that paralyzes his ability for self-expression:

¿Para qué tocarlo? De pronto se me ocurrió que podría darse vuelta, y la angustia me apretó instantáneamente la garganta. Pensé que con la laringe así oprimida no se puede gritar, y mi miedo único, espantablemente único, fue no poder gritar cuando se volviera, como si el fin de mi existencia debiera haber sido avanzar precipitadamente sobre él, abrirle las mandíbulas y gritarle desafortadamente en plena boca — contándole de paso todas las muelas. (11)

Quiroga's sexual hampering, caused by the possibility of locking eyes with Díaz Vélez, is illustrated through a frightening choking sensation that would prevent him from screaming in the case that his double turned around and looked at him. This incapacity for verbal expression and erotic fulfillment has a parallel with the narrator's later writer's block—he sits down at his desk to write a letter to Lugones, or in other words to fulfill his guilty pleasures, when Díaz Vélez suddenly appears and disturbs him with his judgmental gaze. The same connection between verbal blockage and sexual repression also appears at the end of the story, when Quiroga stares at Díaz Vélez conceivably pleasuring himself in bed and anxiously tries to speak, but feels an oppression in his throat that inhibits him from doing so.

Despite this interruption in his fantasy, Quiroga is able to reignite his desire by getting lost in admiration of his own body once again, which is illustrated when he curiously stares at Díaz Vélez's arms, legs, hair, and the feminine ribbon that hangs from his hat:

Tuve un momento de angustia tal que me olvidé de ser él todo lo que veía: los brazos de Díaz Vélez, las piernas de Díaz Vélez, los pelos de Díaz Vélez, la cinta del sombrero de Díaz Vélez, la trama de la cinta del sombrero de Díaz Vélez, la urdimbre de la urdimbre de Díaz Vélez... (11)

While gazing at these aspects of Díaz Vélez's body and dress, Quiroga's sense of corporeal alienation disappears and he experiences a "crazy" temptation to softly touch Díaz Vélez's jacket in an act of "intrinsic creation of oneself," that would provide him with ecstatic happiness:

Un momento después tuve la loca tentación de tocarlo sin que él sintiera; y en seguida, lleno de la más grande felicidad que puede caber en un acto que es creación intrínseca de uno mismo, le toqué el saco con exquisita suavidad, justamente en el borde inferior — ni más — ni menos. Lo toqué y hundí en el bolsillo el puño cerrado. (11)

The images of madness and temptation associated with the caress of Díaz Vélez's "saco" hint at sexual desire, of course, but the fact that Quiroga describes this as an act of intrinsic creation, and that the movement is accompanied by his fist deepening in his pocket—the second time this happens in the story—, hints that this is a solitary, masturbatory encounter.

When sinking his hands into his pockets after touching Díaz Vélez's jacket, Quiroga experiences a fear of vigilance upon sensing that at least ten people are watching him. This scene evokes Walter Benjamin's idea that passersby in the streets of nineteenth-century Paris acted as "veiled mirrors," which allowed individuals to come to terms with their own self-images (McCracken 89). The scrutinizing gazes of these passersby finally allow Quiroga to interact with his mirror image when Díaz Vélez stops at a street named "Charcas." The name of the street evokes stagnant pools of water that would allow Quiroga to contemplate his mirror reflection, just like the series of windows that aligned the streets as he chased his double. When Díaz Vélez stops at "Charcas," Quiroga stands directly behind him and a silhouette begins to form, causing Díaz Vélez to suddenly turn around and gaze at Quiroga. Although his gaze is initially worried, empty, and distracted, he quickly reorients his stare to Quiroga's eyes:

Tres minutos después llegamos a Charcas y allí se detuvo Díaz. Miró hacia Suipacha, columbró una silueta detrás de él y se volvió de golpe. Recuerdo perfectamente este detalle: durante medio segundo detuvo la mirada en un botón de mi chaleco, una mirada rapidísima preocupada y vaga al mismo tiempo, como quien fija de golpe la vista en cualquier cosa, a punto de acordarse de algo. En seguida me miró a los ojos. (12)

This silhouette, together with their interlocked gazes, suggests a mirroring between the two men that will finally provoke communication after this chase that has occurred alongside the *vidrieras*.

When the two men begin to speak, Quiroga thanks Díaz Vélez for the candies, causing them to awkwardly stare at each other in silence, emphasizing the sexual guilt that the sweets have represented throughout the story:

—¿No ha vuelto por lo de Lugones?

—Sí, y gracias por las chancacas; muy ricas.

Nos callamos, mirándonos. (13)

To add to the themes of sexual temptation incarnated in the *chancacas*, Quiroga then asks Díaz Vélez if he is waiting for the tram, which as previously mentioned was linked to sexual arousal at the time. As soon as Quiroga asks this question, Díaz Vélez's nose elongates to touch his lower lip:

—¿Esperaba el tranvía?

—Sí —afirmó mirando la hora. — Al bajar la cabeza al reloj, vi rápidamente que la punta de la nariz le llegaba al borde del labio superior. Irradióme desde el corazón un ardiente cariño por Díaz. (13)

This elongation of Díaz Vélez's nose hints at an erection. In *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, J. N. Adams explains that “it became a commonplace in the Middle Ages that the shape and state of the nose reflected the nature of the genitalia. . . . Ancient caricatures often give the nose a phallic appearance” (35). The fact that Quiroga feels compassion towards Díaz Vélez in this moment suggests that he sympathizes—that is, has the same feeling—with this man's plight to control his sexual desires.

Quiroga's mention of his indulgence in the *chancacas* and his subsequent observance of Díaz Vélez's nose elongating is followed by an invitation to accompany "el otro" to the café to drink coffee. Díaz Vélez asking Quiroga to drink a coffee reveals the shared sexual temptations between these men. In his treatise *Nymphomania, or, a Dissertation Concerning the Furor Uterinus* (1775), the French doctor Bienville linked this beverage to nymphomania (Bienville 52), while Doussin-Dubreuil connected it to masturbatory arousal (Doussin-Dubreuil 76). This medical connection between coffee and self-pleasure also appears in *La condesita*, when the narrator describes how Felisa notes that her uncle the vicar, who is addicted to masturbation, drinks copious amounts of coffee: "Ella veía que su tío era aficionado a la buena mesa, que apetecía los guisados excitantes, que gustaba de las libaciones copiosas, que bebía sendas tazas de café" (109). This image of erotic enticement underlying the coffee invitation is also revealed when Quiroga has a vision of a cat, which has been identified as a symbol of frustrated male sexual desire at the time.

—¡Hum!... ya empieza —pensé. Y mis ideas en perfecta fila hasta ese momento comenzaron a cambiar de posición y entrechocarse vertiginosamente. Hice un esfuerzo para rehacerme y me acorde súbitamente de un gato plomo, sentado inmóvil en una silla, que yo había visto cuando tenía cinco años. ¿Por qué ese gato?... Silbé y callé de golpe. De pronto sonéme las narices y tras el pañuelo me reí sigilosamente. (14)

Given that the nose is a phallic symbol, when Quiroga tries to secretly release the liquid from his nose behind his handkerchief while hiding his derision, the image of seminal release becomes clearer. In this scene Quiroga also wants to spit in his hand, burst out into laughter, and do something "crazy": "Como había bajado la cabeza y el pañuelo era grande, no se me veía más que los ojos. Y con ellos atisbé a Díaz Vélez, tan seguro de que no me vería, que tuve la tentación fulminante de escupirme precipitadamente tres veces en la mano y soltar la carcajada" (14). The fact that Quiroga does not want Díaz Vélez to see him blowing his nose indicates the

forbidden nature of this action. Similarly, Quiroga lubricating his hand can indicate preparation for masturbation, especially since this action is associated with a sudden “temptation.”

The coffee meeting between Quiroga and Díaz Vélez is immediately described in sexual terms, which has been also pointed out by San Román, when he highlights the close proximity of the men’s knees in the following passage: “Nos sentamos en la diminuta mesa, uno enfrente de otro, las rodillas tocando casi. El fondo verde nilo del café daba en la cuasi penumbra una sensación de húmeda y reluciente frescura que obligaba a mirar con atención las paredes por ver si estaban mojadas” (14). In addition to the closeness of the men’s legs, the humid environment of the café causes Quiroga to gaze at the walls to see if they are “wet,” evoking a repressed desire for ejaculation, just like the pouring rain earlier when Quiroga sat in a warm, cozy environment. This mutual gazing and closeness between the men leads Quiroga to become excited and to hear flies buzzing in his ears. “Pasamos un rato sin hablar, pero las moscas de la excitación me corrían sin cesar por el cerebro” (14). Patients were also described in masturbation manuals as hearing this sound. When discussing a spermatorrhea patient, Lallemand states that he heard “buzzing in his ears in the evening; he lost his memory, was unable to attend to his affairs, and performed his military duty with much difficulty” (113). Felisa of *La condesita* also suffers from this symptom when she tells the reader “Oía rumores extraños, zumbidos que resonaban hasta lo más profundo del cerebro y me aturdían a veces horriblemente” (60).

The internal hums of flies in Quiroga’s head cause him to smile convulsively and to bite his lips as if he were trying to stave off an inner temptation: “Aunque estaba serio, a cada instante cruzábame por la boca una sonrisa convulsiva. Mordíame los labios esforzándome— como cuando estamos tentados—en tomar una expresión natural que rompía en seguida el tic desbordante” (14). In *Los accidentes histéricos y las sugerencias terapéuticas* (1904), the

Argentine physician José Ingenieros describes a man who became addicted to onanism and later suffered from a case of obsessive smiling in public that he fervently attempted to control, paralleling Quiroga's effort to conceal his smile and his previous fits of laughter when gazing at Díaz Vélez in the street. After Ingenieros's patient confesses "en esa época practiqué la masturbación en gran escala durante seis meses," he goes on to explain how this addiction caused excessive, uncontrollable smiling:

Cuando estoy solo me siento tranquilo, pero estando en sociedad toda mi tranquilidad desaparece. En la calle, al cruzarme con un transeúnte, me veo obligado a sonreír. En clase sonrío igualmente; cuanto más deseo contenerme, tanto más violenta es la risa. En la iglesia, orando, pareceme que todas las miradas convergen sobre mí; inclino la cabeza y siento que estoy a punto de reír, aunque no tenga humor para esta clase de jovialidades: al contrario, pruebo un sentimiento de tristeza desesperante. (101–02)

While Quiroga experiences this fit of smiling, a series of ideas rapidly run through his head, overwhelming him with an unusual urge to penetrate Díaz Vélez's eyes with his rigid fingers, an image that evokes erection and satisfaction of desire through a narcissistic copulation with his own gaze:

Todas mis ideas se precipitaban superponiéndose unas sobre otras con velocidad inaudita y terrible expansión rectilínea; cada una era un impulso incontenible de provocar situaciones ridículas y sobre todo inesperadas; ganas locas de ir hasta el fin de cada una, cortarla de repente, seguir esta otra, hundir los dos dedos rectos en los dos ojos separados de Díaz Vélez, dar porque sí un grito enorme tirándome el pelo; y todo por hacer algo absurdo—y en especial a Díaz Vélez. Dos o tres veces lo miré fugazmente y bajé la vista. Debía de tener la cara encendida porque la sentía ardiendo. (15)

The sexual nature of Quiroga's uncontainable impulses is also projected through his burning face, his desire to pull his companion's hair out and his embarrassment as he meets Díaz Vélez's gaze. Quiroga's shame continues when he notices that the waiter serving him coffee has stopped by his side to distractedly gaze into the street, reminding Quiroga of his craziness: "Todo esto pasaba mientras el mozo acudía con su bandeja, servía el café y se iba, no sin antes echar a la calle una mirada distraída. Díaz continuaba desganado, lo que me hacía creer que cuando lo

detuve en Charcas pensaba en cosa muy distinta en acompañar a un loco como yo [...]” (15).

When the coffee bearer looks out into the street, it illustrates that Quiroga has suddenly been reminded that others could be watching him in his embarrassing loss of self-control. This self-observance through an imaginary social mirror causes Quiroga to confess that *he* is actually the crazy one and that he stopped Díaz Vélez at Charcas to invite him to drink a coffee. However, Quiroga attempts to displace his worries of insanity by imagining that Díaz Vélez has been the one forcing him to have hallucinatory imaginings of being pursued, to drink coffee and to engage in other activities that are contrary to his wants:

¡Eso es! Acababa de dar con la causa de mi desasosiego: Díaz Vélez, loco maldito y perseguido, sabía perfectamente que lo que yo estaba haciendo era obra suya. «Estoy seguro de que mi amigo —se habría dicho— va a tener la pueril idea de querer espantarme cuando nos veamos. Si me llega a encontrar fingirá impulsos, psicologías, persecuciones, me seguirá por la calle haciendo muecas, me llevará después a cualquier parte, a tomar café» [...] (15)

By imagining Díaz Vélez grimacing at him in the street and tempting him against his will,

Quiroga attempts to “ward off the double lurking behind the mirror” (Melchior-Bonnet 272).

However, despite Quiroga’s effort to convince himself that Díaz Vélez is not his own reflection, deep down he knows that he is mistaken, which is revealed when he verbally expresses his error and then fixates on Díaz Vélez’s pupils: “¡Se equivoca com-ple-ta-men-te! —le dije—, poniendo los codos sobre la mesa y la cara entre las manos. Lo miraba sonriendo, sin duda, pero sin apartar las pupilas de las suyas” (15). The pupil was seen as a mirror in ancient philosophical discourse, an idea that the author also implements in “La meningitis y su sombra.” In regards to the relationship between the mirror and the pupil in Socrates’s thought, Bartsch states:

Socrates goes on to say that, just as we can see our face reflected in the eye of another person, so an eye can see itself by looking into the best part of another eye, that part with which it sees. This part is the pupil. Because it is also the pupil that looks into another eye, Socrates’ statements imply that the eye sees itself by looking at the reflection of its own pupil within the pupil of another eye. (58)

This process of recognition in the crazy other leads Quiroga to stare deeply at Díaz Vélez and to slowly articulate his name, without taking his eyes off of his pupils:

Cuanto más fijaba la vista en él, más se entrechocaban hasta el vértigo mis ideas.

—Dí-az-Vé-lez... —articulé lentamente, sin arrancar un instante mis ojos de sus pupilas. Díaz no se volvió a mí, comprendiendo que no le llamaba. (15)

While gazing at himself through the eyes of an other, Quiroga experiences a crisis of nonrecognition, evidenced by Díaz Vélez's failure to turn around and look at him. Quiroga hints that he is acting as a spectator of himself in this erotically shameful interaction with Díaz Vélez by acting as if his words were coming from an invisible third person, sitting between the two men: "Dí-az-Vé-lez —repetí con la misma imprecisión extraña a toda curiosidad, como si una tercera persona invisible y sentada con nosotros hubiera deletreado su nombre" (16). Quiroga also hints now that he has been having an interview with an invisible being in the café when he states that his friend seems to be unable to hear his words: "Díaz pareció no haber oído. Y de pronto se volvió francamente; las manos le temblaban un poco" (16).

As Quiroga keeps repeating Díaz Vélez's name in this seemingly hallucinatory encounter with an imaginary other, the reader can also recognize that Díaz Vélez's name sounds similar to a string of informal commands: "dí" ("say"), "haz" ("do"), "ve" ("see"). This subtle detail emphasizes the morally contagious nature of Díaz Vélez's persona, as Quiroga imagines his loss of willpower as a surrender to an imaginary force tempting him against his wishes. The theme of forbidden temptation will continue in this scene in the café:

Seguía mirándome en los ojos, sin abandonar su sonrisa de amigo franco que quiere dilucidar para siempre malentendidos. Yo había esperado muchas cosas, menos ese valor. Díaz me echaba, con eso sólo, todo su juego descubierto sobre la mesa, frente a frente, sin perdernos un gesto. Sabía que yo *sabía* que quería jugar conmigo otra vez, como la primera noche en lo de Lugones, y sin embargo, se arriesgaba a provocarme. (16–17)

The language of Díaz Vélez wanting to “play” with Quiroga and to “provoke” him on this particular occasion in the strangely moist café, as it had happened on the stormy, rainy night in front of the window of Lugones’s home, continues to expose Díaz Vélez as a cruelly tempting phantasm of Quiroga’s psyche. While gazing at Díaz Vélez, the buzzing in Quiroga’s ears suddenly stops, allowing him to hear the zooming of “moscas ajenas” suggesting that he is observing himself from a third-person perspective as he loses control of his desires (17).

This external buzzing causes Díaz Vélez to ask Quiroga to reflect upon his anecdote about the pursued individual during their first night, when they met in Lugones’s home: “¿Usted creía que yo era perseguido, no es cierto? [...] ¿Y que cierta historia de un amigo loco que le conté en lo de Lugones, era para burlarme de usted?” (17). Quiroga answers affirmatively, revealing that the anecdote about his imaginary “friend” has actually served to expose his own insecurities throughout the story. Quiroga’s embarrassment about his uncontrollable desires is revealed when Díaz Vélez goes to take a sip of his coffee, realizing that it is empty, and then Quiroga focuses on the womanly bags beneath his eyes: “Díaz llevó la taza a la boca, pero a medio camino notó que estaba vacío y la dejó. Tenía fuertes ojeras no de hombre, sino difusas y moradas de mujer” (17). The bags beneath his eyes expose that he has been indulging in sexual excess—for example, Doussin-Dubreuil’s treatise describes a masturbating female patient who had “sus ojos abatidos y con ojeras” (92). Díaz Vélez’s unsatiated thirst will reappear at the end of the novel when he runs out of his house naked with an empty water jug screaming for water, a request that is never fulfilled, since he is detained by the authorities.

Díaz Vélez’s shameful sexual temptations become mystically transferred to Quiroga when he notices that this man’s “ojos de arsénico” are fixated on his, trying to tempt him. Upon being poisoned with Díaz Vélez’s gaze, Quiroga reaches for the sugar bowl, but pulls his hand

back in embarrassment. “Me encogí desenfadadamente de hombros, y como quien extiende al azar la mano sobre la mesa cuando va a cambiar de postura, cogí disimuladamente la azucarera.

Apenas lo hice tuve vergüenza y la dejé. Díaz vio toda la maniobra sin bajar los ojos” (18).

Quiroga’s secret, shameful attempt to reach for the sugar in this particular instance parallels Díaz Vélez’s continued offerings to Quiroga to try his sweet *chancacas*, both of which have served as indications of guilty pleasure. When Quiroga pulls his hand away from the sugar, Díaz Vélez playfully notes his fear of indulgence, revealing his efforts to “provoke” Quiroga once again: “Sin embargo, tuvo miedo —se sonrió” (18).

Upon confronting his guilty desires, Quiroga and Díaz Vélez suddenly switch roles when Díaz Vélez accuses Quiroga of pursuing him: “¿Y si yo efectivamente creyera que usted me persigue?” (18). Quiroga continues to admit that he is pursuing a guilty reflection of himself when he no longer views his interactions with Díaz Vélez as a farce, while sensing a certain intelligence beaming from this “other’s” eyes. These details reveal that Quiroga’s theatrical performance in front of the mirror has begun to put him in touch with his true self that he has been hiding inside his being as if it were a crouching dark animal:

Yo sabía bien que él no hacía farsa alguna, y que a través de sus ojos inteligentes desarrollando su juego sutil, el loco asesino continuaba agazapado, como un animal sombrío y recogido que envía a la descubierta a los cachorros de la disimulación. Poco a poco la bestia se fue retrayendo, y en sus ojos comenzó a brillar la ágil cordura. (18–19)

Quiroga hints that there is an impending bestial craziness lodged within his persona, pointing to his buried sexual desires that he has attempted to suppress throughout the story for his fears of mental instability and that will finally burst forth from the shadows when he sees Díaz Vélez run out of his dark house naked in a sexual frenzy.

To lead up to the escape of the somber “beast” hiding in Quiroga’s psyche, when the two men leave the café there is a merging of selves: “Ya eran las dos. Caminamos hasta Charcas

hablando de todo, en un común y tácito acuerdo de entretener la conversación con cosas bien naturales, a modo del diálogo cortado y distraído que sostiene en el tranvía un viejo matrimonio” (19). Not only does the wording “ya eran las dos,” hint at doubling, but Quiroga also mentions that they are walking towards “Charcas,” the street that denotes water reflection and the same place where Quiroga saw a silhouette form as he stood behind Díaz Vélez.³⁰ Quiroga also compares his conversation with Díaz Vélez to a paused conversation that a married couple would have in the tram. This amorous connection that Quiroga feels with Díaz Vélez hints that he is coming closer to embracing his authentic desires that he hides away from society in embarrassment.³¹ When the two men get off the tram, they say good-bye, but Díaz Vélez inquires when he will see Quiroga again and where he lives. After Quiroga tells Díaz Vélez that he has already given him his address, the men lock eyes once again and shake hands. The men seem to have an urge to continue seeing one another as they walk away from one another and turn their heads at the same time to participate in yet another mutual gaze.

Díaz Vélez’s inquiry about Quiroga’s address transports the reader into this very domestic space, where he is in his own home writing a letter to Lugones under the illuminating lights of his gas lamp. As seen in my analysis of Turbosa’s character in *La condesita*, the writing process is an introspective, masturbatory activity that puts one in contact with fearful, yet alluring reflections of one’s own being. As he engages in private writing, Quiroga, like Turbosa, is haunted by imaginary phantasms that spy on him in his bedroom. The foggy light from Quiroga’s gas lamp will blur reality and fantasy as he engages in a guilty process of self-

³⁰ Later in the story Quiroga receives a letter from Díaz Vélez, precisely at two o’clock in the afternoon, that lures him to his house.

³¹ In “La meningitis y su sombra,” Carlos Durán also fantasizes about a marriage with his suppressed mirror image to achieve a sense of wholeness (see chapter 3).

judgment. Richard Leahy compares the sudden luminous flooding of gaslighting in nineteenth-century society to Foucault's theory of the panopticon for its ability to make everything and everyone visible, creating a sense of self-vigilance: "While in gas's light, one can perceive, yet the individual doing so must understand that this also opens them up to the gaze of others, turning them into a participant within a social network of visibility" (105). Leahy also argues that the emergence of gaslight created tensions between private desire and public surveillance. "The emergence of consumerist networks, and the expansion of vision, the metropolises of the nineteenth century resulted in erotic desire and consumerist desire being both promoted and repressed under the gaslights" (110–11). In addition, Leahy connects gaslight with theatrical spectacle: "The artificiality of its light creates a space where material is made luxuriously sensuous, its glare imbues materials with depth and color, yet also exposes cracks that appear under theatrical falseness" (119). The gaslight in Quiroga's bedroom possesses this capacity to instill an intense fear of vigilance and visibility as well, while exposing his bodily passions through a theatrical spectacle of the self.³²

Like Quiroga's conversation with Lugones in front of the irradiated windows on the stormy night that put Quiroga into contact with Díaz Vélez's watchful, animalistic gaze, his letter writing to a "friend" is a private form of introspective sexual confession before the looking glass that once again provokes imaginary surveilling gazes that mysteriously emerge from the street. As previously discussed, in the nineteenth century correspondence was associated with male masturbatory confession that allowed male patients to interpret their sufferings through the

³² Díaz Vélez later hides in the darkness to satisfy his passions. However, when he is exposed to burning gaslight, he sees imaginary phantasms that judge him and insult him.

onanistic admissions of other men. Quiroga's letter writing is depicted as a solitary, introspective, dreamlike activity that puts him into contact with his masturbating double:

Estaba solo en mi cuarto. Era tarde ya y la casa dormía; no se sentía el menor ruido. Esta sensación de aislamiento fue tan nítida que inconscientemente levanté la vista y miré a los costados. El gas incandescente iluminaba en fría paz las paredes. Miré el pico y constaté que no sufría las leves explosiones de costumbre. Todo estaba en pleno silencio. (20)

This solitary writing develops subtle sexual connotations when Quiroga feels a hot gas spreading through his room, while confessing that the "pico" or wick of his lamp usually suffers from heated "explosions." Since the word *pico* can be slang for "penis," the image of hot liquid exploding from the "pico" conjures an image of uncontrollable seminal emission. The "pico" will also be associated with heated explosion, temptation, and insanity at the end of the story, when Quiroga observes Díaz Vélez sick in bed while imagining that this "other," is dragging him into an abyss as he urges Quiroga to "explode."

Although Quiroga initially finds comfort in the solitude of his house, the light emitted from his lamp produces a series of hallucinatory phantasms who are depicted as spectators leaving the theater to watch Quiroga during his "letter writing." As Quiroga sits by his gas lamp trying to draft his letter, he is suddenly confronted with a vigilant gaze that inhibits him from expressing himself: "Yo estaba solo, solo, solo... ¿Qué quiere decir *solo*? Y al levantar la pieza vi un hombre asomado apenas a la puerta, que me miraba [...] Bajé la vista, prosiguiendo mi carta, pero vi de reajo que el hombre acababa de asomarse otra vez. ¡No era nada, nada! Lo sabía bien" (20). The imaginary vigilance in the gaslight continues when Quiroga feels hallucinatory beings lurking closely behind him, paralleling Turbosa's thought that there were people in his *gabinete* scrutinizing his persona:

Desde ese instante, del silencio alumbrado, de todo el espacio que quedaba tras mis espaldas, surgió la aniquilante angustia del hombre que en una casa sola no se siente solo.

Y no era esto únicamente: parados detrás de mí había seres. Mi carta seguía y los ojos continuaban asomados apenas en la puerta y los seres me tocaban casi. (20–21)

Quiroga imagines that Díaz Vélez is the one watching him in this writing process and then realizes that the door to the street is wide open, and he hears the murmuring of crowds leaving the theater going to catch the tram at Charcas:

No pretendí a volver a escribir. ¡Díaz Vélez! No había otro motivo para que mis nervios estuvieran así... La puerta de la calle estaba abierta aún y oí la animación de la gente que salía del teatro. —Habrà ido a alguno —pensé. —Y como debe tomar el *tramway* de Charcas, es posible pase por aquí... Y se le ocurre fastidiarme con sus farsas ridículas, simulando sentirse ya perseguido y sabiendo que yo voy a creer justamente que comienza a estarlo... (21)

Quiroga associates Díaz Vélez's gaze with theater spectatorship, emphasizing the recurring idea we have studied that the mirror has the ability to induce a theatrical performance of the self through a subjection to exterior gazes, a performance that allows people to recognize the authentic identity that they hide behind a mask to please society. Likewise, the fact that these are parallel scenes of taking the tram at Charcas, and that they are associated with dreaming and theatrical illusion, hints that Quiroga's interactions with Díaz Vélez in the streets were nothing more than hallucinatory encounters.

Quiroga shuts off the gas in an attempt to shut out these horrifying reflections of himself: "Golpearon a la puerta. [...] ¡Él! Dí un salto adentro y cerré la llave del gas [...] llamaron de nuevo. Y luego, al rato, sus pasos avanzaron por el patio. Se detuvieron en mi puerta y el intruso quedó inmóvil en la oscuridad" (21). Upon seeing this imaginary "intruder" that has been spying on him during the writing process, Quiroga suddenly hears an echo of his own name in his ears, illustrating his budding self-recognition in this theatrical performance:

Y me llamó por segunda vez. Y luego, después de una pausa larga:
—Horacio!

¡Maldición!... ¿Qué tenía que ver mi nombre con todo esto? ¿Con qué derecho me llamaba por el nombre, él que a pesar de su infamia torturante no entraba porque tenía miedo! (22)

Later, Díaz Vélez will reveal that he was this intruder in Quiroga's house, while inquiring why Quiroga was too scared to speak to him.

Although Quiroga tries to ward off this intruder who has appeared in his room, he is forced to confront his suppressed reflection once again through a letter. However, this time Quiroga is not writing his own letter but rather reading a letter from Díaz Vélez, creating a mirrored relationship of private confession and self-observation. When Díaz Vélez sends Quiroga a letter one week after this hallucinatory intrusion into his home, he immediately poses yet another threat of contagion:

Mi estimado Quiroga:

Hace cuatro días que no salgo, con un fuerte resfrío. Si no teme el contagio, me daría un gran gusto viniendo a charlar un rato conmigo. (22)

The mirroring nature of this letter is subtly revealed when Quiroga states that he received the letter at two o'clock, a detail that hints at doubling: "La carta llegóme a las dos de la tarde. Como hacía frío y pensaba salir a caminar, fui con rápido paso a lo de Lugones" (23). In this particular instance of receiving Díaz Vélez's contagious letter, Quiroga decides to converse with his "friend" Lugones, underlining the idea that the mirror was a "second I" that could allow him to judge his faults (Bartsch 53). When Quiroga tells Lugones that he is there to talk about his correspondence with Díaz Vélez, in which the pursued individual has expressed his contagious sickness, the two men try to decipher what could really be wrong with Díaz Vélez:

Para nosotros fue evidente que ése era el principio del fin, y en cinco minutos de especulación a su respecto hicimosle hacer a Díaz un millón de cosas absurdas. Pero como yo no conté a Lugones mi agitado día con aquel, pronto estuvo agotado el interés y me fui. (23)

It is evident that Quiroga is concealing information from his friend or the mirror, failing to confess the “agitated day” he had with Díaz Vélez where he followed him down the street, drank coffee with him, and interacted with him in his own bedroom, all encounters that caused him to become overwhelmed with strange temptations that induced fears of vigilance. Quiroga also reveals that he has gone to his friend’s house to vent his forbidden passions, when he says that his real intention for going to see Lugones was to tell him that Díaz Vélez has offered him more *chancacas*, the sweet that has served as a symbol of moral contagion and guilty indulgence throughout the story. Quiroga also states that it would be unthinkable to express to his friend that Díaz Vélez wanted to offer him more sweets. This thought of confessing his want of indulgence in his double’s sweets leads him to flee from his friend’s house, or in other words to run away from the mirror.

Quiroga’s reluctance to see himself in Díaz Vélez continues when he accepts this man’s contagious invitation and goes to his house to be confronted with an immediate image of darkness and secrecy. Díaz Vélez’s aunt opens the door wearing a black robe enclosed by an infinite amount of buttons that are tightly shut (23). Díaz Vélez’s aunt reinforces to Quiroga that her nephew is sick, but Quiroga explains that he has been invited through a letter to go see him.

When entering the bedroom, Quiroga senses that his friend is in bed, not due to a cold, but for some other unexplained reason indicating to the reader that there is a secret underlying root for his solitary confinement to his home and for his contagious letter inviting the author over: “desde que lo ví, confirméme en lo que ya habíamos previsto con el otro: no tenía absolutamente ningún resfrío” (24). Quiroga also notices the strange whiteness of Díaz Vélez’s bedroom, giving it the appearance that it was blending into other rooms, while also observing that the space was filled with the same hot vapor emerging from gaslight (24). The merging of

the white rooms, congested with a burning gas, hints that Díaz Vélez's bedroom, Lugones's living room, and Quiroga's room are actually the same place, and that Quiroga has been engaging in different conversations with himself before the mirror. For example, while the hot fire incited Quiroga's introspective masturbatory desires as he had an intimate conversation with Lugones at his house at the beginning of the story, he also feels a burning gas while writing a letter to his friend in his own home and when observing Díaz Vélez in this very encounter in his bedroom. Similar to the images of liquid release as Quiroga observed the rain while sitting by Lugones's *estufa*, and how he contemplated the "leves explosiones" of his gas lamp in his bedroom, Quiroga's gaze at Díaz Vélez's *pico* overwhelms him with a temptation for a mysterious type of explosion: "Miré con curiosidad el pico, pero el suyo silbaba, siendo así que el mío explotaba. Por lo demás bello silencio en la casa" (24). Despite Quiroga's previous verbal and written blockages, in this particular scene in Díaz Vélez's bedroom when Quiroga sees this man's appendage "whistling," he too develops the courage to unleash his passions. The mention of Díaz Vélez's *pico* whistling is a covert symbol of Quiroga's desire to get in touch with his body and inner desires. In "The Sound of Memory: Music and Acoustic Origins," Alexander Stein asserts that

Whistling can have the function of objective self-location; it is psychological sonar or acoustic self-touch, an auditory means of confirming one's own existence, intactness, aliveness and place. It is an acoustical mirror through which reassuring confirmation of one's self comes in hearing the sound of one's own body. (76)

When Quiroga finally achieves this "explosion" that he has been longing for, he immediately undergoes a self-interrogation when Díaz Vélez asks him: "¿Por qué no me respondió la otra noche en su cuarto?" When Quiroga says he does not know why he avoided an interaction with his sexually liberated mirror image in his moment of solitary written expression, Díaz Vélez asks: "¿Cree que no entré de miedo?... Pero ¿Cree que no estoy enfermo?" (24).

These questions evoking fear and sickness immediately burden Quiroga with worries of insanity, further emphasizing the sexual symbolism of this release, given the medical discourses linking craziness to erotic excess. Quiroga's internal preoccupations come to the surface once again in a fixed gaze between the protagonists, as he sees his true self through the eyes of an other:

Cuando bajé los ojos a él, me miraba. Hacia seguramente cinco segundos que me estaba mirando. Detuve inmóvil mi vista en la suya y desde la raíz de la medula me subió un tentacular escalofrió: ¡Pero ya estaba loco! ¡El perseguido vivía ya por su cuenta a flor de ojo! ¡En su mirada no había nada, nada fuera de su fijeza asesina! (24)

Amid this fearful mirrored gazing, Quiroga senses the physical and mental exhaustion that the pursued individual's excessive masturbation has instilled upon him when his tired arm slouches to the bed, leading the narrator to worry that his own craziness has escaped:

Levantó el brazo y lo dejó caer perezosamente sobre la colcha.

—Hace un rato yo lo miraba...

—¡Dejemos!... ¿quiere?...

—Se me había escapado ya el loco, ¿verdad?...

—¡Dejemos, Díaz, dejemos!... (24–25)

This fear of insanity leads Quiroga to suffer from another blockage of verbal expression, showing his continued self-vigilance that has interrupted the fulfillment of his onanistic fantasies. To overcome his fear of self-expression, Quiroga imagines Díaz Vélez encouraging him to fulfill his desires, exposing him once again as a morally contagious "other" buried within Quiroga's psyche, forcing him to act against his will. Quiroga realizes that Díaz Vélez has gotten into bed, not because he is sick, but because he is scared, a fear that is likely related to surveillant gazes of authority spying on him. While observing Díaz Vélez in this secluded space, away from

the public eye, Quiroga imagines that this terrified man will also be able to achieve an explosion, a thought that causes him to violently tremble in an act of orgasmic satisfaction:

¡Si sigue, explota! ¡No va a poder contenerlo! Y entonces mi di clara cuenta de que habíamos tenido razón: ¡Se había metido en la cama de miedo! Lo miré y me estremecí violentamente: ¡ya estaba otra vez! ¡El asesino había remontado vivo a sus ojos fijos en mí! (25)

This creates an image of male bonding as Quiroga fantasizes that he is not alone in his struggle to fight off his erotic impulses: there are other men who are afraid to express their passions for fears of external judgement.

As in the previous encounter in the café where Quiroga saw Díaz Vélez develop outward signs of sickness as he lost control of his passions, after this explosion in bed Díaz Vélez suffers from a series of physical and mental derangements. First, Díaz Vélez hears imaginary voices emerging from his roof that insult him, paralleling Turbosa's behaviors and those of the spermatorrhea patients of Esquirol's and Lallemand's treatises. Díaz Vélez then suffers from "a congestion" that leaves him ghostly pale and immobile with a blank expression on his face and agitated breathing, ailments that were listed as consequences of onanism and spermatorrhea in medical treatises. For instance, when discussing a man plagued with spermatorrhea, Lallemand states that "occasionally he had attacks of congestion in his head; his face became red, he lost his senses, and experienced very varying spasmodic symptoms. After these his face became pale and fainting occurred" (42). Lallemand also claims that "patients affected with spermatorrhea become out of breath; sometimes, even they feel oppressed breathing during quiescence; they frequently sigh also" (276). Similarly, Díaz Vélez's imaginary fears, nervousness, and seclusion to his bed parallel the symptoms of men plagued with spermatorrhea. Rosenman explains that "these men suffer from paralysis, tremors, lassitude, and insomnia; they cannot concentrate, work, or get out of bed; they are nervous, weepy, distracted, afraid" (375). Díaz Vélez also

appears to develop suicidal fantasies, a documented symptom of spermatorrhea in medical manuals and a symptom that plagued Turbosa. Díaz Vélez's suicidal tendencies are exposed when Quiroga meets his double's gaze once again, comparing his stare to one of a cornered animal that has a shotgun pointed at it, creating a joint image of male suffering as Quiroga observes his predicament through this troubled male masturbator (26).

This distraught look of torment in Díaz Vélez's eyes causes Quiroga to flee from his reflection: "Que se mejore, Díaz..." and attempts to leave. Despite Quiroga's effort to rid himself of this sick, sexualized side of his being, Díaz Vélez acts as an imaginary source of moral contagion, extending his infectious hand to Quiroga and asking him to return the following day: "Venga mañana, hoy estoy mal..." Quiroga tries to resist this temptation by stating "Yo creo..." an unfinished statement that is interrupted by Vélez begging for another visit: "No, no, venga; ¡venga!" (26).

When leaving Díaz Vélez's house, Quiroga assures himself that this disturbing theatrical performance in front of the mirror, in which he assumed the role of a delusional and suicidal masturbating man, will finally cure him from his desires. For the first time, Quiroga does not see the street populated with imaginary enemies that scrutinize his behaviors and detect his effeminate masturbatory habits, but he is able to return home peacefully knowing that he has finally divorced himself from his shadow: "Salí sin ver a nadie, sintiendo, al hallarme libre y recordar el horror de aquel hombre inteligentísimo peleando con el techo, que quedaba curado para siempre de gracias psicológicas" (26). However, Quiroga's optimistic hope to be freed from his masturbatory desires disappears when he receives a letter the next day from an anonymous young man who relays a message from Díaz Vélez's aunt asking to see him again: "*Señor: Lucas*

insiste mucho en ver a Vd. Si no le fuera molestado le agradecería pasara hoy por esta su casa” (27).

Just like Quiroga imagined that a group of theater spectators intruded through the door of his own house to judge him in his moment of sexual expression through his own letter writing, when he approaches Díaz Vélez’s house, he immediately notices a group of public spectators in front of his door screaming: “¡Ya viene, ya viene!” (27). The voices of these “spectators” are exposed as Quiroga’s own inner voice when he starts to say to himself that Díaz Vélez has gone crazy, but suddenly is transported to his insane friend’s doorstep: “¡Ya está, ya está loco! —me dije, con angustia de lo que podía haber pasado. Corrí y en un momento estuve en la puerta” (27). When Quiroga arrives to Díaz Vélez’s doorstep, once again he notices that it is dark inside, emphasizing his attempt to keep his true persona hidden from the public eye: “La casa tenía un hondo patio lleno de plantas. Como en él no había luz y sí en el zaguán más allá de éste eran profundas tinieblas” (27). In addition to the recurring connections between darkness and Quiroga’s inability to recognize himself throughout the story, Díaz Vélez’s gloomy home reflects the idea that individuals addicted to onanism preferred to live in secrecy, solitude, and darkness. In regards to a male patient who developed spermatorrhea after incessantly pleasuring himself Lallemand comments that “he fell by degrees into a deep melancholy; depressing thoughts arose before him incessantly; he seemed compelled to seek solitude and darkness” (98).

The darkness of Díaz Vélez’s house, which has allowed him to escape from public gazes and to secretly pleasure himself beneath his bedsheets, ceases to be a protective blanket of privacy when an entire crowd of spectators recognizes that this man has been spending his days naked, in solitude, and that his masturbatory habits have made him insane. Quiroga asks the crowd why they are congregating, and a series of interlocutors respond:

—El mozo que vive allí está loco.

—Anda por el patio...

—Anda desnudo...

—Sale corriendo... (27)

Quiroga depicts Díaz Vélez's aunt as a reflection of his inner turmoil and a revealer of the truth when he sees her sobbing through the window, and she begins to sob even harder when she comes face to face with him: "Me volví, y contra la ventana estaba llorando la pobre dama. Al verme redobló el llanto (27). Vélez's aunt is also the person who reveals to Quiroga that his double has gone insane shortly after he tried to send him something, which was most likely a letter, given the previous correspondence between the two men:

—¡Lucas!... se ha enloquecido!

—¿Cuándo?...

—Hace un rato... salió corriendo de su cuarto... poco después de haberle mandado...

(27–28)

Given the previous connections between the letter, mirror gazing, theatrical self-performance and sexual confession, the fact that Díaz Vélez tried to send Quiroga a letter right before his nude outburst of craziness reveals that Quiroga's repeated rehearsals before the looking glass have forced him to come face to face with his horrifying authentic reflection that he has attempted to keep in the dark. At the beginning of the story, Quiroga stated that he was able to remain oblivious to Díaz Vélez's first name (Lucas) for a long while after they met in Lugones's home: "Lugones nos presentó por el apellido únicamente, de modo que hasta algún tiempo después ignoré su nombre" (3). However, upon observing his own sexual suffering through Díaz Vélez's

tormented aunt in the window, Quiroga begins to identify with Díaz Vélez on a personal level, finally exposing the man's first name.

When hearing Díaz Vélez's first name, the pursued man suddenly bursts forth from the darkness to charge at Quiroga completely naked, displaying outward signs of physical and mental illness. However, Díaz Vélez's rapid pacing is described as mute, further emphasizing that he is an invisible being lurking within Quiroga's psyche: "Del fondo negro nos llegó un lamentable alarido... Sentí una carrera precipitada y sorda, y Díaz Vélez, lívido, los ojos de fuera y completamente desnudo surgió en el zaguán, llevóme por delante, hizo una mueca en la puerta y volvió corriendo al patio" (28). As previously seen, grimacing was a way to fight off one's disagreeable self-image. This grimacing is followed by the spectators shouting for Quiroga to leave because his life is in danger. These spectators are able to pry with their eyes into the dark secrecy of Díaz Vélez's home, showing the blurring of the public and private spheres that has occurred throughout the story for the character's internalization of oppressive medical discourses that provoke a fear of vigilance.

These spectators also tell Quiroga that Díaz Vélez has been pleading for water in agony:

—¡Salga de ahí, lo va a matar! —me gritaron. — Hoy tiró un sillón...

Todos habían vuelto, hundiendo la mirada en las tinieblas.

—¡Oiga otra vez!

Ahora era un lamento de agonía el que llegaba de allá:

—¡Agua!... ¡agua!...

—Ha pedido agua dos veces... (28)

Díaz Vélez's continued begging for water while naked reveals his unfulfilled erotic appetites, given the connection between thirst and sexual desire.³³ This connection also appears with Turbosa's character in *La condesita* when he describes his persecutory dreams to Salces and says:

Ladrones y asesinos que me persiguen; fieras que me acometen; gigantes que me despenan o arrojan de una torre; abismos en que me precipito; mares en que me ahogo; incendios en que me abraso; epidemias en que muero; hambres que padezco; sed que me devora. (134)

Similarly, when Felisa in *La condesita* is suffering from her attack of erotomania, she screams for water, just like Díaz Vélez:

Cesaron las risas de la condesita y aparecieron espasmos violentos en el vientre, en el esófago, en la garganta.

—¡Agua! ¡agua! —gritaba, llevándose las manos al cuello y a la boca como queriendo arrancar algo que la estorbara respirar. (162)

Sadly, in “Los perseguidos” Díaz Vélez's thirst is never satisfied when he throws his empty water jug into the street in desperation and is subsequently detained by the authorities, who manage to find him in the secretive darkness of his *zaguán*. Quiroga's paranoid vision of Díaz Vélez being arrested by the police for fulfilling his passions parallels Esquirol's “pursued” patient who developed fears of the authorities arresting him after indulging in incessant masturbation. This scene could be a hallucination that Quiroga has in his bedroom while attempting to pleasure himself, since Quiroga imagined Díaz Vélez retreating to the *zaguán* of his own home when he was interrupted by internal vigilant stares during his private letter writing. For example, when the imaginary theater goes spying on Quiroga in his house fused

³³ In *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity*, Kathy L. Gaca describes how in Plato's *Republic* the philosopher connected sexual desire to hunger and thirst (26-27).

into the single character of Díaz Vélez, Quiroga stated that his pursued double was too scared to enter his house, leading him to retreat to this space of his house:

«Sabe que lo pienso en este momento, está convencido de ello, pero ya tiene el delirio y no va a entrar!»

Y no entró. Quedó un instante más sin moverse del umbral y se volvió al zaguán. Rápidamente dejé la mesa, acérqueme en puntas de pie a la puerta y asomé la cabeza. «Sabe que voy a hacer esto». Siguió sin embargo con un paso tranquilo y desapareció. (22)

Díaz Vélez's erotic insanity is also depicted as an interior surge that could erupt at any moment and be detected by public spectators, evoking Quiroga's previous attempts to stave off his strange impulses to eat candies, drink coffee, spit in his hand, "hacer una cosa de loco," burst out into hysterical laughter, spill his private thoughts into a private letter, and release his inner tension through an explosion that would lead to a shameful process of public scrutiny. Given these parallels, Díaz Vélez's outburst of insanity that explodes from the darkness of his home into the public sphere can be depicted as a fearful trial of the self, in which Quiroga fantasizes about fulfilling his forbidden sexual impulses through Díaz Vélez's transgressive persona but simultaneously contemplates the consequences that he could suffer for failing to conform to the masculine ideal.

Just like Turbosa, Díaz Vélez ends up in a mental asylum for his excessive masturbation, which has caused him so much guilt that he has developed a dangerous form of persecutory paranoia. Quiroga visits Díaz Vélez in the mental asylum and observes him being interrogated by physicians, displaying how his trial before the mirror has taken on a curative purpose. Díaz Vélez asks Quiroga to visit him frequently because he desires to be in the company of someone "intelligent," who can "cure" him, unlike the physicians who force him to remember things he wishes to shut out of his memory: "Lo que consiguen es agriarme, suscitándome ideas de las

cuales no quiero acordarme. Estoy seguro de que en una compañía un poco más inteligente me curaré del todo” (29). The intelligence that Díaz Vélez senses in Quiroga evokes the repeated idea in the story that interacting with the mirror can lead one to develop a sense of knowledge and self-awareness, while allowing them to correct their faults.

However, this friendly conversation is interrupted one day when Quiroga finds Díaz Vélez discussing his case with a medical intern:

Un día hallé con él a un médico interno. Díaz me hizo una ligera guiñada y me presentó gravemente a su tutor. Charlamos bien como tres amigos juiciosos. No obstante, notaba en Díaz Vélez — con cierto placer, lo confieso — cierta endiablada ironía en todo lo que decía a su médico. Encamino hábilmente la conversación a los pensionistas y pronto puso en tablas su propio caso (30).

When Díaz Vélez winks at Quiroga and introduces him to his case manager it illustrates that Quiroga has cured himself of masturbatory addiction by running through this imaginary scenario in his head, in which he became a spectator and judge of himself through the persona of Díaz Vélez. Another clue that Quiroga has been engaging in a process of medical self-diagnosis is when he states that Díaz Vélez “puso en tablas su propio caso,” evoking the scene at the beginning of the story when Díaz Vélez was seeking medical assistance at the pharmacy, acting as if he was not the sick one, relating his anecdote from a third-person perspective. When Díaz Vélez senses Quiroga’s intelligence while transforming into his own medic, Quiroga too notes his intelligence and simultaneously remembers a horrible time of his life: “Tenía el deseo de saber qué pensaba el médico de esa extralucidez. En otra época yo la había apreciado a costa del desorden de todos mis nervios” (30). This remembrance causes Quiroga to glance at Díaz Vélez’s medic, illustrating the vigilant medical gaze that lurks within his psyche and inhibits him from fulfilling his sexual desires: “Echéle una ojeada, pero el hombre no parecía haber sentido su influencia. Un momento después salíamos” (31).

When Quiroga is leaving Díaz Vélez's room with the doctor, he replaces the tempting, feline gaze of his masturbating double with the physician's interrogating stare, serving as a threatening reminder of the consequences he could face for pleasuring himself. In fact, the medic makes sure to remind Quiroga before he leaves Díaz Vélez that his masturbatory indulgences could make him insane. This medical gaze provokes fear in Quiroga when the doctor tells him "¡vea, vea!," and he is instructed to observe his double's sick, pale face and his troubled eyes that are filled with terror and hatred, staring straight at him as they have several times before: "Díaz Vélez, pálido, los ojos dilatados de terror y de odio, se acercaba cautelosamente a la puerta, como seguramente lo había hecho siempre — *mirándome*" (51). This final locking of eyes in the doorway hints to the reader that Quiroga will remain a prisoner of his desires and that medical self-judgement and self-vigilance will prove unsuccessful in fighting off his natural autoerotic urges that society condemns.

What makes Horacio Quiroga's "Los perseguidos" unique from the other texts analyzed in the dissertation is that the reader is provided with a glimpse into the complex psychological suffering of the male masturbator. While Turbosa's masturbatory crisis was told from a third-person perspective in *La condesita*, the character Quiroga relates his dilemma from a first-person perspective, establishing a more intimate connection between his character and the reader. This is also the only text of the dissertation that explores the theme of masturbation directly through two male protagonists, without displacing the male crisis of sexuality onto a female character. This perspective shows us that Quiroga was attempting to establish a form of male bonding not only between the two principal protagonists of his texts, but also between the characters and his male readers. By eliminating the female presence in this story, readers are forced to focus solely on the male plight in nineteenth-century society, while being encouraged to sympathize and

identify with men who suffered from a severe crisis of identity for being pressured to conceal their natural desires.

CHAPTER 3: CONFRONTING THE SHADOW: FE/MALE DESIRE, SICKNESS AND FE/MALE OBLITERATION IN HORACIO QUIROGA'S "LA MENINGITIS Y SU SOMBRA" (1917)

While in "Los perseguidos" Quiroga's repressed mirror reflection and infectious epistolary correspondent is a man presented as effeminate and suffering from persecutory paranoia, in "La meningitis y su sombra" the male protagonist's masturbating double is depicted as a delirious, bedridden woman named María Elvira. She is plagued with a sickness that is first described as meningitis, later as "una sencilla obsesión," and finally as a case of "amor propio" (136, 151). As in "Los perseguidos," the author cryptically veils the onanistic indulgences of the protagonist under an illness that physicians linked to solitary pleasure in medical treatises, while providing subtle clues that the girl's diagnosis of meningitis should not be taken at face value. Like the character Quiroga's fantastical encounter with Díaz Vélez in "Los perseguidos," the nightly meeting between the male protagonist, a young engineer named Carlos Durán, and his feminine shadow initiates in correspondence between himself and a male friend, Luis María Funes. Similar to the imaginary contagious letters in "Los perseguidos," Carlos Durán's reading of his friend's letter transports him to the house of a sick individual suffering from masturbatory temptations, where he observes a repressed external image of himself in a dreamlike encounter. The reading of this letter causes Durán to explore the buried erotic desires lingering in his psyche, forging an imaginary meeting later that night between himself and his friend's sister, María Elvira. Durán becomes angrily confused when Funes and María Elvira's physician Ayestarain persistently urge him to sit by her bed each night and observe her feverish, delusional

attacks of passion that occur during her sleeping hours, since they believe that his presence will serve a therapeutic purpose that can cure the girl of her mysterious illness. Despite his reluctance to fulfill the strange task at hand, Durán agrees to supervise this woman, alongside Funes, Ayestarain, and María Elvira's mother, all of whom I interpret as mirror images or alternative identities of Durán who allow him to become a spectator of himself in a nocturnal drama that occurs in his dream.

In this text, Durán repeatedly describes María Elvira's gaze while he observes her dreaming in bed, and he depicts this eye contact in terms of radiating light, romantic bonding, and feverish desire. These images are significant to my discussion of mirroring in the text. Shadi Bartsch illustrates how Plato depicted a man's coming to self-knowledge through mirror gazing in his work *Phaedrus* as an erotic interaction with an imaginary beloved, whose eyes would reflect light back onto the subject. This idea parallels Durán's eventual recognition of his hidden authentic self through his light-emitting ocular interchanges with María Elvira as she lies in bed immersed in an onanistic fantasy:

The vision of beauty is both an erotically tactile phenomenon and a factor in the growth of self-knowledge, and for the beloved of *Phaedrus* in particular, self-knowledge demands one step further: such a quest relies on a mirror through which you, as the seeking subject, are finally penetrated with the reflected rays of your eyes. (Bartsch 80)

Bartsch further emphasizes the idea that the gaze of the beloved can serve as a mirror for a man to see his reflection and to undergo a process of self-improvement:

The stream of beauty that comes from the beloved, passing through the eyes of the lover and then reflecting backward and outward toward the beloved again, acts like a film of simulacra hitting a mirror: it shows the beloved's beauty back to him via the eyes of the lover, and there, in the beloved, this vision nurtures and increases the wings of his soul. In short, his growth comes from the mirrored sight of himself, as reflected in his lover's eyes, and for the beloved, love—and the desire for self-betterment—arises from a reflected view of the self, lurking under the appearance of mutuality. (81–82)

In addition to allowing a man to see his mirror image, the erotic gaze of the beloved can also provoke feelings of pain in him as he becomes objectified and injured by this alluring stare:

Contexts that have to do with erotic looking or aggressive looking also meld the languages of vision and wounding to describe the effect of being the object of the gaze, even without invocation of the idea of the evil eye. In erotic looking, the most common conceit is that the image of the beloved is what penetrates the eye, so that wounding and gazing become linked with the eye not as aggressor, but as a victim; in other contexts, the eye is once again figured as the source of damaging emissions that penetrate or attack the body on which they are trained. (Bartsch 148)

Throughout “La meningitis,” Durán depicts María Elvira as an incarnation of this imaginary beloved whose luminous gaze projects a painful yet tantalizing eroticized image of himself. Durán provides clues to the narcissistic, autoerotic, and imaginary nature of his love for María Elvira by representing her as a feverish, sexually tempting shadow that appears to him in his subconscious sleeping hours and by describing her as an artificial love, labeling her as “mi vano amor nocturno” and his “amor al parecer” (142, 150). Durán's desire to possess the beloved, a self that is distorted as other, continually ends up as a sterile, solipsistic play of mirrors that inhibits an amorous bonding. At the very end of the story, he fantasizes about achieving a marriage with his feminine shadow, a union that would end his sense of self-alienation and finally make him complete.

As in “Los perseguidos,” this story explores the painful division of the male self, as the protagonist struggles to fulfill his natural passions that were condemned by society. Throughout the text, this splitting of the self is demonstrated through Carlos Durán's internalized medical

gaze that pressures him to reject his “unhealthy” passions, his prolonged reluctance to recognize himself in this delirious female other, his frustrated urge to throw himself into the mirror during a crisis of identity, and the final embarrassment that he feels upon realizing that he and his repressed feminine shadow are one and the same, while he dances with María Elvira on a dance floor populated with imaginary spectators judging him. As in *La condesita* and “Los perseguidos,” in “La meningitis y su sombra” there is a secret male desire to embody this feminine masturbator who has rejected social norms to fulfill her own wants; however, upon personifying this female other in a theatrical performance of the self, the male protagonist suffers from extreme emotions of guilt and self-alienation for failing to conform to standards of manhood.

María Elvira’s “wounding gaze” not only reveals Durán’s self-crisis upon attempting to dispel his “feminine” side that incarnates erotic desire but María Elvira’s character also serves as a mirror for men to contemplate their worries that female masturbation would lead to a rejection of the male, a theme that we observed in *La condesita*.³⁴ María Elvira’s meningitis is a cover for a more dangerous “obsession” that parallels autoeroticism. Meningitis was linked to self-pleasure in medical treatises of the time. In her essay “El discurso de la higiene física y moral en la narrativa femenina,” Lou Charnon-Deutsch describes how nineteenth-century physicians linked female onanism to this disease: “Pareciera que la perversión sexual a su vez podía derivar en infartos, parálisis, meningitis, tuberculosis, aneurismas, epilepsia y cáncer” (179). Likewise, a text titled *The Psychopathy of Love: The Abuses, Aberrations, and Crimes of the Genital Sense* (1900), an English translation of a work written by a French army surgeon by the name of Dr. Jacobus X, lists meningitis as a symptom of female masturbation on more than one occasion and

³⁴ Other aspects of this theme will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

provides a specific example of a young girl who developed this sickness due to her solitary indulgences: “When she was alone, she placed herself astride on the edge of a chair to masturbate herself. An acute meningitis quickly carried her off, which demonstrated the morbid nature of this extreme precocious salacity” (46). In his treatise, *Anatomie comparée du cerveau* (1827), the French physician Étienne Renaud Augustin Serres (1786–1868) also argued that masturbation “is the cause of meningitis” (Foucault 239).

Throughout “La meningitis,” Quiroga provides subtle clues that it is not actually meningitis that is afflicting María Elvira: “Pero he aquí que la joven hermosa se enferma, de meningitis o cosa por el estilo” (140). Later, the doctor Ayestarain questions his own diagnosis of meningitis by stating: “¿Meningitis? —me dijo—. ¡Sabe Dios lo que es! Al principio parecía eso, y anoche también... Hoy ya no tenemos idea de lo que será” (140). Another clue to the underlying masturbatory significance of María Elvira’s meningitis, which will be subsequently discussed, is the fact that her physician labels her sickness as a type of monomaniacal delirium, a simple feverish obsession, and a case of self-love.

When María Elvira is immersed in a state of delirium provoked by her “meningitis,” she completely ignores Durán’s physical presence by her bedside each night and renders him a mere figment of her imagination to fuel her autoerotic fantasies. Garth highlights the idea that María Elvira obliterates Durán’s being in her state of hallucinatory dreaming:

The scenario is replayed every night during María Elvira’s illness, and Durán finds himself gradually falling in love “with a shadow,” a woman whose eyes and devotion have captivated him but who has no existence outside her delirium. Once María Elvira has recovered from her delirium, Durán finds himself in an untenable position. Having fallen for her, he realizes that he now has no existence for María Elvira. (119)

However, Garth argues that this story ends up molding María Elvira into prescribed roles of womanhood, while stressing that she is a passive instrument through which Durán can reconcile his own identity:

The male hero's Romantic self-realization—and Durán openly refers to himself as the hero of the tale—requires the female submission to bourgeois duty. Once again Quiroga's male protagonist takes stock of his sexual desires and the limitations they place on him because a woman has forced him to do so. The price of this establishment of the carnal male heroic through womanly self-abnegation, however, is life in the shadows. (102)

While I agree that María Elvira's character allows Durán to assess his own sexual desires and that she does help him come to terms with his repressed self, I do not view her as a submissive woman. Instead, I interpret María Elvira as the active agent of her own fantasies who renders Durán dispensable through the powers of her imagination. Similar to how Aurora of *La condesita* was disillusioned with her male suitors because of her threatening artistic imagination that allowed her to rework paintings and sculptures to produce false male ideals that satisfied her desires, María Elvira completely ignores Carlos Durán's presence by her bedside and alters him into a shadow, or a phantasm that drives her passions. After María Elvira snaps out of her masturbatory fantasy, Durán's real presence fails to be of any use to her, and she is depicted as a cruel flirt who rejects his advances on the dance floor and confesses that she has absolutely no recollection of confessing her love for him in her dreams.

My analysis of María Elvira coincides more with Ricardo Vargas Durán's discussion of her character in "La forma semiótica artística-textual de decir y hacer lo in(debido): *La meningitis y su sombra* de Horacio Quiroga." Vargas Durán describes María Elvira as "fría y calculadora, caprichosa," while arguing that she displays "esa actitud burlona, cínica y mesuradamente sádica de la mujer que sabe que es vista y deseada" (47). In addition, he states that "el patriarcalismo se derrumba en un acto desesperado ante la mirada fría de María Elvira"

and that “Carlos Durán se ve obligado y hasta sometido a los caprichos enfermizos de María Elvira” (20). Vargas Durán argues that María Elvira is a sexually desiring woman who feels pressured to hide her passions due to societal constraints for women: “María Elvira Funes, la típica mujer caótica y como su madre la llama, la que dice disparates, la que con “su enfermedad” demuestra los pocos avances o derechos reconocidos pues la enfermedad no está en su cuerpo, sino en la sociedad enferma que la restringe a satisfacer sus deseos (42). However, María Elvira learns to satisfy her desires by manipulating the patriarchal order:

Sin duda alguna, María Elvira utiliza más recursos para manipular el medio social y ponerlo a su favor, es decir, desarrolla una serie de enmascaramientos para engañar al otro patriarcal, pues ella desea gozar de los placeres sexuales de un hombre que en cierto sentido le es prohibido, inhibiendo a realizar cualquier acercamiento con él con actitudes distantes. (Vargas Durán 23)

Similarly, despite Carlos Durán’s fantasy of possessing the cruel temptress María Elvira, Vargas Durán mentions that the doors—“el acceso al coito”—are shut to him at the end of the story (55).

In my analysis, I elaborate on these ideas by showing how María Elvira’s continuous rejection of Durán leads him to experience emotions of worthlessness and impotence, and to finally envision himself as a nonexistent being as he dances with his beloved, sadly recognizing that he has never been anything more than the “meningitis’s shadow,” or in other words, a delirious projection of the girl’s secretive masturbatory illness. The ability of María Elvira’s gaze to cause these feelings of worthlessness and invisibility in Durán during her moments of autoerotic delirium can be further explored by considering a passage in Lauren Rosewarne’s *Masturbation in Pop Culture: Screen, Society, Self*: “masturbation showcases a woman’s ability to sexually pleasure herself without a man. That woman can get themselves off without a penis—and in turn be sexually independent—can be read as threatening to men who attach value to their prowess as lovers” (13). This fear of women choosing masturbation over male sexuality was

prevalent in nineteenth-century Uruguay. In *El tratado de la imbecilidad del país* (1900–2), Uruguayan writer Julio Herrera y Reissig states that

El onanismo mujerial ha tomado en nuestra tierra un incremento prodigioso. Tiene que ser así. Las mujeres, obsedidas por la honrita, con terror al embarazo, se rehúsan a los hombres, y prefieren ser devoradas en el silencio de la alcoba por vicios solitarios a que se entregan las calenturientas. (279)

Similarly, as mentioned in the introduction, in Bernardo Etchepare's treatise "Desequilibrio mental, hiperestesia e inversión sexual" (1906), the Uruguayan physician presents a case study of a female patient addicted to onanism who could not experience "el más mínimo placer con el hombre," preferring to seek alternative outlets of satisfaction such as masturbation with the hand or bottles, receiving cunnilingus from her pet dog, and injecting herself with morphine (719).

The connection between female self-pleasure and male rejection can be observed in several other of Quiroga's works. In "La llama," the young protagonist Berenice sits on Richard Wagner's lap, initially flattering the pianist, but later horrifies him when his music transports her into an autoerotic reverie that leads her to violently convulse with orgasmic excitement. While being immersed in this fantasy, Berenice completely ignores Wagner's presence, closing her eyes and harming his body with uncontrollable spasms of self-satisfaction that his music has inspired.³⁵ In "El almohadón de plumas" (1917), the male protagonist Jordán is married to a frigid wife, who renders her husband invisible through her autoerotic dreams, since he is depicted as an undetectable presence who circles around his spouse's bedside watching her enjoy the pleasures he could never afford her.³⁶ In "El solitario," another frigid wife demands that her

³⁵ "Y la partitura seguía, subía. Yo mismo sentía mi propio cuerpo molido, destrozado, golpeado sin piedad. Y entre mis brazos, también sacudida en una remoción sin fondo y sin piedad, Berenice temblaba aun de rato en rato, con bruscas sacudidas que le hacían abrir un momento los ojos y mirar, para cerrarlos de nuevo" (383).

³⁶ This theme is discussed in my article for *Decimonónica*, "The Icy Bride and the Invisible Husband: Shivering Solitary Pleasure in Horacio Quiroga's 'El almohadón de plumas.'"

“inert” husband craft her a phallic substitute, which she uses to admire herself in front of the mirror. The male protagonist Nébel of Quiroga’s “Estación de amor” (1917) discovers that his longtime love interest Lidia never permitted him to touch her body due to the autonomous satisfaction she found in compulsive self-pleasure, which is hidden behind her dangerous morphine addiction.³⁷ Quiroga’s story “Tenía la palidez” (1901) deals with a sick young girl whose piano playing allows her to escape reality and delve into her own world of private fantasies. As the girl plays the piano, she almost faints fantasizing about young “caballeros de frac” casting “disturbing” glances at her. When describing the girl’s autoerotic reverie, the narrator mentions the presence of a “shadow” offering her a bouquet of flowers and gloves, suggesting that this shadow is a representation of her male suitor who has been rendered invisible by this woman’s onanistic pleasures and who miserably offers her gloves to curb her self-indulgent practices (39).³⁸

Similar to how the female protagonist of “Tenía la palidez” uses her imagination and artistic abilities to replace men, in “La meningitis” the rejection of the male is specifically related

³⁷ One night when Nébel unexpectedly enters Lydia’s room while she is alone in bed, he hears a quick rustle of clothes and then feels warmth radiating from her body followed by “una honda sacudida,” behaviors that suggest she was pleasuring herself. Her masturbatory practices become even clearer when he states that she had already experienced love before he arrived, causing him to experience feelings of rejection: “Luego, inerte al lado de aquella mujer que ya había conocido el amor antes que él llegara, subió de lo más recóndito del alma de Nébel, el santo orgullo de su adolescencia de no haber tocado jamás, de no haber robado ni un beso siquiera, a la criatura que lo miraba con radiante candor” (34-35).

³⁸ “Tenía la palidez elegante y mórbida de las señoras desmayadas. Parecía una rosa enferma que una mano insensata hubiera abandonado sobre las teclas del piano. Era blanca y lejanamente rubia. Adorable en sí misma pasó envuelta en la ola de miradas inquietas de los caballeros de frac. Tenía la palidez de las caricias, que, ya era muy tarde, son apenas posibles [...] Sentada al piano, su mirada fue tras las cortinados de Amberes, más allá de los jarrones japoneses que se reían silenciosamente y de soslayo. Fue más allá de todo esto, más allá todavía de la sombra que daban un bouquet y un par de guantes... sollozó” (39).

to the powers of the female mind to produce an image of her own desire. In *Keats, Modesty and Masturbation*, Rachel Schulkins describes how women used imaginative masturbatory reverie to fulfill their desires that could not be satiated in reality:

Female onanism (referring to physical as well as mental withdrawal), in Keats's poetry, incorporates a sense of refuge and mental autonomy that springs from the inability to achieve satisfaction in reality. It is embraced and enacted to gratify desires in the mind that cannot be obtained by ordinary means but only through the imagination. (69)

María Elvira uses dreaming to escape from social obligations that pressure her to hide her desires and to enter into the bond of matrimony with Carlos Durán. To fulfill her own wants, María Elvira casts a shadow from her imagination to create an image of her ideal lover, evoking Pliny's theory on the origins of painting. In "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism," Robert Rosenblum states that

In both Occidental and Oriental cultures, one of the oldest and most pervasive legends of the origin of painting involves the observation of a shadow and the tracing of its outline. Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History*, mentions just such a legend, claiming that while authorities are not in exact accord about the beginnings of the art of painting, they all at least agree that it began with the outlining of a man's shadow. (279)

In particular, in this legend it was a woman who traced this shadow to create a replica of her absent lover, which was later converted into a sculpture:

In discussing the origin of clay modeling, Pliny tells the story of a Corinthian maid whose inventiveness was motivated by love. Knowing that her lover was to leave the country, she traced the shadow that her lover's face cast upon the wall by lamplight. The story then goes on to tell how this mimetic image, which was to solace the Corinthian maid in her lonely days to come, was further improved by her potter father, Butades, who filled the outline with clay and baked it with his other pottery. (281)

While this male fear that women's imaginative desires would render men dispensable has already been broached in my analysis of *La condesita*, what is unique about "La meningitis" is that the reader is shown how female autoerotic fantasy provokes in men psychological torment,

feelings of worthlessness and humiliation, as well as a crisis of selfhood.³⁹ In this story, Carlos Durán explains his sufferings firsthand through a type of diary entry, while depicting María Elvira as a mirrored spectator who sits by his side during the writing process, reading each word line for line, observing his feelings, and sharing in his inner turmoil.⁴⁰ This may suggest that men wanted women to understand this crisis of masculinity that was partially provoked by their sudden cold, cruel treatment of the opposite sex as they began to pursue their own autonomous wants.

To display this crisis of masculinity, Carlos Durán is also the artist of his own shadow, which projects images of sickness, desire, feminization, and rejection by the opposite sex. In *Grasping Shadows: The Dark Side of Literature, Painting, Photography, and Film*, William Chapman Sharpe explains how the shadow can expose hidden truths about one's being:

Whether regarded as an accurate record of a person's exterior, or the most revealing manifestation of inner being, the shadow has established itself as an essential part of representation—not only in a trompe l'oeil sense, but especially because it promises, even today, to show what otherwise cannot be shown, the intangible essence of a person. (83)

Sharpe argues that these truths incarnated in the shadow are revealed through a process of gazing, which is precisely what will happen with Durán when he enters into María Elvira's bedroom and envisions that she is a shadow surrounded by a plethora of scrutinizing eyes that peer back at him:

It is important to recognize that both visual and conceptual processes are involved in evaluating shadows. The initial perception itself involves some combination of thought (mental or visual) seeing, to determine whether the shadows are connected to their casters

³⁹ This idea will be further discussed in chapter 6, but it will be related to a husband's feelings of impotence as he realizes that his wife has been dreaming of a male phantasm, who acts as his imaginary rival, with an ability to satisfy his spouse emotionally and physically better than he ever could.

⁴⁰ Nicolás A. Bratosevich asserts that "La meningitis" "es un relato concebido en forma de diario personal" (32).

or not. Then from this rather accessible “physical” category we move into a more challenging visual and semantic one, as we decide how the shadow functions along the “me”/ “not-me” axis. (Sharpe 77–78)

What we will see in this double-sided shadow projection in “La meningitis” is a joint male and female masturbatory fantasy that occurs within a shared dream of self-spectatorship. Both María Elvira and Carlos Durán are artists crafting their own shadows, making this story an expression of both female and male desire, a mirroring or unfolding that will reveal a threatening form of female autonomy alongside a crisis of male selfhood. In this story, the crisis of the male self will be caused by a woman’s independence and imaginative powers that lead to an obliteration of the male being, as well as the suppression of male desires through the internalized medical gaze of the time.

Carlos Durán’s painful confrontation with María Elvira, his mirror image in “La meningitis,” begins when he receives a confusing letter from his friend Luis María Funes, which is immediately followed by a conversation with the physician Ayesterain. Durán mulls: “No vuelvo de mi sorpresa. ¿Qué diablos quieren decir la carta de Funes, y luego la charla del médico? Confieso no entender una palabra de todo esto” (121). Durán is even more baffled when he reads the letter from Funes, upon realizing that it is an invitation for him to come over to his house later that night; however, there is no particular motive stated for this nocturnal visit:

Estimado amigo:
Si no tiene inconveniente, le ruego que pase esta noche por casa.
Si tengo tiempo iré a verlo antes. Muy suyo
--Luis María Funes. (134)

This opening scene of Durán receiving a letter from his acquaintance asking him to come over later that night is a foreshadowing that the protagonist will be confronted with his inner demons in a state of dreaming and transform into a spectator and judge of himself, just as we have seen in the previous texts. As mentioned in my analysis of *La condesita* and “Los perseguidos,”

reading or writing a letter is a metaphor for introspection, self-analysis, and forbidden sexual confession. However, while in the previous texts the protagonists have a close relationship with their epistolary partner, in Durán's case he claims to barely know his friend Funes, while stating that he has been to his house only once before. This visit to a seemingly hysterical woman's home that occurs in a subconscious state of dreaming—which will not only occur in this particular story, but also in Quiroga's "Los guantes de goma," to be discussed in chapter 4—evokes the house/body metaphor in the nineteenth century. In her article "The Metaphor of the Body as a House in 19th Century English Novels," Ioana Boghian asserts that "19th century writers described their characters 'architecturally', i.e. produced architectural bodies—particularly using words similar to those used in describing their houses" (5). Boghian also argues that the house is not only a metaphor for one's body, but also one's psyche:

The mind is dependent on the body to grasp the meanings of the outside world and, together with the body, forms the boundary between the inner and the outer space. It seems that the mind is the most suited "space" of the human body to be described in metaphorical terms related to the house, or to certain rooms of the house. (3)

As will be shown, when Durán goes to María Elvira's house there will be a strange mind/body transference between the two characters, suggesting that this woman is a repressed mirror image projected from Durán's psyche. When receiving this invitation to Funes's home, Durán suddenly remembers that Funes had two beautiful sisters whom he wishes to see. As will soon be revealed, the one sister, María Elvira, is the motive of Durán's nightly visit. By describing Durán's desire to see Funes's sister, Quiroga provides a subtle clue to the reader that he will be engaging in a dialogue with himself when interacting with María Elvira.⁴¹

⁴¹ Romantic male writers used the sister as a mirror image of their soul and a repository for their hidden emotions. In the article "Incest as Romantic Symbol," P. L. Thorslev states that "the two souls are, then, like brother and sister, identical, so to speak, mirror images each of the other in all except their separate sexes; and therefore they share a world of feelings and moods, thoughts

There is a clue that a physician will be involved in Durán's nocturnal introspection and will subject him to the same panoptic medical gaze that troubled Quiroga in "Los perseguidos" and Turbosa in *La condesita*. Durán compares his distant friendship with Funes to his vague relationship with the medic, both of whom he will interact with later that night when observing his reflection: "Y he aquí que una hora después, en el momento en que salía de casa, llega el doctor Ayestarain, otro sujeto de quien he sido condiscípulo en el colegio nacional, y con quien tengo en suma la misma relación a lo lejos que con Funes" (121). All of the interlocutors that appear in Durán's dream are familiar yet unfamiliar, highlighting the difficulties that one experiences in recognizing his or her own reflection in the mirror: "By simulating resemblance, the mirror dissimulates another truth, one that can emerge only surreptitiously, in a fearsome difference and obliquity: 'dubious resemblance' or troubling strangeness, the mirror is a mirror of otherness" (Melchior-Bonnet 224).

This externalizing judgement of the self through the mirror occurs when the physician Ayestarain shows up to interrogate Durán about his relationship with María Elvira. When Ayestarain asks Durán about this woman, he immediately gets frustrated and exclaims: "¡Ah, ah! ¡Por aquí andaba la cosa, entonces! ¡María Elvira Funes, hermana de Luis María Funes, todos en María! ¡Pero si apenas conocía a esa persona!" (135). By sensing Ayestarain's illusory judgmental gaze in this interrogation, Durán experiences a pressure to confess his secret autoerotic relationship with María Elvira: "No, permítame —me interrumpió—. Le aseguro que es una cosa bastante seria... ¿Me podría dar palabra de compañero de que no hay nada entre Vds.

and ideals" (54). Likewise, In *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne K. Mellor states that "for Byron and Percy Shelley, romantic love is narcissistic: the beloved is a mirror image, in a finer tone, of the lover, what Shelley in his "Essay on Love" called the anti-type. The lover worships an idealized version of himself, incestuously projected as his sister" (195).

dos?” (135). Durán responds to the doctor, telling him that his only interactions with María Elvira have occurred a couple of times at “her own house,” continuing the house/body metaphor to show how male psychic and corporeal anxieties are played out through the visit to a female body/house (135). Although Durán can simply negate this relationship with his suppressed feminine reflection, his anxieties come to the surface through the medic’s expression of disbelief and his questioning gaze that remains fixed on the protagonist: “Es raro, profundamente raro... —murmuró el hombre, mirándome fijamente” (135).

To get Durán to confront his suppressed sexual passions and worries, Ayesterein suggests that he meet María Elvira at night, a time when he would be dreaming, or in other words, immersed in an involuntary state of action, where his willpower would be suspended and he would unknowingly explore the hidden facets of his inner being that have been troubling him:

[...] ¿Quiere esperar hasta esta noche? Con dos palabras podrá comprender que el asunto es de todo, menos de broma... La persona de quien hablamos está gravemente enferma, casi a la muerte... ¿Entiende algo? —concluyó, mirándome bien a los ojos. Yo hice lo mismo con él durante un rato. (135)

This mutual, prolonged and silent gaze between Durán and the medic suggests that this is a conflictive self-dialogue within his mind that will expose the inner workings of his masculine crisis.

Following this mute interrogation, one last time the doctor tries to convince Durán to visit the sick girl at night to understand the severity of the situation: “le he dicho que el asunto es bien serio... Por fin esta noche sabremos algo. ¿Irá allá? Es indispensable” (136). Given this supposed urgency, Durán finally agrees and hopes that this visit will unlock the mysterious connection that exists between himself and this girl he barely knows, an enigma that has been perplexing him the entire day, following the reading of his letter from Funes: “Y he aquí por qué he pasado todo el día preguntándome como un idiota qué relación puede existir entre la enfermedad gravísima de

una hermana de Funes, que apenas me conoce, y yo, que la conozco apenas” (136). The reading of his friend’s letter has given way to a process self-questioning that will occur throughout the rest of the story by way of his interactions with María Elvira.

After agreeing to meet María Elvira that night, the text suddenly jumps to Durán describing his time at the sick girl’s residence as an almost magical and spiritual introspective journey: “Vengo de lo de Funes. Es la cosa más extraordinaria que haya visto en mi vida. Metempsicosis, espiritismos, telepatías y demás absurdos del mundo interior, no son nada en comparación de este mi propio absurdo en que me veo envuelto” (136). First of all, by stating that this situation deals with “absurdities of the internal world” and “his own nonsense,” Durán hints that the doctor’s continued insistence on him visiting María is a personal matter tormenting his soul that needs to be addressed. However, before embarking on this self-reflective voyage, Durán must undergo a sort of mystical out-of-body experience in which he becomes a spectator of himself through his observances of the sick female patient. This fantastical transference of identities between Durán and María Elvira is implied through the mention of the three occult nineteenth-century sciences in the above passage.

Metempsychosis involves the “transmigration of the soul at death into another living form” (Herring 82). Spiritism involved a belief in reincarnation, while also stressing the ability for humans to communicate with the deceased members of the spirit world (Ferrera).⁴² Finally, telepathy was defined by “forms of occult relation or communication between people at a distance” (Luckhurst 1). The combination of these sciences serves as a precursor to Durán’s

⁴² In his article “Heterodoxias espirituales y utopías en el siglo XIX español,” Carlos Ferrera states that “el espiritismo creyó en unos casos en la reencarnación y en otros en que el muerto iba a un mundo mejor, pero siempre sostuvo la posibilidad de contactar con los espíritus de los fallecidos” (235).

usurpation of the role of a masturbating female patient who allows him to communicate with a shadow projection of his soul in an imaginary spiritual encounter.

This supernatural transfer of identities prepares Durán to express his inner secrets and anxieties, which is evidenced when he arrives to María Elvira's home and Funes immediately brings him to his writing desk, the same activity that serves as a metaphor for solitary erotic confession in *La condesita* and "Los perseguidos." The medic enters to disturb Durán's desired moment of privacy to recount his observances of María Elvira's masturbatory sickness.

Ayesterain tells Durán how María Elvira fell ill after having a cold bath, which was actually a cure in masturbation manuals of the time for female patients to curb their uncontrollable sexual appetites. Doussin-Dubreuil says that cold baths are recommended for masturbating girls, but that they must be used with precaution, as they can cause painful disruptions in one's nerves, paralleling María Elvira's onset of sickness after her chilly bath:

se prescriben con el objeto de fortificar el sistema muscular y nervioso, y de concentrar el calor natural que se disipa con gran profusión; sin embargo de lo ventajosos que puedan ser estos baños, se deben usar con mucha precaución, porque la naturaleza es enemiga de lo no acostumbrado, y un baño muy frío irrita y ocasiona en algunos sujetos escalofríos insoportables, a que se juntan muchas veces afecciones dolorosos de los nervios. (224)

María Elvira spends the entire night fatigued with a severe headache, a consequence of masturbatory pleasure in medical manuals, and the same ailment that plagues the male protagonist of "Los guantes de goma."⁴³ In addition, Doussin-Dubreuil mentions how a masturbating female patient became extremely fatigued after engaging in solitary pleasures:

"Esta niña tomaba con las dos manos la mesa delante de la cual se sentaba, y la inclinaba en

⁴³ Doussin-Dubreuil mentions a female patient who develops "dolores de cabeza, una agitación que continúa aun durante el sueño, corvadura de todo el cuerpo, y de una piel seca y quemante" (154). Tissot describes a letter from a male masturbator who had severe headaches until he started giving up masturbation (229).

seguida adelante y atrás tan largo tiempo, que llegaba a ponerse muy encarnada, y después caía en un estado de fatiga y laxitud que la dejaba inmóvil” (37).

The next morning, María Elvira’s symptoms give way to fever, a symbol of burning passion. In *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, Terry Castle reveals the sexual symbolism of fever in eighteenth-century literature: “In Restoration and early eighteenth-century writing, for example, images of barometers and thermometers typically appear in highly rhetorical evocations of feminine desire, or in passages describing the mercurial love moods brought on by the presence of women” (26). María Elvira’s uncontrollable heated desires worsen during the night, giving way to a delirious form of obsession, which provokes a secretive anxiety that kills her inside:

El delirio, sobre todo, franco y prolongado a más no pedir. Concomitantemente, una ansiedad angustiosa, imposible de calmar. Las proyecciones psicológicas del delirio, por decirlo así, se erigieron y giraron desde la primera noche alrededor de un solo asunto, uno solo, pero que absorbe su vida entera. —Es una obsesión —prosiguió Ayestarain—, una sencilla obsesión a 41°. La enferma tiene constantemente fijos los ojos en la puerta, pero no llama a nadie. Su estado nervioso se resiente de esa muda ansiedad que la está matando, y desde ayer hemos pensado con mis colegas en calmar eso... (136)

María Elvira’s guilty delirious fixation is another indication of her onanistic imaginings. In his article “Figuras femeninas de la desviación sexual: España, 1850–1920,” Francisco Vázquez García highlights how turn-of-the-century physicians described female masturbation in terms of a nymphomaniacal delirium: “La masturbación femenina, a diferencia de la masculina, carecía propiamente hablando de una entidad *nosográfica* propia; era a la vez el síntoma y la causa de una enfermedad del espíritu, una forma de delirio: la ninfomanía” (17). Vázquez García goes on to state that “el delirio ninfomaniaco se relacionaba directamente con la irritación física de los órganos genitales” (18).

The fact that María Elvira is constantly preoccupied with “un solo asunto” that absorbs her entire life suggests that she is suffering from monomania, the same onanistic pathology that plagues the female protagonist Desdémona of “Los guantes de goma” in the next chapter. In *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror*, Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck cite an eighteenth-century physician who described how the minds of masturbators were always consumed by one thought, as if they were monomaniacs: “On the moral level, ‘the habit of having only one thought renders the individual incapable of having others; it takes over, and reigns despotically’” (158). Diane Mason also discusses this connection between monomania and onanism: “Monomania of this type is a feature of masturbatory pathology in nineteenth-century medical discourse. Robert P. Ritchie claims that, in the onanist, it is ‘not unusual to find that delusion upon one subject or upon one class of ideas exists’” (109).

To decipher María Elvira’s inner enigma that is causing her feverish delirium, Ayesterain waits until she is asleep and specifically summons Durán to observe her in this involuntary state where the willpower is suspended, hinting that he will come to know the truth behind her sufferings as he delves into the unspoken elements of his psyche in a dreamlike state of introspection. Before Durán takes on the role that Ayesterain has requested of him, he compares his own surprise at knowing that María Elvira feverishly calls him with the reaction of a confused adolescent leaving the theater to find that a coveted female actress is holding open the door of her carriage for him, as if she were inviting him to give her company: “Ni una palabra... murmuré aturdido, tan aturdido como puede estarlo un adolescente que a la salida del teatro ve a la primera gran actriz que desde la penumbra del coche mantiene abierta hacia él la portezuela...” (137). This reverie denotes Durán’s encounter with the mirror, in which he will “go to the theater” and become a spectator of himself in his nightly observances of María Elvira.

This idea becomes further emphasized when Durán explicitly draws a connection between himself and this adolescent boy, a relationship that confuses him and leads him to ask Ayesterain the cause of the vision: “Pero yo tenía ya casi treinta años, y pregunté al médico qué explicación se podía dar de eso” (137). Durán’s imagined return to this particular stage of his life is significant, since “the otherness of the mirror” is “a route to the self in adolescence” (La Belle 46).

When consulted about Durán’s vision of this adolescent boy leaving the theater, a metaphor for his coming to knowledge through self-spectatorship, Ayesterain gives Durán a strange explanation. In his speech, the doctor describes an earthquake that violently shakes the ground, destroying the millions of seeds that were initially present, leaving just one precious seed that can sprout a magnificent plant. Ayesterain then reveals that in María Elvira’s delirious dreams, she envisions that Durán is the one who possesses this privileged seed:

supóngase que en una tierra hay un millón, dos millones de semillas distintas, como en cualquier parte. Viene un terremoto, remueve como un demonio eso, tritura el resto, y brota una semilla, una cualquiera, de arriba o del fondo, lo mismo da. Una planta magnífica... ¿Le basta eso? No podría decirle una palabra más. ¿Por qué Vd., precisamente, que apenas la conoce, y a quien la enferma no conoce tampoco más, ha sido en su cerebro delirante la semilla privilegiada? ¿Qué quiere que se sepa de esto? (137)

Considering the connection between the words “semen” and “seed,” in masturbation manuals, I interpret the doctor’s explanation as a denouncement of both María Elvira’s and Durán’s onanistic fantasies that lurk in the realm of the imagination, inhibiting a real heterosexual union that would result in reproduction.⁴⁴ Vargas Durán highlights this idea:

⁴⁴ In the anonymous pamphlet *Onania*, one of the primary preoccupations of the physician surrounding masturbation is the waste of seed that could have been used to produce a child: “I believe that I may call SELF-POLLUTION in our sex murder without exaggeration. Every emission of seed, might if properly applied, have been the cause of pregnancy, and consequently of a Child” (119).

La mejor hembra, para decirlo de alguna manera, es aquella que en el horizonte de los reproductores, representará sin duda alguna, todas las estructuras sociales que aseguren la perpetuación de la especie, la eficacia poderosa del semen como atributo masculino que concede los máximos beneficios a la hembra que se preña dentro de las normas de fertilidad honesta, es decir, la forma matrimonial consagrada a ello. (29)

Ayesterain's comment denounces Carlos Durán's obsession with a fictitious female shadow of his imagination that drives his nightly passions, paralleling Turbosa's obsession with a "ninfa de los ensueños" in *La condesita*, which triumphed over marriage to a real woman. At the same time, marrying María Elvira and making her a mother would tame her transgressive erotic desires and channel them into proper realms of womanhood.

Ayesterain's image emphasizes to Durán the importance of using his precious seed to produce a beautiful plant and save María Elvira from her delirious obsession. At this point he begins to undergo an interrogating, yet therapeutic process of cerebral exploration: "Sin duda... — repuse a su mirada siempre interrogante, sintiéndome al mismo tiempo bastante enfriado al verme convertido en sujeto gratuito de divagación cerebral, primero, y en agente terapéutico, después" (137). Upon declaring himself as his own medic and therapist, Durán is finally summoned by María Elvira's mother to enter her bedroom. In this confrontation with the sick young woman, Ayesterain's entrance is depicted as silent and undetected, underlining that he is an illusory presence that lingers within Durán's psyche that helps him to recognize the pathological nature of his desires. The medic's illusory presence is followed by Funes's and Durán's seemingly orchestrated entrances. The first thing that Durán notices upon entering the bedroom is the desolate darkness, a detail that highlights his fearful reluctance to come to see his feminine shadow face to face: "Lo que primero me chocó, aunque debía haberlo esperado, fue la penumbra del dormitorio" (138).

Durán's reflection is not only unrecognizable, but it also becomes distorted when he is confronted with the fixed gazes of María Elvira's mother and sister, both of whom look taller than he remembered: "La madre y la hermana, de pie, me miraron fijamente, respondiendo con una corta inclinación de cabeza a la mía, pues creí no deber pasar de allí. Ambas me parecieron mucho más altas" (138). Melchior-Bonnet highlights the ability of the mirror to distort one's image, as it does in this encounter right before Durán meets his repressed reflection:

At the same time the reflection is never quite adequate, veiled by the mist of desire. The process that consists of making an object out of a subject, an exterior of an interior, disfigures the face and distorts resemblance. This deformity is the price of any gaze upon the self. One must see oneself without looking, surprise oneself when least expected, by becoming a stranger to oneself. Truth is captured in the sphere of alterity, but then strangeness becomes a threat. One must attempt to seduce the mirror, since failing to do so results in seeing one's malevolent double suddenly emerge from it, a grimacing devil, the fantastic projection of inner demons. (271)

This sense of misidentification denoted in the warped images of the mother and sister transitions into the single, threatening gaze of Durán's double (the beholder of his inner demons) emerging from María Elvira's wide eyes peering out beneath a bag of ice, as she lies in bed: "Miré la cama, y vi, bajo la bolsa de hielo, dos ojos abiertos vueltos a mí" (138). The ice covering María Elvira's forehead is a symbol of her heated passions, which are reflected back onto Durán when they lock eyes.⁴⁵ This eye contact immediately burdens him with guilt, as can be evidenced by the sudden reorientation of his gaze towards the medic and his subsequent hesitation to approach María Elvira's bed: "Miré al médico, titubeando, pero éste me hizo una imperceptible seña con los ojos, y me acerqué a la cama" (138).

⁴⁵ The male character of "Los guantes de goma" also falls asleep with a bag of ice over his head before he dies in his own blood/semen and Desdémona's theatrical performance of polluted hands begins.

As Durán slowly approaches the bed, his desires become incited by the strong amorous sentiment emerging from María Elvira's gaze in her state of feverish delirium: "Yo tengo alguna idea, como todo hombre, de lo que son dos ojos que nos aman cuando uno se va acercando despacio a ellos" (138). Durán comes closer to María Elvira's eyes and realizes that there is a bright, blinding light emitting from them that leaves him with a sensation of dizziness and ocular disorientation: "Pero la luz de aquellos ojos, la felicidad en que se iban anegando mientras me acercaba, el mareado relampagueo de dicha — hasta el estrabismo — cuando me incliné sobre ellos, jamás en un amor normal a treinta y siete grados los volveré a hallar" (138). María Elvira's amorous, luminous, and blinding gaze evokes the idea that men can contemplate a mirror image of themselves through the sensuous yet wounding eyes of an imaginary beloved.

In her state of unconscious dreaming, María Elvira reaches out her hand to Durán and mumbles for him to sit down next to her. When accepting the feverish woman's hand, Durán perceives the vigilant, judgmental gazes of her entire family staring at both of them in silence, from different angles of the bed, staring with disapproval:

Yo, en primer término, puesto que era el héroe, teniendo en la mía una mano ardiendo en fiebre y en un amor totalmente equivocado. En el lado opuesto, de pie, el médico. A los pies de la cama, sentado, Luis María. Apoyadas en el respaldo, en el fondo, la mamá y la hermana. Y todos sin hablar, mirándonos a la enferma y a mí con el ceño fruncido. (139)

These scrutinizing gazes lead Durán to pull his hand away from María Elvira, illustrating his feelings of culpability at experiencing sexual desire, but the young girl keeps insisting on establishing contact: "Un momento intenté retirar la mano, pero la enferma la oprimió más entre la suya" (139). Amid the tempting and seemingly guilty embrace of hands, María Elvira's eyes remain fixated on Durán, while her family runs for more ice, illustrating the heated passion of the moment. Durán is unable to fulfill his desires when María Elvira tells him "Todavía no..." a deterring statement that is reiterated by the medic: "Dos o tres veces miré exclusivamente al

médico; pero este bajó las pestañas, indicándome que esperara” (139). Not only does the medical gaze intrude into Durán’s fantasy, but María Elvira also teases Durán and leaves him in a state of disappointment when she tells him “todavía no” and then falls into a deep slumber, where she can continue her delirious impenetrable fantasies.

This arousing yet disagreeable encounter with the delirious masturbating María Elvira leads Durán to suffer from terrible dreams that cause him to experience feelings of rejection, which will persist throughout the story:

He dormido mal, lleno de sueños que nada tienen que ver con mi habitual vida. Y la culpa de ello está en la familia Funes, con Luis María, madre, hermanas, y parientes colaterales. Porque si se concreta bien la situación, ella da lo siguiente:

Hay una joven de diez y nueve años, muy bella sin duda alguna, que apenas me conoce y a quien le soy profunda y totalmente indiferente. (140)

These bad dreams cause Durán to wonder why María Elvira “exclusivamente en el delirio, se siente abrasada de amor” (140). Durán also appears to be flattered by the fact that he is the object of this beautiful young woman’s fantasies, but he will be left disillusioned when the medic arrives to his house to explain the sad truth behind the situation.

Ayesterain doubts his original diagnosis of María Elvira’s meningitis, leading Durán to ask him: “Pero el delirio... ¿existe siempre?” (140). When the medic tells Durán that they must wait until later that night to confirm his question during their observance of the sick woman, it appears that María Elvira’s delirious fantasies pose a threat to Durán. For example, Durán tells Ayesterain that he is tired of “playing this role,” while confessing the feelings of humiliation that he experiences when he is transformed into a phantasm of this woman’s autoerotic fantasies:

Le dije que mi propia sustancia había cumplido ya su papel curativo la noche anterior, y que no pensaba ir más...

—¿Por qué? ¿Qué le pasa?

—Nada, sino que no creo sinceramente ser necesario allá... Dígame: ¿Vd. tiene idea de lo que es estar en una posición humillantemente ridícula; sí o no?

—No se trata de eso...

—Sí, se trata de eso, de desempeñar un papel estúpido... ¡Curioso que no comprenda!
(141)

Durán's embarrassment provoked by María Elvira's masturbatory fantasies continues.

Ayesterain tells him: "Pero me parece algo así como... — no se ofenda — cuestión de amor

propio" (141). Self-love is an obvious term for autoeroticism, an idea highlighted by Laqueur:

"D. T. de Bienville, who created the new disease of women's desire . . . laid the blame for masturbation and nymphomania, as we saw, squarely on the imagination, 'the chief minister of self-love'" (298). This revelation that María Elvira's sickness is actually a cover for masturbation immediately angers Durán, causing him to feel like even more of an idiot for thinking that there was actually an amorous bonding between the two of them:

—¡Muy lindo! —salté—. ¡Amor propio! ¡Y no se les ocurra otra cosa! ¡Les parece cuestión de amor propio ir a sentarse como un idiota para que me tomen la mano la noche entera ante toda la parentela con el ceño fruncido! Si a Vds. les parece una simple cuestión de amor propio, arréglense entre Vds. Yo tengo otras cosas que hacer. (141)

Although Durán tries to expel this teasing, emasculating female shadow from his psyche by abandoning this idiotic "role" he plays each night, ten minutes after leaving his house,

Ayesterain sends him a letter requesting him to act as María Elvira's remedy, even her hypnotist:

Amigo Durán:
Con todo su bagaje de rencores, nos es indispensable esta noche. Supóngase una vez más que Vd. hace de cloral, brional, el hipnótico que menos le irrite los nervios, y véngase. (141)

While the letter has served as an emblem of mirror observation from an external perspective,

turn-of-the-century physicians believed that hypnosis involved "the exploration of unconscious

mental life” (Micale 19).⁴⁶ Durán’s subconscious fears and desires emerge through his observation of the self in María Elvira’s gaze when he spends several consecutive nights by her side “tan cerca como pueden estarlo dos amantes” (142). In these observances, María Elvira stares into Durán’s eyes, while spelling his name. “Me ha tendido a veces su mano como la primera noche, y otras se ha preocupado de deletrear mi nombre, mirándome” (142). These activities suggest a blossoming of auto-recognition in the other, which will persist throughout these bedside performances of the repressed self. During these nights watching María Elvira immersed in a state of delirious dreaming, Durán’s fears of being rendered dispensable as this woman’s fantasy intensify: “Sé a ciencia cierta, pues, que me ama profundamente en ese estado, no ignorando tampoco que en sus momentos de lucidez no tiene la menor preocupación por mi existencia, presente o futura” (142). When Durán gazes into María Elvira’s luminous eyes he sees a shameful reflection of his being and feels himself gradually slipping into a state of invisibility. Durán also senses that he is simulating his identity as he joins María Elvira in her feverish state of dreaming, further suggesting that he has been rendered into an object of desire through this woman’s gaze:

El caso es este: María Elvira, si es que acaso no lo he dicho, tiene los ojos más admirables del mundo. Está bien que la primera noche yo no viera en su mirada sino el reflejo de mi propia ridiculez de remedio inocuo. La segunda noche sentí menos mi insuficiencia real. La tercera vez no me costó esfuerzo alguno sentirme el ente dichoso que simulaba ser, y desde entonces vivo y sueño ese amor con que la fiebre enlaza su cabeza a la mía. (142)

María Elvira’s character evokes Durán’s anxieties of the sexually autonomous woman who has the potential to emasculate him, but in addition she also incarnates his suppressed autoerotic desires, since he confesses that he is in love with a shadow, while describing his relationship

⁴⁶ Hypnosis will be shown to be a metaphor for mirror gazing and coming to terms with one’s repressed self in chapter 6.

with María Elvira as “vain nocturnal love” (142). Despite the fact that Durán recognizes his pathological and unnatural love for this woman, he defends the right of men to dream of a shadow of their imagination: “Crueldad esta que apreciarán en toda su cálida simpatía los hombres que están enamorados — de una sombra o no” (142).

This defense of male imaginative passion is interrupted by a visit from Ayesterain, in which the medic tells Durán that María Elvira is feeling better and he has no need to see her anymore. When Durán hears this news, he is overcome with a frustrated urge to break the doctor’s thermometer in his pockets, the instrument that he envisions this man using to measure his heightened desire and intrude into his sexual fantasy. The doctor explains to Durán that his observances of María Elvira were necessary for him to understand the “artificiality” of his love for this woman and that they served a therapeutic purpose that would bring him to self-awareness:

En el camino — hemos ido al Águila, a tomar el vermut — me ha explicado bien claro tres cosas.

1º: que mi presencia, al lado de la enferma, era absolutamente necesaria, dado el estado de profunda excitación-depresión — todo en uno — de su delirio. 2º: que los Funes lo habían comprendido así, ni más ni menos, a despecho de lo raro, subrepticio e inconveniente que pudiera parecer la aventura, constándoles, está claro, lo artificial de todo aquel amor. 3º: que los Funes han confiado sencillamente en mi educación, para que me dé cuenta — sumamente clara — del sentido terapéutico que ha tenido mi presencia ante la enferma, y la de la enferma ante mí. (144)

This coming to knowledge through introspection forces Durán to recognize the insalubrious artificiality of his nocturnal love, while confirming his fears that this woman has absolutely no care in the world for him and that he was nothing more than a figment of her fantasies:

—Sobre todo lo último, ¿eh? —he agregado a guisa de comentario—. El objeto de toda esta charla es este: que no vaya yo jamás a creer que María Elvira siente la menor inclinación real hacia mí. ¿Es eso?

—¡Claro! —se ha encogido de hombros el médico—. Póngase usted en lugar de ellos... Y tiene razón el bendito hombre. Porque a la sola probabilidad de que ella... (144)

This conversation is followed by Durán eating dinner at María Elvira's house, but unfortunately, he does not see her. He prays to himself that she will suffer from another fever, so that he will be able to play his role again by her bedside:

... tuve que volverme a casa sin haberla visto un instante. ¿Se comprende eso? ¡No verla en todo el día! ¡Ah! Si por bendición de Dios, la fiebre de 40°, 80°, 120°, cualquier fiebre, cayera esta noche sobre su cabeza...
Y aquí está: esta sola línea del bendito Ayesterain:
Delirio de nuevo. Venga en seguida. (144)

While this onset of feverish delirium symbolizes both María Elvira and Durán's re-entrance into an autoerotic fantasy, this observance of María Elvira will provoke painful emotional consequences in him. In this particular observance, María Elvira asks Durán: "Y cuando sane y no tenga más delirio... ¿me querrás todavía?" (145). This comment provokes ecstatic happiness in Durán; however, deep down he knows that this masturbating woman really does not love him and that he is nothing but a projection of her imagination. Simultaneously, in the parallel reading of this mirror image, he wonders if he will be centered and happy with himself if his masturbatory delirium comes to an end. He sees her lying eyes projected on a screen gazing back at him, as if he were looking at himself in the mirror, or playing the part of an actor in a film in this dream of self-spectatorship

Pero cuando por aquella pantalla de ese amor mentido hay dos ojos inmensos, que empapándonos de dicha se anegan ellos mismos en un amor que no se puede mentir, cuando se ha visto a esos ojos recorrer con dura extrañeza los rostros familiares para caer en extática felicidad ante uno mismo, pese al delirio y cien mil delirios como ese, uno tiene el derecho de soñar toda la noche con aquel amor, o, seamos más explícitos: con María Elvira Funes. (146)

Durán continues to dream that María Elvira loves him, but he questions if he is actually the object of her desires: "¿Fui yo o no, el que apaciguó en sus ojos, durante minutos inmensos de eternidad, la mirada marcada de amor de mi María Elvira?" (146). Although Durán affirms that he was the subject of María Elvira's gaze during her feverish fits of passion, he states that their

love is now “acabado, concluido, finalizado, muerto, inmaterial, como si nunca hubiera sido” (146). The reason for this now dead romance is that María Elvira has snapped out of her autoerotic fantasies where she was the crafter of her own shadow.

When María Elvira returns to health, Durán visits her home and realizes that she does not know him: she looks at him with indifference, as if he were a friend of the family. She becomes a cruel, unreachable temptress, evoking Bram Dijkstra’s idea that a woman’s “autoerotic inaccessibility” provoked a crisis in nineteenth-century men (153). Durán imagines María Elvira walking by him, as her skirt rubs against his body while she smiles at him. In this moment of enticement, he envisions himself as an idiot yet again, because he knows that she will never actually be with him:

Más tarde, en el hall, hallé modo de aislarme con Luis María, más colocando a este entre María Elvira y yo [...] Y es extraordinario como su cuerpo, desde el más invisible cabello de su cabeza al tacón de sus zapatos, era un vivo deseo, y cómo al cruzar el hall para ir adentro, cada golpe de su falda contra el charol iba arrastrando mi alma como un papel. Volvió, se sonrió, cruzó rozando a mi lado, sonriéndome forzosamente, pues estaba a su paso, mientras yo, como un idiota, continuaba soñando con una súbita detención a mi lado, y no una, sino dos manos, puestas sobre mis sienes. (148)

María Elvira is not only a source of inaccessible temptation for Durán but also begins to reject him in recurring dreams that he has of dancing with his imaginary beloved. In *Dance Pathologies: Performance, Poetics, Medicine*, Felicia M. McCarren describes how dancing allows individuals to observe themselves before an audience in a performance of the self, a situation that parallels Durán’s:⁴⁷

It is thus not only a dancer’s real ability to look back at her audience, but also her ability to internalize the audience’s gaze, that shapes her subjectivity as a performing artist who both depends on the audience and transcends it . . . Performance demands that the dancer divide herself in two: while dancing her role from the inside out, she must simultaneously see it from the outside in. (100)

⁴⁷ This connection between dancing, self-performance, and masturbatory fantasy will also appear in chapters 5 and 6.

In “Dialogicality in Dance: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, ...?,” Dania Antinori also highlights this idea: “Dance, in my opinion, speaks well for research in in-depth dialogue within oneself, because communication is expressed both silently through the body in motion, as well as through the words spoken out loud” (86). As noted by Elaine Shefer, this connection between self-reflection and dancing appears in several of Edgar Degas’s nineteenth-century paintings:

One such example is *Ballet Class* (1878–1890), in which three dancers are absorbed in working out their poses. Not only have they positioned themselves against the mirror, to which they have turned their backs, they don’t even look at the ballet master, who is opposite to them. In Degas’s two versions of *Monsieur Perrot’s Dance Class* (1875–1876), the mirror, seen behind the dancers again, reflects the Parisian landscape outside. Even when there is no mirror present, as in *The Rehearsal* (1879), it is still apparent that the dancers Degas portrayed are looking into one (603).

In one of these dreams of dancing with María Elvira, Durán remembers her telling him about black dots that appeared in her eyes that she did not have before her sickness:

Y después de bailar, hablamos así:

—Estos puntitos de la pupila —me dijo, frente uno de otro en la mesita del buffet —no se han ido aún. No sé que será... antes de mi enfermedad no los tenía. (149)

Bartsch highlights the connection between the pupil and the mirror in ancient philosophical thought by quoting Socrates: “I’m sure you’ve noticed that when a man looks into an eye (*opsis*) his face appears in it, like a mirror. We call this the ‘pupil’ (*kore*), for it is a sort of miniature (*eidolon*) of the man who is looking... Then an eye will see itself” (48).

The mirror symbolism of the emergent black dots in María Elvira’s eyes becomes more evident when she tells Durán “usted debe saberlo más que nadie” (149). This comment suggests that María Elvira’s autoerotic sickness has become a mirror of truth for Durán that will bring his inner demons to the surface as the two twirl around the dance floor together before an imaginary audience of other dancing couples who pass by their side. In this process of spectatorship, María Elvira confesses to Durán that he was nothing other than “su amor, al parecer,” a comment that

will intensify his emotions of anguish and insignificance provoked by this woman's emasculating gaze of autonomy and inaccessibility:

Apartó los ojos, sería ya, alzándolos a las parejas que pasaban por nuestro lado.

Corrió un momento, para ella de perfecto olvido de lo que hablábamos, supongo, y de sombría angustia para mí. Pero sin bajar los ojos, como si le interesaran siempre los rostros que cruzaban en sucesión de film, agregó un instante después de costado:

—Cuando era mi amor, al parecer. (149)

María Elvira's eyes are projected onto a screen or simulacrum that causes a series of indistinguishable faces to flash before Durán, symbolizing his reluctance to recognize himself in this embarrassing image of male insufficiency. Durán tries to get María Elvira to remember what she told him in her moments of feverish delirium, but she is unable to do so and shrugs it off as an insignificant matter, causing Durán to experience profound suffering: "El golpe era serio. Pero María Elvira no pensó en contestarlo, contentándose con mirarme un instante más y apartar la vista con una corta sacudida de hombros" (151). Durán claims that they did not speak anymore during this dream of dancing, but he remembers that María Elvira was not able to find the "compañero ideal que buscaba," emphasizing the idea that he feels rejected when he is in her presence (151).

Durán has several other dreams or imaginations with María Elvira on the dance floor, all of which heighten his inner crisis, as she continues to behave as a tempting, emasculating woman who refuses to pay him any attention, reminding him of his impotence. These embarrassing scenes of spectatorship overwhelm Durán with so much suffering that he wants to throw himself into the mirror, representing his crisis of selfhood that will soon culminate in his fearful recognition in the other:

¿Qué me quedaba por hacer? Nada, a no ser tragar el papelito húmedo, hundir la boca en el hueco que había dejado su rodilla, y estrellar el sillón contra la pared. Y estrellarme en seguida yo mismo contra un espejo, por imbécil. La inmensa rabia de mí mismo me hacía

sufrir, sobre todo. ¡Intuiciones viriles! ¡Psicologías de hombre corrido! ¡Y la primer coqueta cuya rodilla queda marcada allí, se burla de todo eso con una frescura sin par! (154)

This desire to throw himself into the mirror provokes a strange blurring of identities between Durán and María Elvira as he has yet another dream of dancing with her in front of an imaginary audience of gazing spectators:

No puedo más. La quiero como un loco, y no sé, lo que es más amargo aún, si ella me quiere realmente. Además, sueño, sueño demasiado, y cosas por el estilo: Íbamos del brazo por un salón, ella toda de blanco, y yo como un bulto negro a su lado. No había más que personas de edad en el salón, y todas sentadas, mirándonos pasar. Era, sin embargo, un salón de baile. Y decían de nosotros: *La meningitis y su sombra*. Me desperté, y volví a soñar: el tal salón de baile estaba frecuentado por los muertos diarios de una epidemia. El traje blanco de María Elvira era un sudario, y yo era la misma sombra de antes, pero tenía ahora por cabeza un termómetro. Éramos siempre *La meningitis y su sombra*. (154)

When Durán says to himself “yo era la misma sombra de antes,” it underlines that he and María Elvira are mirror images. For example, in previous scenes of the story Durán referred to María Elvira as the shadow, saying things such as “Amo, pues, una sombra” and “Había amado una sombra,” but in this moment of self-reflection on the dance floor, there is a sudden confusion when Durán hears the spectators saying that *he* is the shadow. The fact that Durán is now the shadow exposes his fears of annihilation and invisibility caused by María Elvira’s impenetrable autoerotic fantasy reenacted in his dreams that continuously remind him that she has no recollection of his true identity outside her feverish delirium. Durán also says that now *he* has the thermometer on his head, exposing his own repressed autoerotic passions that have been played out through dreams of an alluring female phantasm.

By describing María Elvira as wearing a shroud, it reveals the emptiness and deception he experiences upon realizing that his love object is actually his own mirror image. In *The Death-Ego and the Vital Self: Romances of Desire in Literature and Psychoanalysis*, Gavriel Reisner explains that this is the dynamic of Narcissus trying to love his own reflection:

The drowning of narcissus is a psychoanalytic parable, an elegant description of self-love as a fall into nothingness, a descent into the trans/parent depths of death. To fall in love with the self is to drown in the inner psyche, to return to the object of the original desire blocking the object of life-desire. When we fall into the water of our own beauty, searching for love in the mirror-image, we fall deep into the abyss of nothingness. There is no love object behind the beauty of the mirror image. Narcissus is doomed. (109)⁴⁸

In addition to this connection between death and auto-recognition in the other, María Elvira's shroud emphasizes Durán's anxieties of being obliterated by this woman's desiring gaze.

This horror upon recognizing both his impotence and passions in this sick, feminine, masturbating other causes Durán to stop the dances with his shadow and to flee from María Elvira to forget her forever. "¿Qué puedo hacer con sueños de esta naturaleza? No puedo más. Me voy a Europa, a Norteamérica, a cualquier parte donde pueda olvidarla" (154). When Durán gets to the Funes house to say goodbye to these actors of his hallucinatory nocturnal drama, María Elvira is "indispuesta," but at the same time "visible" and sick, hinting that she is a haunting phantasm in Durán's mind: "María Elvira estaba indispueta — asunto de garganta o jaqueca — pero visible" (155). When seeing Durán, María Elvira simultaneously catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, a reflection that will evoke sadness, sickness and sexual excess: "Pasé un momento a la antesala a saludarla. La hallé hojeando músicas, desganaada. Al verme se sorprendió un poco, aunque tuvo tiempo de echar una rápida ojeada al espejo. Tenía el rostro abatido, los labios pálidos, y los ojos hundidos de ojeras" (155).⁴⁹ When this face appears in the mirror, María Elvira's sickness is suddenly transferred to Durán as she asks him "¿Está

⁴⁸ Confronting one's repressed mirror image will also result in the deaths of the male and female protagonists studied in chapter 6.

⁴⁹ As mentioned in my analysis of "Los perseguidos," bags under the eyes were a common symptom of masturbatory excess. Doussin-Dubreuil's description of a patient presents strikingly similar characteristics: "Su tez había principiado a ponerse pálida, sus ojos abatidos y con ojeras, sus labios blanquecinos, su piel lívida" (92).

enfermo?” (155). These instances of mirroring emphasize that María Elvira’s autoerotic illness has served as a looking glass for Durán to contemplate his own anxieties of impotence aroused by the self-sufficient female masturbator, while also self-reflecting on his guilty autoerotic fantasies of a feminine shadow that would have been deemed as pathological by nineteenth-century physicians.

There is one more clue that María Elvira is a mirror image of Durán’s internal crisis of masculinity. She gazes through the glass windows and opens her eyes widely as if lost in contemplation, and suddenly redirects her vision towards him with a sad, worried expression. María Elvira extends her hand to Durán and it is no longer burning with passion, as in their shared moments of delirium, but rather cold and humid from her illness provoked by venereal excess: “Me tendió lentamente la mano, una mano fría y húmeda, de jaqueca” (156). Upon being confronted with these images of sickness, Durán reminisces about how María Elvira playfully tempted him with her feverish hand on various occasions: “El corazón me latió locamente, pero como en un relámpago, la vi ante mí, como aquella noche, alejándose riendo y negando con la mano: «no, ya estoy satisfecha»... ¡Ah, no, yo también! ¡Con aquello tenía bastante!” (156). These conjoined images of emasculation and uncontrollable desire overwhelm Durán with, very tellingly, shame: “Me voy —le dije bien claro—, ¡porque estoy hasta aquí de dolor, ridiculez y vergüenza de mí mismo! ¿Está contenta ahora?” (156).

Durán experiences an extreme sense of self-alienation as he presses his face against the windows and no longer sees an image of María Elvira but a shattered reflection of his own soul in anguish: “Había apoyado la frente en los vidrios, deshecho, sintiendo que después de lo que había dicho, mi amor, mi alma, mi vida, se derrumbaban para siempre jamás” (156). Unable to support his inner crisis provoked by María Elvira’s emasculating gaze and enticing feverish

hand, Durán decides to expel this cruel, feminine, and sexualized shadow from his being. He describes how the light in her eyes that once projected his suppressed reflection finally extinguishes, causing her to let out one last weep of sorrow that symbolizes the end to Durán's sufferings:

Ella estaba a mi lado, y en sus ojos — como en un relámpago, de felicidad esta vez — vi en sus ojos resplandecer, marearse, sollozar, la luz de húmeda dicha que creía muerta ya.

—¡María Elvira! —exclamé, grité, creo—. ¡Mi amor querido! ¡Mi alma adorada! (157)

This departure from María Elvira causes Durán to self-reflect on the painful experiences expressed in his narration, which he now sees as distant occurrences of his life: “Y nada más. ¿Habrá cosa más sencilla que todo esto? Yo he sufrido, es bien posible, llorado, aullado de dolor; debo creerlo porque así lo he escrito. ¡Pero que endiabladamente lejos está todo esto!” (157).

This whole interaction has occurred through a dream that is simultaneously disguised as a private form of writing that puts individuals into contact with their mirror images. In this case, the spectator observing Durán's writer is none other than María Elvira: “Y tanto más lejos porque — y aquí está lo más gracioso de esta nuestra historia — ella está aquí, a mi lado, leyendo con la cabeza sobre la lapicera lo que escribo” (157). In her book chapter “Transcription—Materiality—Signature: Dancing and Writing between Resistance and Excess,” Gabrielle Brandstetter describes how reading one's own writing acts as a type of self-spectatorship that is similar to dance performance, evoking the connections between writing/reading, dancing, and mirror gazing in the story:

Writing, unless it is done in experimental situations, is a performance that doesn't present itself and is not subjugated to the regime of observation through an audience. All the more complex, however, are the scenes of self-observation in the performance of writing—and here writing and dancing see eye to eye. The ‘showing itself’ and ‘reading itself’ in the act of writing is a staggered process: by reading what I have written, I see the ‘have-written,’ I see myself as writer. I observe myself in the act of writing-reading. (122)

María Elvira is a spectator of Durán's private writing, but she also tries to interject to help shape his story. However, now that the painful drama has ended, Durán imagines that he is able to place María Elvira under his authority, fantasizing about a marriage to this once inaccessible woman, a union that would end his crisis of selfhood and provide him with a sense of wholeness. This imagined marriage serves this exact purpose when Durán states that he and his feminine shadow experienced a shared suffering throughout the writing of the story:

Ha protestado, bien se ve, ante no pocas observaciones más; pero en honor del arte literario en que nos hemos engolfado con tanta frescura, se resigna como buena esposa. Por lo demás, ella cree conmigo que la impresión general de la narración, reconstruida por etapas, es un reflejo bastante acertado de lo que pasó, sentimos y sufrimos. (157)

This joint suffering is ended by a kiss between María Elvira and Durán, symbolizing a complacent union with his once disjointed mirror image, something that could not occur in *La condesita* and "Los perseguidos." However, this union with the unattainable feminine shadow can only occur by fantasizing about her submission to the male. The author first had to obliterate María Elvira and extinguish her demeaning gaze before Durán could ease his anxieties about female power, relieve his sufferings, and achieve a sense of selfhood.

Like his "Los perseguidos," Horacio Quiroga's "La meningitis y su sombra" shows how this author provides the reader with a profound descent into the male psyche to show how men were struggling to cope with changing gender roles at the turn of the twentieth century, leading them to experience extreme internal suffering and a crisis of selfhood. However, this story presents a new facet to male reactions and coping mechanisms to this crisis by showing how men were actually troubled by the idea of the autonomous woman who had no use for the opposite sex. While this preoccupation appeared in *La condesita* earlier, Mayo explored the topic in a nonserious manner, creating scopophilic depictions of women replacing men with masturbatory

substitutes. In “La meningitis,” Quiroga presents this theme in a very somber fashion to expose men’s true emotions of suffering, rather than veiling them under exaggerated images of phallic-usurping, dildo-bearing, and cross-dressing hermaphroditic women. In the following chapter on Quiroga’s story “Los guantes de goma,” this male mirroring through the sick female masturbator will continue, but it will serve to project anxieties of uncontrollable, leaky, and sexualized corporeality.

CHAPTER 4: A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE OF POLLUTED HANDS: MICROBIAL MASTURBATORY INVASION IN HORACIO QUIROGA'S "LOS GUANTES DE GOMA" (1909)

While María Elvira's character in "La meningitis y su sombra" exposed male fears of a woman's secretive, imaginative powers that would allow her to escape from patriarchal control through delirious dreaming, the protagonist Desdémona of "Los guantes de goma" incarnates apprehensions surrounding the uncontrollable and autonomous female body in nineteenth-century society. In "Los guantes de goma" Quiroga focuses on a young woman's troublesome relationship to her body and the dilemma that adolescent women experienced upon trying to cope with their desires that they were taught to view as dirty and shameful.

This internalization of female sexual shame was briefly seen in *La condesita* when Aurora subjected herself to a cauterization; however, "Los guantes de goma" delves deeper into the mental anguish that young women underwent upon trying to stave off their natural desires. Although Quiroga does not give Desdémona the power to voice her emotions of suffering to the reader, her internalization of shame towards her body becomes evident when she views her masturbatory habits as remorseful and self-polluting, leading her to excessively wash her body. Desdémona's negative view towards her body and passions is perpetuated by her vigilant mother, who looks to curb her self-pleasures, as well as a series of doctors who prescribe her restraining devices and liquid solutions to rid her body of sexual dirtiness. Because of this external condemnation, Desdémona fervently tries to keep her desires a secret and eventually

suffers from a horrible death due to her guilt of gender nonconformity. Despite Desdémona's revulsion towards her own body and self-inflicted corporeal destruction, her uncurbable masturbatory desires reveal that patriarchal mechanisms of female moral instruction and shame-ingraining tactics were insufficient to prevent young women from getting in touch with their sexuality.

As in "La meningitis," female masturbation subtly works as a mirror for male anxieties, but in this case, it is not a crisis of worthlessness and rejection that is presented but rather a mirroring of shame towards the fluid, untamable body. Desdémona's onanistic addictions are connected to an image of sick, oozing male corporeality, evoking the sudden conflation between male and female bodies in nineteenth-century medical discourse that was explored in *La condesita* and "Los perseguidos." However, what is different about "Los guantes" is that this disgust of the male body is veiled under a woman's repulsion towards her own body, a strategy that reorients male helplessness back onto a vulnerable woman who will destroy herself for rejecting prescribed norms of womanhood.

"Los guantes de goma" is a very short tale of only two pages, in contrast to "Los perseguidos" and "La meningitis"; therefore, this chapter is briefer than the others on Quiroga. "Los guantes" revolves around a mentally disturbed young woman named Desdémona who lives with her mother and her two nervous sisters Ofelia and Artemisa. Desdémona develops a pervasive fear of her hands becoming infected with microbes after a man with smallpox falls asleep in her home and later dies in a puddle of his own blood after being placed in isolation. Desdémona's hypochondriacal fear of microbial invasion through this man's infected fluids leads her to suffer from uncontrollable temptations to scrub her hands, eventually causing her to die soaked in blood after rubbing her flesh raw convinced that the dreaded microbes have entered

her skin. Throughout the story, Desdémona's mother and physicians are perplexed about her mental derangement and unable to curb her dangerous obsession. Desdémona's psychic illness is diagnosed as a form of monomania related to her hands becoming polluted, which is why one of her doctors forces her to wear tight-fitting rubber gloves that go up to her elbows. Despite this attempt to restrain Desdémona's unruly hands, she rips the gloves open because she is unable to resist the temptation to cleanse her flesh to diminish the possibility of the infectious microbes entering her body. Relevant for the purposes of my investigation is that the anonymous narrator of the story establishes a direct correlation between Desdémona's tragic demise induced by the entrance of imaginary microbes into her hands and the man who fell asleep at her house and subsequently died, purportedly from smallpox hemorrhages.

This image of a woman with uncontrollable, destructive desires illustrates male anxieties towards female adolescent corporeal self-knowledge and autonomy, as men were realizing that it would become impossible to keep women in the dark about their sexuality and to prevent them from gratifying their natural erotic needs. For this reason, there was a strong effort in nineteenth-century society to instruct young women to grow up to become submissive, asexual wives. In her article "De 'perfecta casada,' a 'ángel del hogar' o la construcción del arquetipo femenino en el XIX," M. Ángeles Cantero Rosales discusses this preoccupation of providing young girls with a proper moral education to mold them into the "ángel del hogar," a theme that will be broached in "Los guantes de goma" as Desdémona's mother tries to supervise her daughter's behaviors to curb her masturbatory addictions. Cantero Rosales explains that "la educación de las hijas debe hacerse con seguimiento obsesivo y como forma preventiva de evitar males mayores" and that "las hijas han de ser educadas en el recato, en la resignación, en la obediencia y virtud de la virginidad" (8). To illustrate this point, Cantero Rosales presents a quote from an nineteenth-

century comportment manual titled *La familia regulada* (1867) by Antonio Arbiol: “Si tienes hijas, dize el espiritu Santo, enséñales el temor de Santo Dios, y guarda sus cuerpos, no sea que te afrenten y te confundan. No les muestres alegria de rostro, sino severidad, benigna, para que no se crien libertinas, sino modestas, y muy atentas” (8). In particular, it was a mother’s duty to ensure this moral protection and sexual innocence of their daughters: “A la madre le corresponde en la práctica diaria impedir que las hijas pierdan la virginidad en cualquiera de los sentidos. Son estas las que han de enseñarles que el sexo no ha de estar orientado al placer sino a la procreación” (8).

In *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890–1940* Asunción Lavrin also demonstrates how society tried to silence the topic of female sexuality to aid in this development of honorable young women who would perpetuate submission to patriarchal control:

Although women’s honor depended on proper sexual behavior, most women knew little about their sexuality . . . Neither the function of female organs nor sexuality was discussed in social or family circles, much less written about in women’s magazines or newspapers. (126)

Not only was there a taboo surrounding female sexuality, but the desiring female body was depicted as dirty for its immoral nature of nonconformity:

In the nineteenth century the female body was seen as both a vessel of morality and as a dirty disease. As it could not function as both, women were either good, pure, morally strong, or bad, eroticized and perverted. Desire was overshadowed and female sexuality became forbidden by cultural constraints that imposed morality on women. (Sliwiska 154)

In *A Dark Science: Women, Sexuality, and Psychiatry in the Nineteenth Century*, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson presents a disturbing case study of a nineteenth-century female patient who internalized this idea that her body was dirty because she pleased herself: “I know it’s dirty, but it isn’t anybody’s business but my own. Leave me my pleasure! Even if it kills me, I don’t

care. I want to do it, and die. I want to!” (45). In addition to this idea of dirtiness, women were taught to feel shame towards their desires. Emma L. E. Rees argues that “The secrecy and shame surrounding women’s bodies” was promoted by physicians “to project their morally unpolluted vision of what it meant to be a woman; women’s actual bodies and desires risked being hindrances to the image of passive femininity propagated by the gynecologists” (130).

Despite these efforts to control the adolescent female body through mechanisms of shame while shielding young daughters from knowledge of sexual matters, female physicians in the Southern Cone were working to change women’s alienation from their bodies. Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane—one of the first women in Argentina to receive a medical degree and a fighter for the rights of women—and others were beginning to advocate for women’s education on different corporeal changes that she would experience throughout her life:

Knowledge of the body’s functions was indispensable to learning how best to care for it. In her thesis Rawson de Dellepiane dealt with the problems of puberty, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. Although never explicit in her description of body functions, she tactfully suggested the need to understand the physical and mental changes of each cycle. Puberty was a disturbing change for most girls owing to ignorance of their own bodies. (Lavrin 127)

Similar to the emerging discussions on women’s bodily experiences, feminist discourses worked to educate women on sexual matters: “The first effort to teach about female sexuality from a woman’s point of view was that of Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, who in 1892 wrote her medical thesis on “women and hygiene,” initiating a long career devoted to female health and women’s issues” (127). Lavrin explains how female physicians worked to eliminate the stigma surrounding women’s bodies and desires:

Acknowledging female sexuality, she and other female doctors of her generation dispelled the traditional image of women as angels of spirituality and introduced women’s voices into the discussion of sexual functions. Although she did not express strong views, just commenting on these topics marked a departure from the assumption that they were un-ladylike. (128)

Letters from troubled mothers quoted in Doussin-Dubreuil's masturbation manual expose this emerging quest for the adolescent's knowledge of her body, as they describe cases of young girls who transgress familial vigilance and explore their corporeality through unrestrained secretive pleasures. Quiroga presents his familiarity with these letters from mothers of young girls in "A la señorita Isabel Ruremonde," the story in which a mother interrogates her sick daughter about the cause of her elusive illness, hinted as masturbation.⁵⁰ There is a similar image of a distressed mother in "Los guantes" who struggles to understand her daughter's dangerous obsession with her hands, an ignorance that will result in Desdémona's corporeal self-destruction.

Garth signals that "Los guantes" projects an underlying message about forbidden female sexual desire:

This tale is paradigmatic of Quiroga's women characters: their sheltered lives in bourgeois families reigned over by an absent father and a socially conforming mother; the ill effects of a medical discourse that discounts the possibility of female intelligence in scientific matters; the fear and suspicion of their own bodies, particularly female skin and flesh; and the implications for female sexuality, trapped in a labyrinth of bourgeois social convention. (116–17)

In my analysis I build upon Garth's assertion that this is a tale of a woman who is ashamed of her natural sexual desires, while showing that Desdémona's temptations related to her hands serve as a metaphor for her transgressive masturbatory urges. Quiroga implements this same connection between untamable hands and masturbation in his early story "A la señorita Isabel Ruremonde," by describing how her hands are bound with a bracelet. The narrator reveals that her "lovable and guilty" hands "martyrize" her and are in need of restraint:

—Pero, —me dijo sonriéndome dolorosamente— mis manos...

⁵⁰ I developed a discussion on the ramifications of this story in chapter 2.

—¡Ah, es verdad!— Y acariciando casi para no lastimarla, la ancha pulsera de oro que las unía sobre las almohadones, desprendí sus manos, manos queridas y culpables, manos malas, que el médico mandó sujetar a fin de que no martirizaran más a la pobre niña. (94)

In Doussin-Dubreuil's treatise, the physician describes an analogous situation of a girl who had to have her hands tied to prevent her from destroying her body through self-pleasure:

Cuando yo fui consultado tenía esta joven diez y siete años, el vicio solitario la dominaba en tan alto grado, que a pesar de la precaución que tenía de atarse las manos de una manera que parecía imposible se desatasen, muchas veces al despertar las encontraba sueltas y en la misma situación que quería evitar. (134)

The female protagonist Sadie of Quiroga's "Al autor de la dame seule," also has her hands restrained, but with gloves rather than a bracelet. Sadie's gloves appear to prevent her from indulging in some forbidden temptation, since she often hides her hands from the public eye, but she is unable to resist the temptation to take her gloves off, as she laughs excessively to herself and rejects her male suitors:

¡Muerta, bien muerta estaba mi pobre Sadie! Era tan alegre, que su retiro al campo nos causó gran pena — ¿Que usted ríe mucho? Sadie reía más aún. —¿Que usted esconde las manos para que no se las besen? Sadie calzaba guantes, ¡y los quitaba tan a menudo! (34)

González Espitia notes the dangerous unruly nature of female hands in both of these stories:

The diagnosis of the illness that afflicts both protagonists is elusive. We only know that the problem originates in the relationship between the young women's hands and their bodies, seemingly from 'the excesses' and 'imprudence' of some unascertainable contact that creates a sickness much like pulmonary tuberculosis. (173)

Just like Sadie of "Al autor de la dame seule," Desdémona in "Los guantes" becomes overcome with hysterical laughter as she contemplates the mysterious "obsession" that she has with her hands. After getting diagnosed with the masturbatory disease of monomania, Desdémona laughs to herself, while covering her eyes with her bandaged hands as if to hide the truth of her mania:

"Retiróse muy feliz. Después de reírse de sí misma con sus hermanas, llevóse las manos vendadas a los ojos, con un hondo suspiro de obsesión concluida al fin" (744).

Desdémona's laughter will persist when she rips open her gloves later in the story in the middle of the night, unable to curb her temptations:

Y fue feliz hasta el *preciso* momento en que se le ocurrió que nada era más posible que un microbio hubiera quedado adentro. Razonó desesperadamente y se rió en voz alta en la cama para afirmarse más. Pero al rato la punta de una tijera abría un diminuto agujero en los guantes. (745)

This is further evidence that Desdémona's practice of concealing the hands with gloves was a masturbatory treatment tactic, as prescribed by nineteenth-century physicians. In *Del otro lado del espejo: la sexualidad en la construcción de la nación cubana*, Abel Sierra Madero highlights the use of gloves to prevent female masturbation in nineteenth-century Latin America:

Con respecto a la instrumentación de la histerización del cuerpo de la mujer, Beatriz Preciado realiza un análisis de ciertos instrumentos tecnológicos y objetos producidos durante el siglo XIX y principios del siglo XX, como guantes para impedir el contacto de la mano y el clítoris, o los llamados vibradores musculares; es decir, de las técnicas relacionadas con la represión de la masturbación y las técnicas de curación de la histeria. (110)

In *With the Hand: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, Mels Van Driel also explains that "this pathology sparked a new industry, supplying products like erection alarm apparatuses, penis sheaths and for girls special gloves and bandages to prevent them from opening their legs" (127).

Alongside this issue of female corporeal self-control in "Los guantes" I will also show that manuals on onanism created a direct parallel between blood and semen, showing how the connected bloody deaths of the sick male and female protagonists in the story indirectly expose male preoccupations with sexual fluidity provoked by medical accounts of male masturbation. In addition to the images of sexual fluidity projected through male and female blood spillage in "Los guantes," there are recurring mentions of running sink water as Desdémona fails to control the urges to wash her hands to prevent them from becoming polluted. In "Pathologizing Leaky Male Bodies: Spermatorrhea in Nineteenth-Century British Medicine and Popular Anatomical

Museums,” Elizabeth Stephens describes how fin-de-siècle medical discourses on spermatorrhea blurred the distinctions between male and female anatomies through images of corporeal leakiness, a dynamic that is also present in *La condesita* and “Los perseguidos”:

Reflecting both an increased medical scrutiny of the male body and the production of new male sexualities and subjectivities at the midcentury, spermatorrhea represents a unique episode in the history of medicine and the male body in which the fear of leakiness and fluidity historically displaced onto the female body comes to be directed at a pathologized white, male, middle-class and heterosexual body that has traditionally shaped norms about sexuality and corporeality. (422)

As Stephens notes, this mirroring of corporeal seepage disrupts patriarchal power, since the misogynistic notion of female fluidity has served as a mechanism to perpetuate women’s inferiority by linking her to the body and sexuality. In *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England*, J. Peakman highlights this idea: “Erotica conveyed women as lacking in self-discipline, reveling in their own free-flowing emissions, and therefore irrational and inferior” (65). Peakman also argues:

Although control over bodily fluids was imperative in a civilised body, the very fact that female fluids were portrayed as so free-flowing depicted ‘uncivilised’ women with ‘impolite’ or embarrassing bodies. Exposure of blood and bodily fluids signified an underlying concern about female insatiability and ferocious sexual appetites. (65)

Desdémona’s sexualized female body in “Los guantes” is depicted in terms of uncontrollable, pollutive fluidity to preserve this image of female subordination. However, it is important to note that “Shame functions as a sharp, in fact, painful reminder that the fantasy experience of the “other” is vicarious. Shame brings into focal awareness both the self and the “other,” with the imagery that the “other” rejects the self” (Lewis 87). In addition, “Shame may be experienced for someone else, as if the “other’s” honor were one’s own. In this meaning of the term, there is a feeling of personal responsibility, and yet the self is by implication helpless to avoid the shame of the “other” who is so close” (Lewis 64). This idea that shame involves a close “fantasy other”

will be observed in “Los guantes,” as Quiroga portrays a guilty theatrical male fantasy alongside Desdémona’s “dirty” onanistic addictions that result in gruesome corporeal liquidation.

Quiroga depicts Desdémona’s character as a forbidden mirror for men to contemplate their unspeakable sexual fantasies and anxieties by labeling her as an actress who has usurped the role of the deceased, blood-soaked man to undergo a remorseful fantastical trial of the self. After the sick individual visits the hysterical sister’s home and dies in a bath of contaminated blood—an image I see directly connected to spilled semen—in “la Casa de Aislamiento,” the narrator shifts the reader’s attention from this gruesome case of purported smallpox to Desdémona’s shameful personal trial before the looking glass. She fearfully judges her masturbatory temptations through the voices of her sisters and other unidentified interlocutors, who suggest that her hands will become polluted through contact with microbes present in the man’s “blood.” The narrator explicitly describes Desdémona’s death as a “drama” related to wasteful expenditure at the very end of the story, a language that parallels medical discourses on the dangers of “wasting” semen in the sterile practice of masturbation.

The theatrical purpose of the sister’s characters is also revealed by Quiroga’s choice to name Desdémona and her sister Ofelia after sexually transgressive female protagonists from Shakespeare’s plays *Othello* and *Hamlet*. As scholars have noted, both Desdémona and Ofelia’s characters symbolize female sexuality, guilt, corruption, and madness. In *Women in the Age of Shakespeare*, Theresa D. Kemp describes how Desdémona can be seen as a woman who transgressed gender boundaries first by marrying Othello without the permission of her father and then by being accused of committing adultery, an allegation that may or may not have been true:

An interpretive question for this play is how to resolve the conflict between Desdemona’s unconventionality and strength of personality, which leads her to choose her mate

without her father's authority, and the misogynist notions of unbridled female sexuality that underlie Othello's doubts of her chastity. This crux is further complicated when, in answer to Emilia's question of "who hath done this deed?" Desdemona replies, "nobody, I myself." Perhaps she is implying responsibility; perhaps she is alluding to her condition as a *femme covert*; the meaning is intriguingly unclear. (88)

Similar to the sexually contumacious nature of Desdémona's character, in her essay

"Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," Elaine Showalter describes how Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* incarnates male fears surrounding the female body, leading to framing her erotic passions in terms of madness in the play:

Whereas for Hamlet madness is metaphysical, linked with culture, for Ophelia it is a product of the female body and female nature, perhaps nature's purest form. On the Elizabethan stage the conventions of female insanity were sharply defined. Ophelia dresses in white, decks herself with 'fantastical garlands' of wild flowers, and enters according to the stage directions of the 'Bad' Quarto, 'distracted' playing on a lute with her 'hair down singing.' Her speeches are marked by extravagant metaphors, lyrical free associations and 'explosive sexual imagery.' She sings wistful and bawdy ballads, and ends her life by drowning. (80)

In "Los guantes," Quiroga uses Desdémona and Ofelia's characters to play on this association between female sexuality, guilt, and madness in a drama that indirectly allows men to express hidden feelings of shame towards their own passions by connecting the male body to images of sickness, sexuality, femininity, pollution, and fluidity.

Another significant hint that "Los guantes de goma," is a tale of forbidden erotic temptation is the central theme of microbial invasion, since this was a nineteenth-century metaphor for one's inability to fight off one's own sexual urges. On the surface Desdémona's fear of developing smallpox through the spreading of the deceased man's microbes evokes nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding germ theory. For example, Nancy Tomes states

The first germ panic developed in the wake of scientific acceptance of the germ theory of disease. Although the germ theory has an ancient pedigree dating back to the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, it was only in the 1870's and 1880's that experimentalists such as Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch provided compelling scientific proof linking specific microorganisms to specific diseases. Between 1885 and 1915, the rapid development of

bacteriologic methods led to an explosion of knowledge about both public and private hygiene. Gradually, older theories of atmospheric infection gave way to a more modern emphasis on casual contact, food and water contamination, and insect carriers as the chief source of infection in every day life. (192)

However, in addition to these scientific theories linking infectious bodily diseases with microorganisms, the invasion of the microbe had a deeper significance related to fears of moral contagion at the time. Christopher Forth describes moral contagion as the contaminating influence of immoral qualities of another person that could be absorbed through the pores as if they were imaginary microorganisms, evoking Desdémona's fear of infection through microbes left behind by the man's blood that would enter through her skin. Forth states that "eighteenth-century notions of moral contagion depended upon a person's susceptibility to the minute 'corpuscles' emitted by the bodies of others, which when absorbed by one's own body facilitated the transmission of the moral qualities of the other" ("Moral Contagion and the Will," 62–63). José Pedro Barrán describes the presence of this medical discourse in fin-de-siècle Uruguay, explaining how men who gave in to their sexual desires would be viewed by society as weak, unmanly individuals who accepted the invasion of the "microbe," or in other words, welcomed immoral influences that would transform them into the dreaded feminine other:

El deseo que conducía al placer debía gobernarse en aras, no de la salvación del alma, sino de la salud del cuerpo, pues el deseo infinito del hombre no tenía en cuenta la finitud de las energías de su cuerpo. Así ocurría el debilitamiento y se creaba el "*terreno*," la condición que favorecía la "*invasión*" del microbio. (33)

Desdémona's "drama" of imaginary contagion begins when a mysterious man falls very ill and then arrives at her house to rest:

El individuo se enfermó. Llegó a la casa con atroz dolor de cabeza y náuseas. Acóstate en seguida, y en la sombría quietud de su cuarto sintió sin duda alivio. Mas a las tres horas aquello recrudeció de tal modo que comenzó a quejarse a labio apretado. Vino el médico, ya de noche, y pronto el enfermo quedó a oscuras, con bolsas de hielo sobre la frente. (743)

The man's symptoms of terrible headache and nausea parallels symptoms of a male patient addicted to masturbation in Tissot's treatise "Conozco que cada día voy mejorando: mis males de cabeza no son ya tan frecuentes ni tan violentos: mi estómago se va restableciendo y los dolores de los miembros no son tan molestos" (229). The ice on the man's forehead reveals the will to cool his feverish passions, which will be indirectly expressed when he suddenly disappears into the darkness and the story switches over to an image of the hysterical sisters conversing about the man's illness in the dining room: "Las hijas de la casa, naturalmente excitadas, contáronnos en voz todavía baja, en el comedor, que era un ataque cerebral, pero que por suerte había sido contrarrestado a tiempo" (743).⁵¹ Given the nineteenth-century house/body metaphor, the fact that this feverish man falls asleep in a house full of hysterical "excited" girls hints that these nervous young women are mirror projections of his corporeal anxieties, unchecked desire, and inner turmoil.⁵²

In "Los guantes de goma," the particular room of the house where the hysterical girls discuss the sleeping man's mysterious illness is the dining room, a place where one fulfills one's appetite. Tissot equates sexual excess to hunger by stating "el amor sensual por más que se le disfrace, nace de una sensación igual a la que produce el hambre, y los otros apetitos sensitivos" (209).⁵³ During the conversation about the man's illness in the dining room, the narrator pays

⁵¹ In "La meningitis" María Elvira also had a bag of ice on her head when Carlos Durán entered her room, which served as a symbol of her heated delirious passion.

⁵² This crux was discussed in chapter 3, when Carlos Durán had a mystical journey to a female hysteric's home, where he underwent a strange mind/body transference with her.

⁵³ Tissot's idea is also present in *La condesita* (see chapter 1), when the narrator describes the insatiable appetite of the male protagonist Turbosa, whose masturbatory addictions are paralleled with excessive eating during all hours of the day:

particular attention to the oldest sister, Desdémona, who is the most nervous of them all and the most troubled by the presence of the mysterious individual in her home: “La mayor de ellas, sobre todo, una muchacha fuertemente nerviosa, anémica y desaliñada, cuyos ojos se sobreabrían al menor relato criminal, estaba muy impresionada” (743). Her slovenly appearance and anemic condition foreshadow her masturbatory indulgences. By describing Desdémona as unkept, Quiroga begins to introduce the connection between masturbation, dirtiness, and self-pollution that will run throughout the text, as she incessantly scrubs her body to rid herself of germs. In the famous medical treatise that sparked the masturbation panic, *ONANIA or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and all its Frightful Consequences* (1723), the anonymous author equates masturbation with dirtiness:

Let any Man examine all the Places of the New Testament, where mention is made of Vices and Sins, and he will find, there is not any other Crime so many times named as Uncleaness; and how can a person be more superlatively unclean, than when he is guilty of SELF-POLLUTION? (9)

Diane Mason also mentions that “anaemia was cited by James Cantlie in 1883 as one consequence of masturbation,” while describing how the female protagonist Lucy of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* suffers from nocturnal “anaemic” blood flows, which serve as a metaphor for indulgences in solitary pleasures (38). The fact that Desdémona suffers from anemia also draws a parallel between her character and the sick man resting in her house who will eventually die from excessive hemorrhages, both of which are blood-depleting ailments that evoke male fears of seminal loss.

Generalmente había sido hombre de voraz apetito, siempre dispuesto a comer a todas horas, sin que por eso hubiesen desarrollado sus carnes y contextura en proporción al excesivo consumo de alimento; pero también cesó esa voracidad, vino la inapetencia, y tras la inapetencia las malas digestiones, flato y pesadez en la cavidad del estómago (128).

While the girls discuss the man's illness, Desdémona sits in silence listening to her sisters, who appear to be mirror images of one another usurping and repeating each other's words in a game of mimicking: "Fijaba la mirada en cada una de sus hermanas que se quitaban mutuamente la palabra para repetir lo mismo" (743). Desdémona's quiet observance is interrupted when one of these voices is directed towards her: "¿Y usted, Desdémona, no lo ha visto? —preguntóle alguno." Desdémona is horrified by this interrogation and responds: "¡No, no! Se queja horriblemente... ¿Está pálido? —se volvió a Ofelia" (743). Desdémona appears to be hiding some perturbing inner secret, when her eyes dilate and dart back and forth between the gazes of her sisters. "Las chicas prosiguieron, y de nuevo los ojos dilatados de Desdémona iban de la una a la otra" (966). This interrogation, along with Desdémona's nervous behavior and preoccupation with paleness, suggests that she is hiding a perturbing inner secret, which the reader will soon discover is related to fears of pollution through her hands.

That night, the sick man who fell asleep in the sister's house suffers from insomnia, strangely causing a disturbance in the dining room: "Supongo que el enfermo pasó estrictamente mal la noche, pues al día siguiente hallé el comedor agitado. Lo que tenía el huésped no era ataque cerebral sino viruela" (743). The fact that this man's restless night causes an agitation in the dining room indicates that his sickness is related to sexual excess, given the previously mentioned connection between eating and sexual appetite. Similarly, the specific mention of smallpox is highly significant, given that Tissot describes a man addicted to onanism who died from this disease as a result of his masturbatory excess (42). Tissot also establishes the blood/semen analogy that will appear in "Los guantes," by stating how this patient's seminal emissions suddenly turned to flows of blood after indulging in onanism:

Un joven bien formado y de un temperamento feliz, á los diez y seis años de su edad se entregó al vicio solitario con tal frecuencia y ardor, que después de algún tiempo en lugar

de licor espermático perdía una porción considerable de sangre; la reiteración de sus vicios le produjo una inflamación muy dolorosa en los órganos genitales. Hallándome por casualidad en el campo me consultó su mal, y le ordené el uso de las cataplasmas emolientes con buen suceso; pero tuve después noticias de que había muerto de viruelas. (42)

In “Los guantes” the doctor assures the mother of the household that the man’s smallpox is a benign case, calming the worries of Desdémona’s sisters. However, Desdémona is unconvinced by the doctor, believing deep down that this illness will be incurable and pose grave consequences, emphasizing again that she is concealing some disturbing secret surrounding the diagnosis of smallpox:

Ofelia accionaba bien, y Artemisa secundaba su seguridad. La hermana mayor, en cambio, estaba muda, más pálida y despeinada que de costumbre, pendiente de los ojos del que tenía la palabra.

—Y la viruela no se cura, ¿no? —atrevióse a preguntar, ansiosa en el fondo de que no se curara y aun hubiera cosas mucho más desesperantes. (743)

Desdémona’s mute silence is another indication of her enigmatic inner mystery related to this man’s smallpox, which will cause him to die the next day covered in his own blood: “Al día siguiente fueron hombres a desinfectar la pieza donde había incubado la terrible cosa, y tres días después el individuo moría, licuado en hemorragias” (743). In addition to the previous passage linking blood and semen, Tissot also argues that losing one ounce of semen weakens a man’s body more than losing forty ounces of blood:

Hay en toda máquina animal otro humor mucho mas importante que la sangre, y es el licor destinado para la generación, que influye de tal modo sobre las fuerzas vitales y la perfección de las digestiones, por medio de las que se reparan, que los médicos de todos siglos han opinado y creído, que la pérdida de una onza de este licor debilita y enerva mucho mas que la de quarenta onzas de sangre. (xxiii)

This medical connection between blood and semen is also brought up in *La condesita*, when the medic Salces instructs Turbosa on the ability of masturbation to deplete men of their blood/semen: “Si solo la idea de perder cuarenta onzas de sangre aterra la imaginación, júzguese

cuanto no debiera aterrarse el perder una onza de esencia generadora, que es su equivalente. ¡Una onza! ¡Y en cuán breve tiempo la desperdician los hombres sensualistas!” (141).

Following the man’s bloody death, the omniscient narrator inserts himself in the situation and acts as if he were present in the girl’s home. The narrator describes how the sisters continue to converse about the man’s death in the dining room, emphasizing the recurring connection between sexual desire and hunger. The narrator also argues that one develops a fear of “microbes” at the dining room table, pointing to the themes of moral contagion and sexual temptation:

Bien que nuestro contacto con el mortal hubiera sido mínimo, no vivimos del todo tranquilos hasta pasados siete días. Fatalmente surgía a diario, en el comedor, el sepulcral tema, y como en la mesa había quienes conocían a los microbios, estos tornaron sospechosa toda agua, aire y tacto. (743–44)

The conversation surrounding the man’s nocturnal bleeding eventually transitions into Desdémona’s worry that she will become infected by the liquid that this sick man’s body has left behind: —¡Oh, qué horror, los microbios! —apretábase los ojos—. Pensar que uno está lleno de ellos...” (744). This expression of worry from Desdémona’s mind is followed by an interjection from an unknown interlocutor who suggests to the young girl that the root of her preoccupations lies in her hands: “— Tenga cuidado con sus manos, y descartará muchas probabilidades — compadecióla uno” (967).

After the unidentified interlocutor warns Desdémona about the dangers of her hands becoming polluted, another anonymous speaker suggests that the lurking fear of microbial contagion in the young girl’s home has actually been provoked by a letter. This particular comment causes Desdémona’s sister Ofelia to become paralyzed with fear and to stare at her hands in a moment of melancholic reverie that produces within her an unfortunate temptation:

—Ha habido contagios por carta. ¿A quién se le va a ocurrir lavarse las manos para abrir un sobre?

—Los ojos desmesurados de Ofelia quedáronse fijos en el último. Los otros hablaban, pero este había sugerido cosas maravillosamente lúgubres para que la mirada de la joven se apartara de él. Después de un rato de inmóvil ensueño terrorífico, miróse bruscamente las manos. No sé quién tuvo entonces la desdicha de azuzarla. (744)

This contagious letter creates a mirroring between the protagonists, by suggesting a dangerous transmission and contagion between the man with smallpox, Desdémona, and her sister Ofelia, who has now also suddenly become worried about developing an infection through her hands. Given the recurring idea that a letter could act as a mirror for one to observe oneself from an external perspective, this contagious correspondence highlights the idea that Desdémona and the man with smallpox are reflections of each another. On the one hand, this mirroring allows Quiroga to give the reader a glimpse into the sexual predicament of the adolescent woman of nineteenth-century society who desires to be a master of her body but suffers from intense feelings of disgust and shame for failing to conform to the image of the “ángel del hogar.” On the other hand, this mirroring allows men to play out their own corporeal fantasies and fears through this masturbating hysterical woman.

This interrogation at the dinner table ends with a sinister and cautionary message from one of the interlocutors, who argues that obsessing over one’s hands would inevitably lead to the entrance of microbes, a warning that horrifies Desdémona:

—Llegará a verlos. La insistencia en mirarse las manos desarrolla la vista en modo tal que poco a poco se llega a ver trepar los microbios por ella...

—¡Qué horror! ¡Cállese! —gritó Desdémona. (744)

This warning from the interlocutor about the consequences of fixating on one's hands causes Desdémona's pathological obsession with self-pollution to fully develop. As a result, the narrator stops "eating" at the girl's house for an entire year:

Pero ya el trastorno estaba producido. Días después dejaba yo de comer allá, y un año más tarde fui un anochecer a ver a la gente aquella. Extrañóme el silencio de la casa; hallé a todos reunidos en el comedor, silenciosos y los ojos enrojecidos; Desdémona había muerto dos días antes. En seguida recordé al individuo de la viruela; tenía por qué, sin darme cuenta. (745)

Given the repeated connections between eating, microbial invasion, and temptation related to the hands, I interpret the narrator's decision as an effort to stave off the pathological, sexualized, feminine influences that this house of hysterical young women has upon him. By describing how the girls' eyes are red and emitting tears mourning Desdémona's recent death as they sit in the dining room, the place where one's appetites are fulfilled, Quiroga draws a subtle allusion to masturbatory excess and seminal release.

In his article "Weeping, Death and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," Elliot R. Wolfson establishes a connection between the weeping eye and the ejaculating phallus:

The weeping of the eye symbolically displaces the seminal discharge of the phallus. . . . The correlation of the eye and the phallus is an old one in Jewish sources, perhaps suggested by the fact that the word 'ayin' connotes both the eye and a spring or fountain, the latter being a rather obvious phallic symbol. (209)

The redness of the girls's weeping eyes is also an allusion to excessive self-pleasure.

Uruguayan physician Luis Bergalli argued in 1892 that masturbators would suffer from a redness in the genital area from excessive touching:

Cuando la masturbación data de largo tiempo, el niño presenta palidez, cambio de color, un arco oscuro, azulado, alrededor de los ojos, torpeza, falta de voluntad para el juego, impresionabilidad, cefalalgia, dispepsia, estipticidad. Localmente, se puede observar enrojecimiento, tumefacción del prepucio, de los labios y del antro de la vagina y también leucorrea o sea catarro vaginal. (596)

It is important to note that when hearing about Desdémona's death in this moment of crying at the dinner table, the narrator immediately thinks of the dead man with smallpox, creating a direct parallel between Desdémona's bloody death caused by the entrance of imaginary microbes into her hands in the middle of the night and the gruesome passing of the slumbering man who also died in a puddle of blood, a cover for semen.

After linking Desdémona's illness with the deceased man's blood spillage, the narrator goes back in time to clarify the cause of Desdémona's death, explaining how the prior interrogation at the dinner table caused her to develop an obsession with washing her hands: "Durante el mes subsiguiente a mi retirada, Desdémona no vivió sino lavándose las manos" (744). Desdémona's fear of having dirty hands shows that her self-judgments have caused her to internalize pervasive feelings of shame for pleasuring her body, producing within her a fervent desire to rid herself of what was perceived as immoral impurities. The excessive nature of Desdémona's masturbation is revealed through her fingers that become inflamed after spending hours at the sink running them under water:

En pos de cada ablución mirábase detenidamente aquellas, satisfecha de su esterilidad. Mas poco a poco dilatábanse sus ojos y comprendía bien que en pos de un momento de contacto con la manga de su vestido, nada más fácil que los microbios de la terrible viruela estuvieran trepando a escape por sus manos. Volvía al lavatorio, saliendo de él al cuarto de hora con los dedos enrojecidos. Diez minutos después los microbios estaban trepando de nuevo. (744)

While Desdémona's red fingers can hint at their overuse in self-stimulation, the running water can suggest an image of seminal flow to parallel her pleasures with male sexual anxieties. In Tissot's treatise, the physician repeatedly refers to ejaculation as "el flujo," a wording that evokes an image of running water:

Yo he visto hombres, quienes á consecuencia de la disipacion padecian un flujo continuo, el qual no les ocasionaba debilidad alguna, ni los hacia incapaces de ereccion y de emision. He conocido á otros, que, como los primeros, padecian otro flujo que los

debilitaba prodigiosamente, y que se efectuaba sin sensacion venérea, sin ereccion y sin emision. (272)

In “Los guantes,” the image of running sink water will be recurrent, and it has already been bolstered with other images of fluidity such as “blood” spillage and weeping eyes, both of them indirect references to ejaculation, suggesting that the flowing water linked to Desdémona’s fears of dirty hands is yet another masturbatory image.

Desdémona’s excessive time scrubbing her hands at the sink eventually causes her mother to recognize that her flesh has been rubbed completely raw, and that her daughter is suffering from some dangerous and excessive obsession: “La madre — que habiendo leído antes de casarse una novela, conservaba aún debilidad por el más romántico de los tres nombres filiales — llegó a hallar excesivo ese distinguido temor. La piel de las manos, terriblemente mortificada, lucía en rosa vivo, como si estuviera despellejada” (744). Desdémona’s mother’s worry about her daughter’s fixation on her hands evokes the idea that nineteenth-century mothers were responsible for providing their daughters with a proper moral education, so that they would grow up to be innocent angels of the home, as we saw in Arbiol’s manual. However, Desdémona’s character shows how this prescribed motherly duty was beginning to fail, as daughters were finding secretive ways to transgress familial vigilance to explore their bodies and discover the mysteries of sexuality.

To get to the root of Desdémona’s obsession, her mother brings her to a physician who diagnoses her with monomania, a disorder that denotes a single pathological preoccupation of the mind which, as discussed in chapter 3, was a disease linked to masturbation at the time. Desdémona’s monomania is also paralleled with a fear of sickness and contagion, suggesting that she is suffering from a severe case of hypochondria, a disease that physicians associated with onanism, the imagination, and sexual fantasy (Potter 111). Upon being diagnosed with

monomania, Desdémona laughs off her illness, satisfied that the real root of her obsession with her hands has not been recognized by the physicians. However, no matter how hard she tries to convince herself that she has overcome her pathology, she is continually tempted by the contagious influence of imaginary microbes, causing her to incessantly destroy her flesh by violently scrubbing her hands with a brush that her doctor has given her:

Pensar que yo creía que trepaban... —se dijo; y continuó mirándolas. Poco a poco sus ojos fueron dilatando. Sacudió por fin aquellas con un movimiento brusco y volvió la vista a otro lado, contraída, esforzándose por pensar en otra cosa. Diez minutos después el desesperado cepillo tornaba a destrozar la piel. (744–45)

Tellingly, in Tissot's treatise he recommends that masturbators wash their body with a brush or cloth to rid themselves of perspirations: "La que exige más atención, y que es preciso favorecer como mas importante, es la transpiración insensible. Este beneficio se consigue con el uso de las friegas, frotando todo el ámbito del cuerpo con una escobilla ó franela (191). The fact that a doctor prescribes Desdémona a brush to scrub her body evokes the efforts of nineteenth-century physicians to indoctrinate women that their sexuality was dirty. To put a halt to the corporeal pathological self-destruction caused by this scrubbing, she is taken to several other medics, but none of them is able to stop her addictions. In her moments of solitary mute contemplation, Desdémona cannot help the water from running, an image that conjures fears of filthiness caused by sexual release: "Durante largos meses la locura siguió, volviendo alegre de los consultorios, curada definitivamente, para, después de dos minutos de muda contemplación, correr al agua. (745)

When Desdémona visits yet another doctor, her temptation to wash her hands becomes connected to "ideas fijas," stressing the idea that the masturbator was a monomaniac who was incapable of having any other thoughts unrelated to their self-pleasures (Stengers and Van Neck 158). In *Archivos de psiquiatría, criminología aplicadas a las ciencias afines* (1906), José

Ingenieros also describes how individuals with morbid sexual tendencies would develop an obsession with “ideas fijas” and would suffer from perversions of the imagination that would be satisfied through onanism:

Muchos individuos cuya función está cansada, o que tiene leves insuficiencias congénitas, ó ligeras inversiones iniciales, si se ponen en cierto ambiente propicio a las ideas fijas y a los desvaríos de la imaginación, pueden ser presa de actividades sexuales mórbidas, reemplazando ó perturbando los más delicados sentimientos; esa transformación suele ser ayudada por el onanismo, las malas amistades, las perversiones de la ideación, etc. (13)

The narrator makes it clear that Desdémona’s fixed ideas and temptations trouble her principally through the middle of the night, leading her to wake up the next morning overwhelmed with a fear of self-contamination through invisible microbes that she attempts to rid by scrubbing her hands with the brush: “Ese día fue Desdémona tan dichosa que en la noche despertóse varias veces, sin la menor tentación, aunque pensaba en ello. Pero a la mañana siguiente arráncose todas las vendas para lavarse desesperadamente las manos. Así el cepillo devoró la epidermis y aquellas quedaron en carne viva.” (745) The fact that Desdémona’s “temptations” usually occur during the night and cause her to desperately wash her hands the following morning to rid herself of germs evokes Mason’s idea that the night was “a time when the chronic onanist was most susceptible to temptation.” (90)

The dangerously obsessive nature of Desdémona’s nocturnal enticements lead her mother to bring her to yet another doctor who attempts to curb her addictions by enclosing her hands completely in rubber gloves that are tightly sealed at the elbows: “El último médico, informado de los fracasos en todo orden de sugestión, curó aquello, encerrando luego las manos en herméticos guantes de goma, ceñidos al antebrazo con colodiones, tiras y gutaperchas” (745). As previously mentioned, nineteenth-century medics ordered masturbating patients to wear gloves, and Quiroga’s short story “Al autor de la dame seule” suggests the author’s possible familiarity

with these precautionary practices. Although the doctor assures Desdémona that the microbes cannot enter her hands while she is wearing the gloves, her fear of the germs entering her skin becomes unbearable when she is alone in bed, laughing out loud to herself, leading her to cut open the protective garments with scissors. Desdémona's loud laughter in the moment of her irresistible urge to tear off her gloves highlights the sexual nature of her monomaniacal fixation. In his treatise *Histeria y sugestión* (1904), Ingenieros describes a case of a young woman whose clitoral stimulations caused her to break out in hysterical fits of laughter, much like Desdémona does when she rips open her gloves and invites the immoral influence of microbes:

Desde la pubertad su instinto sexual se ha manifestado intensamente; siéndole imposible prescindir de sus sollicitaciones, ha sistematizado la satisfacción de su sensualidad mediante titilaciones diarios del clítoris, que le producen voluptuosidad completa. Este hábito, en cuya referencia insistimos, ha tenido estrecha relación con su primer paroxismo de risa histérica. (98)⁵⁴

In this particular instance, the surrender of Desdémona's willpower to her passions, allows for the "microbes" to enter through the holes of the destroyed gloves: "Pero por los agujeros iban a entrar todos... La madre sintió sus pies descalzos" (745). Not only does the ultimate deathly invasion of the microbes into Desdémona's flesh symbolize her repeated inability to fight off her sexual cravings, given that microbial invasion alluded to erotic temptation, but so do her bare feet, which alarm her mother. Tissot strongly urged patients to keep their feet covered and warm, as cold, exposed feet could provoke autoerotic impulses: "La parte que todo el mundo, y en particular las personas débiles, deben tener más abrigada y caliente, son los pies: precaucion que no se despreciaria con tanta frecuencia si se comprendiesen los graves inconvenientes que

⁵⁴ For a further discussion on the connection between laughing and uncontrollable sexual desire in *La condesita* (chapter 1) and "Los perseguidos," see chapter 2.

resultan de lo contrario a la economía animal (102). Doussin-Dubreuil's treatise also describes a female masturbator with bare feet:

Ved si soy digna de lástima, me dijo con dulzura abriendo suavemente uno de los postigos, y en efecto distinguí una persona de cerca treinta años, sentada próxima a una mesa, sobre la cual había una luz, con cuello y pecho descubiertos, las manos automáticamente abandonadas sobre los muslos, los pies desnudos, los cabellos desordenados, de una figura descarnada, el color pálido, las espaldillas y todas las extremidades de los huesos muy salientes bajo los vestidos. (55)

When Desdémona's mother notices her daughter's bare feet as she is lying in bed, she becomes horrified and runs over to stop her from giving into her temptation once again: "¡Desdémona, mi hija! —corrió a detenerla" (745). Upon being discovered by her mother in this moment of autoerotic pleasure, Desdémona starts sobbing and buries her head between the pillows symbolizing her embarrassment: "La joven lloró largo rato, la cabeza entre las almohadas" (969). Desdémona's mother's attempted supervision of her daughter proves unstoppable against this corporeal addiction that allows Desdémona to express her natural desires condemned by society.

The next morning Desdémona's mother wakes up to find the bandages that once protected Desdémona's unruly hands:

A la mañana siguiente la madre, inquieta, levántose muy temprano y halló al costado de la palangana todas las vendas ensangrentadas. Esta vez los microbios entraron hasta el fondo, y al contarme Ofelia y Artemisa los cinco días de fiebre y muerte, recobraban el animado derroche verbal de otra ocasión, para el actual drama. (969)

This scene emphasizes the horrors surrounding corporeal fluids that have run throughout the text by reintroducing images of spilled blood, running sink water, and self-pollution. In the last line of the story, Quiroga suggests that Desdémona's monomaniacal preoccupation with her polluted hands was a theatrical rehearsal of death and wasteful expenditure that lasted for five days. The mention of fever reminds the reader of the man with smallpox who fell asleep with the bag of ice

on his head in the beginning of the story, hinting that his illness has been played out in Desdémona's drama of polluted hands.

In addition to the recurring images of blood, microbial invasion and running water used throughout this “drama” to denote horrors of onanistic ejaculation, the word “derroche” indicates wasteful expenditure, a term that nineteenth-century physicians used to describe the sterile spillage of semen through masturbation. In *Sexo y razón: una genealogía de la moral sexual en España (siglos XVI–XX)*, Vázquez García and Moreno Mengíbar explain that “la masturbación masculina — desde un cuadro conceptual que se mantiene básicamente estable entre 1750 y 1850 aproximadamente — es un derroche del principio vital que provoca el debilitamiento, la muerte del individuo y la degradación de la especie” (427). In “Los guantes” the reader is given a glimpse of the dangers of both male and female sexual excess and expenditure described by nineteenth-century physicians by linking an image of a sick, oozing male body with a sexually uncontrollable female body that becomes polluted, destroyed, and eliminated from obsessive onanism.

Quiroga's “Los guantes de goma” narrates the tragic tale of a young girl who goes insane and is punished for not being able to control her masturbatory urges, which are viewed as dirty by society. In an attempt to stave off the perceived contagion of this self-pleasuring practice, physicians of the period were offering shocking cases of young girls like Desdémona who were destroying their physical and mental faculties through clandestine self-pleasures that their doctors were unable to curb even with the extreme measure of restraining their hands with gloves. Desdémona's unruly corporeal autonomy presents a severe threat to patriarchal stability, just like the tales of adolescent female bodily mastery in the masturbation manuals. These adolescent sexual explorations were seen as an early developing deviation from the prescribed

path of the *ángel del hogar*, since women were becoming aware of their bodies and desires. As seen in *La condesita*, that powerful knowledge could lead women to reject marriage when reaching adulthood. This threatening disruption in the chain of command for the *ángel del hogar*'s submission to the male will be further investigated in the next chapter, when the female protagonist Herminia's adolescent masturbatory discoveries cause her to stray away from marriage to remain with her mirror image, a reflection that provides her with a superior emotional and physical gratification to that she receives from the opposite sex.

CHAPTER 5: THE FRIEND IN THE MIRROR AND THE FEMININE MASK: HERMINIA'S AUTOEROTIC SELF-BECOMING IN ALBERTO INSÚA'S *LAS NEURÓTICAS* (1910)

In Quiroga's "La meningitis y su sombra" and "Los guantes de goma," the female protagonists concealed secretive sexual desires that they played out through clandestine masturbation to deceive patriarchal order. While in "La meningitis" masturbation was displayed in the form of feverish, delirious dreams, in "Los guantes" onanism was depicted as shameful and unrestrainable bodily self-touching. The female protagonist Herminia of Alberto Insúa's Spanish novel *Las neuróticas* experiences both forms of masturbatory pleasure: physical and mental. Herminia's onanistic desires also reveal that she possesses a covert identity that she hides away from the public eye to feign a façade of gender conformity. However, while Quiroga's female characters lacked psychological complexity and were unable to voice their own feelings, in *Las neuróticas* the reader undergoes a profound descent into Herminia's private thoughts and emotions, displaying a woman's inner battle to embrace her true self and to have the courage to reject patriarchal demands.

As was previously seen in *La condesita*, in *Las neuróticas*, masturbation is used as a trope for female self-becoming and a gateway to knowledge and independence. Another similarity between these two novels is that female autoerotic introspection is paralleled with a lesbian romance between two friends. Nevertheless, Herminia's relationship with her friend and lover Conchita is distinct from Felisa and Aurora's short-lived sapphic passion. Aurora and Felisa were depicted more as superficial feminist clichés, their autoerotic awakenings before the mirror lacked emotional depth, and the reader was given no details about their single sexual

encounter together. Mayo also did not allow these women to “reveal their secrets” to one another until Felisa was on her deathbed, making it impossible for them to use this knowledge to follow paths in life that strayed away from prescribed models of womanhood. In addition, Mayo refused a forging of female selfhood in his novel through Felisa and Aurora’s final kiss of death.

On the contrary, in *Las neuróticas*, Herminia’s relationship with Conchita is depicted as a powerful, long-term sexual and emotional bond that involves a series of serious psychic interrogations between self and other. Herminia’s intimate interactions with Conchita provide her with the necessary knowledge to undergo a radical self-transformation, end her masquerade of femininity, and finally have the courage to be herself. Similarly, Insúa allows “the kiss in the glass” when these two friends lock lips and join their bodies in a nude embrace, permitting Herminia to achieve a sense of wholeness that was denied to Felisa in *La condesita*. Not only does Insúa authorize this reconciliation of Herminia’s private and public identities, but he also presents a new stance on the notion of female illness that has been observed in all of the texts thus far in the dissertation. In this novel, the idea that women were sick for possessing sexual desires is suddenly called into question, as will also happen in Eduardo Zamacois’s *La enferma*, in the final chapter of the dissertation. What begins to emerge in *Las neuróticas* is a subtle male admission that female hysteria was an invented disease to keep women in a place of subjugation, as men were fearfully observing a rapid movement towards gender equality.

Las neuróticas revolves around the Montaña sisters—Herminia, Esther, and Melita—who are described as three “neurotic” adolescent women suffering in different degrees from the common nineteenth-century female disorder of hysteria. The doctor of the story, Antonio Álvarez, attributes the physical and mental ailments of these women to their suppressed sexual and emotional desires, which he initially believes can be cured through marriage. Later he

changes his opinion, after observing Herminia's process of self-development that ends in a displeasing marriage. In my analysis, I will focus specifically on the sister Herminia, since the narrator pays particular attention to her episodes of self-observation that are depicted as autoerotic explorations. Herminia's auto-discovery is presented as a gradual unmasking of the true identity she conceals from society, by interacting with her reflection in fantasies that take place in the theater, as well as masked balls and carnivals that force her to tear down the artifice enveloping her true persona.

Herminia's fantasies allow her to challenge patriarchal social demands that attempt to first mold her into an object of male desire and later into a self-sacrificing wife who is pressured to abandon her private, liberating bond with the mirror. As mentioned by Schulkins, female onanism "is embraced and enacted to gratify desires in the mind that cannot be obtained by ordinary means but only through the imagination" (69). Paula Bennett and Vernon Rosario also describe how masturbatory fantasy provided nineteenth-century women with an outlet to satisfy their longings for autonomy and sexual gratification that were denied to them through patriarchal social regulations, which is what will happen with Herminia (10–11). Throughout the novel, Herminia's introspective fantasies reveal her struggle to conform to traditional roles for women and expose her inner desire to tear down the false mask that she wears for society.

Before Herminia discovers her true self, she lacks self-confidence, inner substance, knowledge, independence, and happiness. As will be shown in my analysis, Herminia's persona is initially connected with images of falseness, darkness, death, sleepiness, and naïveté to show that she is a lost young woman devoid of a consciousness. At the beginning of the novel, the mirror acts as a typical instrument of female vanity and masquerade for Herminia, as she uses it to cover her face in makeup and to adorn herself with fancy clothes to please men. However, as

the novel progresses, the mirror becomes a tool of liberation that allows her to reject traditional conventions of femininity to pursue her own wants. Relevant here is that this is the only text studied in the dissertation in which a woman is permitted to achieve knowledge, transgress gender boundaries, and explore new possibilities for herself, without being subjected to an obliteration. Herminia's sustained existence compels readers to realize that this new model of the self-fulfilling woman was not going to magically disappear as it did in other male-authored works of fiction from the time period.

Herminia experiences autoerotic reveries at masked balls and carnivals, while dancing around with her male suitors as she tries to find her future husband to fulfill societal expectations of being dependent on a man for the rest of her life. However, she fearfully flees from this environment of costumes and masks that embodies the pressure to conform to patriarchal demands, preferring to be with her "naked" independent self that she discovers one day while passionately gazing at her nude body in the shower. As Herminia recognizes her natural beauty in the reflective streams of water, while pleasuring herself with autoerotic caresses, rays of light will appear to awaken her from her state of unconsciousness. From this moment on, Herminia experiences an inner conflict as she battles between her masked and "naked" self in guilty masturbatory fantasies (101). In Herminia's introspective fantasies, she envisions what her life would be like if she fulfilled her societal obligation to marry her male suitor, the marquis of Ojeda. On the one hand, Herminia enjoys the thought of being married to a rich man, since she would create an upstanding social image for herself. Herminia also thinks that marriage will allow her to fulfill her pent-up sexual curiosities that she is forced to conceal as a single woman in nineteenth-century society. On the other hand, the thought of transforming into the submissive, self-sacrificing *ángel del hogar* terrifies Herminia when she imagines herself being

converted into her husband's slave and being treated as a mere sexual object whose emotional and physical needs would be left unsatisfied.

For Herminia, marriage symbolizes a death of the self, since she would forever lose her self-gratifying connection to the mirror to merge into her husband. As Herminia envisions playing the role of the wife, she finds herself continually returning to her moment of masturbatory self-discovery, when she was able to recognize her own beauty and self-worth, while getting in touch with her inner voice that provides her with a sense of knowledge, happiness, and autonomy. Whereas in "Los perseguidos" the masquerade of masculine "normalcy" triumphs over Quiroga's buried authentic persona when his sexualized, feminine, and sick alter ego Díaz Vélez is locked up into a mental asylum, in *Las neuróticas* Herminia will embrace her true reflection to achieve a sense of wholeness, even if it means being labeled a "neurotic" by society.

This concern over women masking their identities is presented by Birgit Spengler in her discussion of May Alcott's nineteenth-century American novella *Behind a Mask* (1866): "in particular critical attention has been directed at issues of masking, impersonation, as well as at the cultural construction of femininity and social demands on womanhood—issues that are already prioritized by the novella's title and subtitle" (222). Evgeniia Stroganova also describes how female characters in the 1870 Russian novel *The Snezhin Family* feel pressured to hide behind masks to fake conformity to patriarchal ideals:

Hence all forms of female behavior in the novel appear as a form of masking, of concealing the truth, so that one may speak of a masquerade of femininity. And in every case the masquerade is shown to be an accommodation to the expectations of femininity as envisaged by patriarchal norms and outward conformity to them. (51)

In some aspects, the situation has not changed one hundred fifty years later. Laura Gutiérrez Spencer presents a similar image of repressive female masquerade in contemporary *chicana* poetry:

In these and other works by *chicanas*, we can see that women of color trace their significance or lack of it within patriarchy as they create themselves in their own images, create masks to camouflage their true identity from a biased world, and express what they cannot say with words or ink. (83)

As discussed in the introduction, nineteenth-century women who attempted to end this masquerade of femininity by voicing their own desires risked being labeled as hysterics, a diagnosis that will also be attached to Herminia for her rejection of traditional gender norms.

Herminia is labeled as a hysteric because she is a woman with natural passions who becomes a master of her own body. She also cultivates her intellectual faculties by conversing with others who function for her as mirrors, she explores her hidden fantasies, and she develops a powerful sense of subjectivity that gives her the courage to separate from her husband. Doctor Álvarez gains privileged access into Herminia's private fantasies to eventually realize that men need to take a moment to reflect upon their unjust treatment of women. Although Álvarez initially diagnoses Herminia as a hysteric and urges her to marry, through his interviews with Herminia's mirroring friend Conchita he begins to understand the female predicament during the period.

Herminia's fantasies reveal how patriarchal power is diminishing in early twentieth-century society; women are beginning to explore their own wants and to realize that men are egotistical, dispensable beings who have no clue how to make them happy. During adolescence Herminia interacts with an external projection of herself in the form of a friend, lover, or confidant. Herminia maintains this connection with the mirror and other forms of reflections of herself throughout her life, allowing her to understand her true identity. Because of Herminia's

secretive, inquisitive, confessional, emotional, and sensual encounters with mirrorlike reflections, Insúa construes Herminia's mirror engagements as enlightening masturbatory fantasies that involve a lesbian romance with her friend Conchita. Isabel Clúa Ginés describes how Herminia acts out explicit masturbatory scenes in the novel, while arguing that Conchita plays "un papel crucial en el aprendizaje amoroso de Herminia" (146). Clúa Ginés also states that the only person capable of seducing Herminia is Conchita, a friend and lover who helps her to realize the sad reality for women in society who are pushed into the institution of marriage (160). I agree with Clúa Ginés; in my analysis I further show that Herminia's masturbatory experiences and lesbian romance with Conchita are actually solitary moments of deep introspection and self-dialogue that allow her to develop a sense of subjectivity, while questioning women's place in society.

There are various details that link Conchita with the reflective quality of the mirror, such as her name, which evokes a seashell. This detail is significant, since the shell is an emblem of the Greek goddess Venus and her counterpart the Roman goddess Aphrodite, both of whom are depicted as carrying mirrors to admire their own beauty and contemplate their thoughts, which parallels Conchita's ability to help Herminia get in touch with her body and soul.⁵⁵ As an example, Maite Zubiaurre describes nineteenth- and early twentieth-century images of Aphrodite in the following manner:

The nude woman posing in front of mirrors emerge from their textile cocoons just as Aphrodite arises from her shell. In both cases, viewers witness the birth of female sexuality and the exquisite passage—so dear—to the erotic connoisseur—from prepubescent body to sexually mature female anatomy and beauty. (184)

⁵⁵ In Botticelli's famous Renaissance painting *The Birth of Venus*, the goddess stands naked above a scallop shell.

Diana Tietjens Meyers also discusses several European paintings in which the goddess Venus is gazing at herself in a mirror. In regards to Titian's 1555 painting titled *Venus with a Mirror*, Meyers describes how the looking glass "seems to show her how she feels or how she should feel, not how she looks" (108–09). Meyers also explains how paintings of Venus symbolized female sexual power and corporeal autonomy. When discussing Peter Paul Rubens's Flemish painting *Venus before the Mirror* (1614–15), Meyers states that the work

presents an unalloyed celebration of her corporeality and allows her to enjoy her self-regarding interlude without recrimination. While Cupid and a black servant direct their attention to her adorable face, Venus gazes impassively at her stunning image in a bright, beveled glass. (1877)

As Herminia's mirror in *Las neuróticas*, Conchita serves both of these purposes: she helps her to get in touch with her buried inner self and permits her to develop a sense of erotic agency.

Another parallel between Venus and Conchita is revealed during Herminia's onanistic self-discovery, which occurs in the bathroom, while she is showering and watching the droplets of water reflect off her body to create an image of light and illumination. This detail is significant, since

The theme of female beauty and adornment was crystallized in sculptures, paintings, and prints depicting Venus (the goddess of love), a Venus-like woman, or a radiant mortal at the bath at her toilette ... In the toilette scenes, her beautiful form and its splendid reflection outshine her surroundings and the objects portrayed with her: jewelry, the mirror, a candle, and in other accoutrements that enhance her allure. (Goodman 323)

Further evidence to suggest the linkage between Conchita and Venus will be revealed at the end of the novel, when Conchita flips through *Pierre Louÿs's* French novel *Aphrodite* (1896), which includes scenes of nude women gazing at themselves in the mirror. As will be shown in my analysis, there are several other indications that expose Conchita as Herminia's mirror reflection and inner voice. Conchita appears to Herminia in all of her fantasies, forcing her to express her inner fears, desires, and emotions that she hides away from society. Herminia also hears echoes

of Conchita's "musical" voice when she is alone, helping her to make the right decisions. In addition, Herminia has conversations with Conchita in her illuminated *gabinete* filled with mirrors, and she receives numerous letters from her friend that force her to confront the truth of her unhappiness in playing the prescribed female role of the *ángel del hogar*.

After interacting with Conchita, Herminia sees herself as beautiful not by caking makeup onto her face to please men, but by admiring her nude, natural body for her own pleasure. Herminia is repulsed by the idea of serving as an instrument of male desire and prefers to cling to her own fantasies, where she can envision an ideal, nonexistent lover who is sentimental, protective, and sexually vigorous, someone who can always flatter her and console her with the right words, as well as appreciate her inner and outer beauty. As seen in *La condesita*, male authors of the time veiled tales of female self-discovery before the mirror under sensual acts with another woman. However, as discussed in chapter 1, the idea of the mirror as a woman's friend/lover projected a deeper message about a woman's powerful psychological interactions with her reflection, since "El espejo está relacionado con las principales emociones que forman la historia psicológica de la mujer" (Zubiaurre 185). This idea is further demonstrated in Mark Twain's story "Eve's Diary" (1905) when the female protagonist gazes at her image in a pool of water and states:

This is where I go when I hunger for companionship, someone to look at, someone to talk to. It is not enough that lovely white body painted there in the pool—but it is something, and something is better than utter loneliness. It talks when I talk; it is sad when I am sad: it comforts me with its sympathy; it says, 'Do not be downhearted, you poor friendless girl; I will be your friend.' It is a good friend to me, and my only one; it is my sister. (qtd. in Dijkstra 137)

The idea of the mirror as a female friend and confidant can also be seen in artwork of the time. In Louis de Schryver's French painting *Fond Confessions* (1905), the female friend is depicted as a listener and confider of secrets. This female friendship appears to have an

emotional significance, since the two women engage in an intimate embrace, as one of the friends dreamily gazes up at her companion. The female friend was also believed to possess the abilities to satisfy a woman sexually. In Pablo Picasso's painting *The Two Friends* (1904), the female friend is depicted as a mirror image and sexual lover, as two seemingly identical women sit side by side naked on the bed, while their bodies blur together as one. As Dijkstra notes, this painting represents the ““woman echoes woman” theme, showing two “friends” whose facial expression and even body type—indeed, whose every facet—showed that as beings they were interchangeable” (156).

As seen in *La condesita* the woman who united with her friend appeared to be no different than the woman who preferred a romantic bond with the mirror rather than a husband. Lesel Dawson emphasizes this phenomenon by describing how the female protagonist Annabella of John Ford's British play *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633) rejects her male suitor's marriage proposal, because he cannot compete with the mirror: “When Sorenzo calls upon her to ask for her hand in marriage, she adopts the trope of the mirror as a means of rejecting him, suggesting that as well as being no beauty, he lacks the ability to reflect her adequately; ‘You are no looking-glass,’ she tells him” (145). Jenijoy La Belle provides a similar example in the twentieth century from Doris Lessing's novel *Martha Quest* (1952). La Belle describes how the female protagonist Martha is disillusioned with marriage because her husband cannot provide her with the same amount of satisfaction that the mirror offers. During a sexual encounter, Martha's husband constantly tells her how beautiful she is, but she is unmoved by his advances, gets up from the bed, and walks in front of the mirror to admire her own beauty. This rejection of her husband has much to do with her continual self-inspection and self-admiration in her adolescent years in front of the mirror, in which she would tell herself “Beautiful, you are so beautiful” (73).

La Belle argues that “through the glass Martha can escape into a world where there is a voice softly reiterating her own desires” (73). By getting in touch with her fantasies at a young age, Martha realizes that no man can compete with her reflection: “Martha receives nothing from Douglas she has not already acquired from the looking glass. This young woman, when she is with a man, repeats her experiences with a mirror, as though she were imprisoned in the mirror stage of self-conception and fantasy (74).

In *Las neuróticas* there is a male realization of having to compete with the mirror, the masturbatory fantasy and the woman’s “friend,” to fulfill her emotional and physical desires. As seen in the other texts analyzed in this project, the “hysterical mirror” is alluring yet disturbing. On the one hand, this mirror allows men to explore their fantasies when given a glimpse into the secret masturbatory fantasies of a beautiful young woman. On the other hand, this mirror exposes the flaws of patriarchal society, creating a performance of disrupted gender roles where the hysterical woman reflects back onto men their anxieties of sexual incompetence, rejection, and diminishing authority. Herminia’s mirror also serves as a forbidden looking glass for female readers, who can put themselves in her shoes to fantasize about breaking free of gender constraints to become independent women.

The descent into the “hysteric’s” mind begins when Herminia’s father Don Roberto observes his daughters rapidly running back and forth in a nervous crisis, half-dressed, between the different rooms of the house:

A medio vestir, con el pecho y los brazos desnudos, las señoritas de Montaña iban de la alcoba al gabinete, del gabinete a la sala. Los movimientos rápidos, las voces destempladas y las exclamaciones de ira daban a entender que las señoritas de Montaña tenían los nervios en tensión. (5)

Don Roberto is unable to handle “las risas” and “los gritos histéricos” from his daughters, leading him to shut himself in his office to write (5). Don Roberto’s process of self-reflection begins when he writes beneath an illuminated lamp that brightens the crystal lens of his glasses:

Con la cara junto al papel, escribiendo en actitud de miope, maquinalmente, reflexionaba don Roberto. La luz, que una pantalla verde enfocaba sobre la mesa, hería su calva sonrosada. De pronto dejó la pluma y, al levantar la cabeza, la luz chispeó en los lentes, en la línea angulosa de la nariz y en la dentadura descarnada que la boca pálida descubría al abrirse. (6)

It is important to note that in this moment of reflection Don Roberto is writing a play for his theater company titled *La Gran Agencia de los Asuntos Mineros*. The name of the agency is significant since Spengler describes the mine as a metaphor for a journey into the hidden aspects of the feminine psyche. Regarding the nineteenth-century American story “A Night under Ground,” by L. E. Lee, Spengler explains that “the descent into a subterranean border zone is also a dangerous undertaking that unfetters forces which are usually buried deep in the nineteenth-century female self” (309).

The fact that Don Roberto is writing a play in this ambiance of mirroring while attempting to shut out the screams of his hysterical daughters illustrates that male self-reflection will be played out through the lens of the female hysteric in a theatrical process of self-observation. The narrator hints that Don Roberto’s private reflections will be enacted through his daughters by describing how they have usurped his authority. The action then moves from the father’s moment of introspection to his daughters’ changing room, where they try on different blouses before the mirror:

Un minuto después, en el gabinete, rodeadas de su madre, de Melita y la doncella, Esther y Herminia se probaron por cuarta o quinta vez las blusas [...] Doblando el talle y torciendo la cabeza como a impulsos de un resorte, se contempló Esther cuando Herminia concluyó de hacerlo. (9)

The image of the girls trying on different shirts before the looking glass foreshadows Herminia's introspective contemplations and negotiations of the different roles that she can play in patriarchal society. For example, La Belle states that "women have alternative faces and alternative selves and that it is before the mirror that these different faces are created. The motivation for these acts of self-creation is to construct a face the world the male will accept, even desire" (65).

In this scene Esther and Herminia are also described as "marionetas," "mujeres de teatro," and "payasos" with ugly, painted faces and false eyebrows that go up to the very tops of their heads, suggesting that they are actresses who will play out male anxieties and force male readers to gaze at themselves in the mirror as they enter the fantastical realm of the female looking glass that exposes fearful truths about transforming gender roles:

Las lunas biseladas del vestidor y el espejo movable reprodujeron doblemente su figura extraña de marioneta. La cara corta, angulosa, de cejas oblicuas, que subían hasta las sienes; la nariz valiente y respingada, que parecía sorber el labio superior, demasiado corto, de encías descubiertas y dientes blancos crecidos, era, bajo el pelo rubio recortado, como el de ciertas mujeres de teatro, y peinado con un aire funambulesco, algo como la cara de un payaso o de un actor de pantomima, algo exótico y agradablemente feo, que seducía y que inquietaba. (10)

The narrator describes this image of the "female actress" standing in front of the mirror as alluring yet fearful, going along with the idea that this drama played out through the female hysteric is intriguing to men because they have a voyeuristic glimpse into women's hidden fantasies; but at the same time, the hysteric's mirror will force them to confront their anxieties. The male reader is given the idea that he will be entering into the mysterious realm of female desire, when the narrator describes the *gabinete* as a private, sensual, and feminine space secluded from the public eye where women undress: "flotaba en el gabinete una emanación de perfume, de ropa usada y de alcohol sucio para templar las tenacillas: esa atmósfera de las

habitaciones en que se desnudan y se arreglan las mujeres” (16). Not only does this image of women undressing serve to arouse male readers, but it will also symbolize exposure of the sisters’ forbidden thoughts that will force men to self-reflect about their unjust treatment of women in late nineteenth-century society.

Male readers will also be encouraged to ponder the widespread diagnosis of female hysteria when the family doctor Antonio Álvarez “invades” the gabinete to listen to the girl’s conversations, while he provides commentaries as he stands in front of a glass cabinet, a piece of furniture that can capture reflections, like a mirror. The medic converses before this vitrine with another unidentified man, who hopes to get rich from exploring the mines of the insolvent theater agency that Herminia’s father owns:

El gabinete también había sido invadido. Antonio Álvarez, médico joven y estudioso, amigo del análisis y de la murmuración hablaba allí, cerca de la vitrina de Luis XIV, con un señor grueso desconocido, al que interiormente llamaba él “una víctima” desde que por su boca supo que ‘andaba en tratos para quedarse con una mina de cobre en la *Agencia*.’

—Una gran mina, según dicen. Solo con la primera calicata se ha visto que será una riqueza.

Antonio Álvarez, buen amigo de la casa, le animó todavía: —Sí, sí; una verdadera mina.

A ella sin miedo. ¡Quién fuera usted! (25)

Since the mine was associated with a descent into the female psyche, when the doctor encourages this man to figuratively descend into the mine, it can symbolize the male exploration of the “hysteric’s” buried desires that occurs throughout the novel. The fact that this other man wants to personally benefit from the mines that pertain to the defunct agency, suggests that men will become spectators of themselves as they watch this private drama of female self-becoming that occurs during their interactions with the mirror.

The medic also wants to descend into this “mine” and claims that it is his responsibility to “dissect” this group of female hysterics. When speaking with Esther’s male suitor Gustavo, the medic Álvarez tells him:

El histerismo de Melita es principalmente melancólico, callado, podría decirse ‘interior.’ El de Herminia es ruidoso, fiero, agresivo, sin duda alguna con origen definido en su naturaleza sexual. El de Esther es más grave, pues une a todo lo de Herminia manifestaciones epilépticas... A mi me producen una gran lástima las pobrecillas. Yo las quiero de verdad, amigo Gustavo. Mis manías de médico, y si usted quiere, mi pedantería de observador novel, me han llevado a la disección de las muchachas, por cuya felicidad haría un sacrificio, se lo juro... (39)

Through this process of “dissecting” the female hysteric by intruding into her private mirror, Álvarez begins to question his diagnosis of the Montaña sisters as a group of neurotics. By observing these women’s thoughts, conversations, and dreams, Álvarez realizes that maybe these women are not sick; the real cause of their sufferings is their unjust treatment in patriarchal society. Álvarez eventually discovers that men must end their egotistical, repressive authority over women and start to treat them as “friends,” like Herminia’s mirror companion Conchita, who understands her deepest fears, emotions, wants, and passions.

The male preoccupations aroused by this theatrical intrusion into the female mirror begin when the looking glass stops serving as an instrument of female vanity and becomes a gateway for female power that can provide women with a masculine type of self-assurance. For example, Herminia’s sister Esther stops in front of the looking glasses that adorn the gabinete and takes on a proud, masculine stance. The narrator depicts this woman in front of the mirror as threatening, describing the “gravedad” of her legs that have emerged beneath her skirt as she passionately admires her own beauty with confidence (10). Herminia rudely interrupts Esther’s moment of self-contemplation because she too wishes to unashamedly recognize beauty in her own reflection, understand her own sensual desires, and experience the same type of “masculine”

self-confidence that her sister possesses: “Hija, no eres tú nadie cogiéndote el espejo para ti sola” (10).

Although Herminia tries to form a bond with the mirror, the narrator describes her as a naïve young woman who fakes her happiness because she has just “appeared” in society and has not yet begun to contemplate her inner desires and question women’s social expectations:

“Herminia era, realmente, una muchacha agradable. Más joven que Melita y Esther, daba a sus veinticuatro años el desenfado ingenuo, la ruidosa alegría y el candor delicioso—todo lindamente fingido— de una colegiala que acaba de aparecer en la sociedad” (12). Despite Herminia’s inability to recognize her true self in her reflection, the narrator predicts her self-awakening and subjectivity by describing her large eyes, vibrating pupils, and pronounced mouth:

Tenía el pelo negro y brillante, la frente corta y recta, los ojos grandes, de párpados vibrátiles y pupilas metálicas que, al mirar con fijeza, parecían dos chispas de oro; la boca roja, de líneas duras y sensuales; la barbilla saliente; la mandíbula un poco pronunciada; formando un conjunto de belleza arisca, más inspirador de lujuria agresiva que de suave y sutil rendimiento. (12)

Herminia’s large, glowing eyes and her trembling eyelids are a foreshadowing of her powerful gaze upon the self, which will illuminate truths to her about her own desires and about the falseness of her identity that she masquerades to conform to unjust feminine ideals. Herminia’s red mouth with marked lines also predicts her verbal agency that triumphs over her suffocated voice at the beginning of the novel, before she experiences a masturbatory awakening that will put her into dialogue with her authentic inner voice hidden beneath a social façade. Her jaw is only slightly pronounced, but as will be subsequently shown, after Herminia discovers herself in an erotic encounter before the looking glass, her jaw becomes accentuated to vocalize her fantasies to her mirroring friend, Conchita.

Although there is a subtle foreshadowing of Herminia's blossoming of selfhood, the narrator makes it clear that at this point in the novel she is unhappy with herself and lacks self-confidence:

Pero Herminia estaba descontenta de sí misma. Hubiese querido rojas — con ese rojo enfermizo, de fiebre, con ese rojo extraño que parece sangrar en algunos rostros de marfil, con ese rojo diabólico que las cortesanas tísicas ponen sobre sus mejillas yertas—, hubiese querido rojas así, de un modo fantástico, sus mejillas, dulce y espontáneamente sonrosadas. (12)

Herminia's desire to spontaneously develop feverish, red cheeks is a covert symbol of her imminent sexual awakening that revives her from an unconscious state in which she is naïve about her body and emotions. For example, the narrator explains that the psychological reasoning behind why Herminia wants her marble cheeks to develop a natural flush is because of a sonnet that a male poet wrote to her, in which he compared her to death:

Y el culpable de este capricho, de, por lo menos la intensidad psicológica de este capricho... era Gilberto Ruiz, el poeta venezolano, autor de un soneto a Herminia, en que la comparaba con la Muerte, cantando en graves alejandrinos, como solo se hacen en Caracas, "el morboso contraste" de la tez blanca y "de místico alabastro" y "la rojez trágica y terrible" de las mejillas: "la lividez de la Muerte y las rosas de la Vida"... (12)

Herminia initially tries to mold herself into this image of the poet's desire that paints a picture of a beautiful, submissive, moribund, and statuesque woman who lacks inner agency by whitening her face with powder, falsely reddening her cheeks with blush, and widening her eyes with a makeup pencil (12). This effort of women to masquerade their identities to please the male gaze is summarized by Catherine Craft-Fairchild:

Masquerade in Irigaray's formulation is a painful, desperate renunciation of female desire: the woman experiences desire, but it is the man's desire, not her own. She desires to be desired; by catering to male fantasies, she becomes objectified as a spectacle. (54)

Despite Herminia's efforts to feel beautiful as she is objectified through the lens of the male gaze, she is unable to do so. While Esther stands proud in front of the mirror to admire her

beauty, Herminia appears reluctant to see herself in the mirror and lacks a sense of self-appreciation, which is evidenced by her circling among various mirrors and by the fact that she only sees herself as pretty when her back is turned to one (12).

Not only does Herminia avoid a frontal confrontation with the mirror, but she also has to seek approval from an outside source, rather than feeling attractive in her own skin. To seek this external approval, she turns to her sister Melita:

—¿Verdad, Melita, que estoy así muy bien? Es un perfil...

—Divino —aseguró Melita abandonando su asiento. (13)

Although Melita tells her sister that she looks divine, Herminia struggles to express her gratitude for her sister's flattery, but eventually manages to do so with a fake, rehearsed smile: "Herminia desplegó los labios lentamente, en un ensayo de sonrisa de buen tono. ¿No era nada saber sonreír?" (13). The word *ensayo* (rehearsal) emphasizes the farcical nature of Herminia's external appearance that she puts on for society; her male-pleasing mask of makeup will soon be washed off in the shower when she gets into touch with her authentic self through an autoerotic fantasy. Masturbation allows Herminia to be awoken from this moribund state; her eyes will become naturally enlarged, without makeup, allowing her to see the truth of her own desires and the reality of gender relations in society. Herminia's cheeks will develop a natural flush without the help of artificial blush that she initially caked on her face to please the male poet. Her mouth and jawline will become more pronounced, allowing her to vocalize her desires and to converse with her inner voice about unspeakable thoughts related to her emotional and physical wants, as well as her fears of marriage and of the egotistical nature of the male sex. Herminia will also learn to stand tall and proud to admire her beauty in front of the mirror, like her sister Esther, after she explores the secrets of her body.

On the morning of Herminia's awakening through the mirror, she is described as sleeping until the late hours of the morning in the complete darkness, without a single ray of light penetrating her bedroom from the balcony (45). Herminia's prolonged sleeping, along with the darkness of her room, illustrates that she has not yet experienced an awakening of the self. However, Herminia soon discovers the dormant mysteries of her body and psyche when she interacts with her mirror reflection in the shower, an event that is preceded by an infiltration of light: "La luz del sol irrumpió hasta la alcoba por el balcón abierto de repente. Herminia, de un salto, se incorporó en la cama, llevándose las manos a los ojos" (48). The luminous rays entering her bedroom from the balcony is a foreshadowing of Herminia's self-discovery that will occur through the gaze of Conchita, in an atmosphere of radiating light and reflection.

However, before this moment of self-observation, Herminia is reluctant to "see the light" or in other words to come in touch with her true persona, when she covers her eyes to shield them from the sun's rays. Despite Herminia's hesitancy to "see the light," Conchita helps her to uncover her authentic persona; she enters into the bedroom waking Herminia up, calling her and her sister "dormilonas." In this scene, Conchita is associated with illumination and consciousness, connections that will persist throughout the novel to display Herminia's process of self-becoming before the mirror. Conchita's persona is also linked to notions of warmth and nakedness, details that evoke images of life and authenticity, while Herminia's character conjures images of coldness and false adornment. For example, when the girls enter the bathroom and see Herminia showering, Esther shouts to Conchita: "¡Qué frío! Herminia debe de estar loca" (49). While Herminia's cold shower would freeze the sensations of her nude body, Conchita enjoys using the bathwater to warm her body every morning upon rising:

“Desengañaos, el agua templada es lo mejor. ¡Ay! Yo todos los días de la cama a la bañera, que me aguarda con el agua tibia” (50).

Conchita’s practice of bathing in warm water is paralleled with her habit of sleeping naked because “es lo más sano” (50). Conchita’s nudeness serves as a contrast to the prior scene of Herminia putting on makeup and trying on different blouses in the mirror, activities that suggest a masking of her inner identity. Terhi Utriainen highlights this idea by stating that “dress is a second skin which is nevertheless experienced as “real” as the first skin. Dress is such an essential aspect of human being that there are in fact, quite few situations where one is completely naked” (134–35). Later in my analysis, I reinforce how Conchita’s nudeness signifies for Herminia a movement towards an authentic individual, as she strives to tear off her social mask in autoerotic dreams and embrace her unspoken desires by sleeping naked like her friend. By the end of the novel, Herminia and Conchita’s bodies will also merge in a nude embrace to display Herminia’s sense of wholeness that she has struggled to achieve throughout the story.

In this shower scene, the narrator describes how Herminia’s “suffocated” voice emerges from the shower: she lets out muffled exclamations of pleasure as the water caresses her body (50). Herminia’s stifled moans of satisfaction show that she has not fully learned to articulate her desires. However, Conchita appears to provide Herminia with a gateway to discover and express her passions: “Conchita, como otras veces, entró a sorprender a Herminia” (50). The fact that Conchita has surprised Herminia in the shower on other occasions emphasizes the idea that she represents a looking glass, an image further stressed by the connections among water, reflection, and mirrors that are linked to the goddess Venus, born out of a shell.

Conchita tries to revive Herminia’s suffocated voice by engaging in dialogue with her: “¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?” Conchita’s greeting causes Herminia to restate the pleasure that she feels as

the water trickles down her body: “¡Deliciosa! ¡Ah!... ¡Ah!...” (50). Herminia’s verbal articulation of desire will be followed by her gazing and admiring her own body. This gaze upon the self is depicted as a lesbian interaction, in which Conchita is the one contemplating her friend. By transforming this moment of solitary female self-discovery into a pornographic scene of lesbianism, Insúa appeals to male readers by distracting them from this potentially threatening scene of a woman’s blossoming independence, while multiplying their visual pleasures, a strategy Zubiaurre also describes:

Reflection and repetition are two of the strategies most commonly used to guarantee female passivity. Hence, female sex appeal and beauty are reflected and repeated in all sorts of mimicking surfaces, such as portraits or even decorative objects and surroundings, but with greater emphasis on the surface of mirrors. (182)

Although Insúa construes Conchita as Herminia’s lover, she is subtly depicted as having both mirrorlike qualities and a gaze that presents intimate situations to the reader. This core of reflective gazes is clear when the narrator describes the silence between the two women as they stare at each other through the reflective lens of the shower water:

Conchita en silencio, con una sonrisa fina en la boca sensual, contempló a su amiga. Con las manos en el vientre, la espalda arqueándose bajo la recia impresión del agua, Herminia se ofrecía tal cual era: blanca, delgada, con las dulces curvas de una niña y la gravedad de una mujer completa. (50)

Gutiérrez Spencer describes how women engage in private interactions with the mirror by exploring their own bodies to discover themselves, a parallel to the silent, mutual gazing and touching between Herminia and Conchita:

The space ‘behind the mirror’ is one in which the poetic subject can enter into a nonverbal form of discourse, through the process of exploring her own body. The mirror becomes a place where the spirit and the body meet and converse without language. Through her exploration of the realm of the mirror, woman can come to find herself. (72)

By gazing at an exterior projection of her own body in the water/mirror, Herminia acquires a threatening sense of power and maturity, which is revealed when the narrator describes how she

offers herself to Conchita, with the severity of a “complete woman.” Herminia’s blossoming sense of confidence and independence that will lead her away from the model of the *ángel del hogar* is also projected through the descriptions of her body, which emphasize the strength and volume of her legs, while focusing on her undeveloped breasts and hips: “Muy poco acentuadas las caderas, casi en germen los senos, solo las piernas carnosas y de un modelado perfecto daban impresión de plena belleza” (50). While the image of a woman with fully developed breasts and hips suggests that she is fit for the self-sacrificing duty of maternity, the destined future for women in turn-of-the-century society, a woman with strong, perfectly sculpted legs reveals that she is able to stand up for herself and be independent.

Herminia’s emerging sense of selfhood that occurs by interacting with her reflection in a masturbatory encounter can be understood when considering theories that stress the abilities of both autoeroticism and the female gaze to grant women the powers of subjectivity. Arja Rosenholm stresses how a woman’s interaction with a Self that is construed as Other in the mirror can allow her to achieve self-knowledge:

The pervasive concern with self-definition is enacted through a set of intentional and culturally prescribed acts of looking at and being looked at. Self-mirroring is realized by means of a set of leitmotifs of seeing and looking as conditions for knowing: getting to know the very ‘riddle’ of identity comes through the eyes via the energy of scopophilia: the Self is produced by its objectification through the act of mirroring itself in the eyes of the Other. (60)

Similarly, A. Narayanan argues that masturbation involves a pleasurable gaze upon the self that allows one to fulfill one’s inner desires: “In its tripartite sense of the scopophillic [sic] instinct, that is pleasure in looking at oneself, self-touching, the seeking of pleasure within oneself and its culmination in the fulfillment of orgasm, masturbation raises all the problems of the self and its existence” (815).

Herminia's movement towards selfhood in her sensual moment of autoerotic gazing continues when the streams of water become "confused" as they trickle down this seductive "conjunto," while reflecting off one another in the bright light:

Pero el conjunto era seductor y la actitud voluptuosa, al recibir el agua fría como una caricia, seductora también. Los hilos de agua se quebraban en la nuca, irisándose al contacto de la luz, y confundidos resbalaban por la espalda, se recreaban en alguna sinuosidad graciosa y se precipitaban, por último, en el baño de cinc... (50)

The details of the radiant rays in this process of mutual gazing evoke the same imagery used to denote a coming of self-knowledge we have studied in Quiroga's "Los perseguidos" and "La meningitis y su sombra." Herminia's gaze upon the light and the mirror brings her closer to understanding her buried inner self, transforming her from a young girl naïve about her desires into a self-assured woman who knows the mysteries of her body. For example, the narrator previously described how Herminia approached Conchita in the shower with the "gravedad de una mujer completa" to contrast her new maturity incited by the mirror with her innocence at the beginning of the novel. This scene contains a similar clue to Herminia's transition into adulthood and self-awareness when Conchita dries Herminia after the shower, knowing how to caress her body better than the "doncella" (51). While Herminia is still a virgin, she has clearly developed powerful sexual knowledge that has transformed her from an innocent maiden into a woman who knows her body and the power that resides in it.

Although Herminia has developed an intimate connection with her body through touching and gazing, she is still hesitant to get in contact with her inner voice and to shed the mask that she puts on for patriarchal society. Herminia's fear of embracing her authentic image is revealed when she is too scared to speak to Conchita, causing her to return to the bedroom alone, while Conchita stares at herself in the mirror without her friend: "No se atrevían a hablar. Conchita terminaba, volvía a la alcoba y ella, sola un momento, iba vistiéndose lentamente, después de

perfumarse frente al espejo (51). Herminia thinks of Conchita with a smile on her face, but then suddenly wonders what would happen if her male suitor, the Marqués de Ojeda, could see her through the keyhole, judging her actions: “Pensó en Conchita con una larga sonrisa. Luego, en el marqués de Ojeda. Si la viera así... por un agujerito. Pero ¿se casaría aquel hombre con ella? (51). Perhaps Herminia worries that if her male suitor witnessed her getting gratification from pleasuring her own body, he would deem her unfit for marriage, as this behavior would be unacceptable. But it could also be that she thinks that Ojeda would be even more desiring of possessing her; therefore acknowledging the power and autonomy of her and her body.

In this scene, the reader is in the same position as the *marqués*, provided with a voyeuristic glimpse into Herminia’s masturbatory explorations and creating another level of mirroring. This peek into Herminia’s forbidden pleasures would allow female readers to fantasize about alternative possibilities for themselves outside the realm of heterosexual desire, while also arousing male readers by creating the illusion that they are watching a young woman satisfy her secretive passions. However, aside from this titillating image that would provoke sensual curiosity in both male and female readers, there is a lingering fear of this self-sufficient woman. This illusion of being spied on and judged could cause hesitation in female readers to try out this new role of the autonomous woman, while also creating anxiety in male readers who could realize that women no longer needed men to gratify their wants.

Herminia’s gaze, which makes her aware of both her own desires and of prescribed social norms for women, brings her closer to discovering her true self. Her movement towards authenticity is subtly exposed when she finally achieves the “spontaneous” reddening of her cheeks that she desired at the beginning of the novel, which would replace the blush makeup she applied to mold herself into an image of male desire: “Un rubor sincero coloreó sus mejillas y

acabó de vestirse apresuradamente” (51). However, the fact that Herminia hurriedly gets dressed reveals that she is not quite comfortable being “naked” like Conchita, or in other words, she is not ready to shed her costume of conformity that she puts on for society.

Herminia’s longing to achieve selfhood and authenticity is further revealed in the next scene, when she attends a tea party with her sisters and Conchita. The narrator mentions that Conchita is the only friend the girls are comfortable inviting in the presence of these men, since she poses no competition to them. Unlike the Montaña sisters, Conchita has absolutely no interest in pleasing men and refuses to flatter them with even the slightest smile (52).

The fact that Conchita ignores these men reveals that she is a model of female autonomy that Herminia will strive to live up to as she starts to abandon her efforts to objectify herself, learning to assert her own wants. Although Herminia still flirts with the marqués during this tea time, she has a new sense of confidence, which is revealed when she steps out onto a balcony with her male suitor. While Herminia was depicted as pale and moribund at the beginning of the story, images that suggested her lack of consciousness, this time it is the marqués who appears to be devoid of life, as his pale face is contrasted with the redness of Herminia’s cheeks. The marqués’s lifelessness is also revealed when the narrator compares him to a mannequin who is only able to transform into a real being when Herminia speaks to him:

Herminia y el marqués hacían grupo aparte cerca de un balcón. Ella estaba seductora con un vestido azul eléctrico, su cara se acercaba mucho a la del marqués, contrastando el pálido color del de Ojeda con las rojas mejillas y la boca escarlata de Herminia. El marquesito iba perdiendo su compostura de maniquí ante las insinuaciones de Herminia, que de frase a frase, ponía un silencio coqueto, pillando con los dientecitos blancos la dulce carnosidad del labio inferior, dejando asomar la punta de la lengua, tamaño de una fresa, o velando con sus largas pestañas brillantes las pupilas metálicas. (54)

Herminia has not only developed a natural flush, but her pronounced mouth and wide eyes also suggest the new sense of agency that the mirror has awarded her. Herminia’s metallic pupils

serve as a contrast to her previously veiled eyes that she shielded from the light in the bedroom before Conchita stormed in to wake her up and shower. Likewise, Herminia's scarlet mouth, openly flowing with words, serves as a counterpoint to her previously suffocated voice that Conchita encouraged Herminia to vocalize as she sensually gazed at herself in the water trickling off her body.

Herminia also transforms into a sculptor of her own desires, as she will soon use her autoerotic dreams to mold the marqués into an image of her fantasies. In Herminia's reveries, she manipulates his egotistical, possessive nature into a tool of self-satisfaction, when she imagines him fulfilling her sexual curiosities through his forceful erotic dominance. However, Herminia will fuse the marqués's aggressive nature with Conchita's affectionate, gentle words and caresses to create the perfect ideal lover to drive her masturbatory fantasies. For these reasons, the marqués is depicted as a mannequin that only Herminia can bring to life with her gaze. As seen in *La condesita*, a woman's bond with the mirror can provide her with the power to objectify men or obliterate their presence, which is precisely what will happen with Herminia.

Despite Herminia's blossoming sense of independence aroused by the discovery of her inner desires, traditional societal demands of womanhood attempt to tear her away from her close relationship with the mirror. First, the marqués interrogates Herminia about the other men who have been flirting with her, so as to reclaim his patriarchal dominance, and then Herminia's mother reaffirms the need for her daughter to renounce her autonomy to give in to male control through the institution of marriage. She tells the marqués's friend that "El matrimonio es la única carrera de las mujeres... Y ellas, naturalmente, desean casarse. ¿No es justo?" (56). Herminia's mother also dreams about her daughter becoming a rich *marquesa* to impress others: "Los ojos de Amelia brillaron. Ya veía a Herminia convertida en marquesa, con buenas pieles, con criadas

de smoking y un 40 HP” (56). Amelia’s desire to make her daughter appear rich to the public eye blinds her to the fact that the marqués is not actually in love with Herminia but rather wants to use her to fulfill his sexual cravings. The marqués’s malicious intentions are revealed when the narrator chimes in to expose the marqués’s inner thoughts, which paint him as a misogynist who treats women as mere sexual objects, as if they were inferior animals:

Él no pensaba en cosa tan lejana e hipotética. Le gustaba Herminia y nada más. Entre ella y la jaca compartía sus pensamientos. Llegando a lo profundo de sus reflexiones, en él confusas y rudimentarias, podría verse que el animal y la mujer le inspiraban un mismo deseo de dominación: la jaca, para galopar, la mano en el borrén y la injuria en los labios, y Herminia, con sus ojos de mora y su boca roja, para gozarla lascivamente hasta cansarse. Con una ingenuidad estúpida, se creía superior a la muchacha. (62–63)

Herminia’s self-reflective reveries allow her to recognize the marqués’s sly motives and to realize that if she were to fulfill society’s expectation to marry him, she would have to renounce her autonomy to become a prisoner of male control. Herminia starts to have fearful erotic visions about the marqués harassing her, groping her on the dance floor, expressing his jealousy when she speaks to other men, asserting his right to control her, brandishing a whip at the altar on their wedding day, and finally robbing her virginity in a brutish manner to satiate his passions. As I will discuss, while Herminia derives a certain sense of pleasure from the marqués’s sexual ferocity, she eventually ends up fleeing from her male suitor to seek solace in the company of Conchita. Only Conchita, or Herminia’s mirror image, is capable of understanding her intimate longings to be appreciated, admired, complimented, and gently caressed.

Herminia not only self-reflects on her worries about the marqués in masturbatory dreams to contemplate her future with him but also discusses these dreams with her sisters and her friends Conchita and Clementina in the *gabinete azul*, to hear opinions from other women to help her interpret her thoughts. These conversations between friends in the *gabinete azul* are depicted as imaginary elements of a confessional dream, when the narrator describes how the girls speak

to each other in an incoherent manner and blush when revealing their secrets in a way that parallels the scattered nature of masturbatory imagination: “Hablaban de un modo incoherente, pasando de las frases agudas y la confidencias que las ruborizaban, a momentos de romanticismo y de ensueño en los cuales el ansia sexual se velaba con nubes de poesía” (75–76). The mirroring nature of these *tertulias* is emphasized by the fact that they also take place in Conchita’s boudoir or in her *gabinete blanco*, which is filled with reflective surfaces such as mirrors and glass balloons. Conchita is also one to guide these meetings, acting as a looking glass that women use to get in touch with their inner selves and confess their forbidden desires (75). As the women talk about “sus encantos, sus deseos” and “sus sueños extravagantes,” Conchita acts as a wise, experienced mentor who provides them with advice: “Conchita Sáenz, maligna con los ojos serenos y erguido el torso majestuoso, ocultaba lo que a ella pudiera referirse y prefería hablar de cosas que había visto, de cosas que había oído o cosas que había sospechado” (76). Herminia seems to be the most impacted by Conchita’s words, which is evidenced when the narrator describes how she forms “juicios extraordinarios” during these *tertulias* (76).

Amid these self-judgments, Herminia tells her friends that she wants to share a dream with them in which she envisioned different men before her on the altar during her wedding day and then lost her virginity to the marqués in a state of vulnerability and helplessness. As Herminia attempts to protest against the marqués’s advances, he lifts a whip to assert his dominance:

Si, cosas de los sueños... Yo me casaba con Ramoncito; fuí a la iglesia y todo con Ramoncito... Hubo aquí un minué, precioso... Gilberto Ruiz leyó unos versos muy largos, muy largos... Y entonces es cuando empieza a confundirse todo. Ramoncito desaparece y en su lugar me da el brazo el marqués, que llega hasta el salón montado en su jaca. La jaca empieza a comerme los azahares...

—¡Jesús!

—Yo protesto y Ojeda levanta el látigo... (77)

Herminia's dream prompts a conversation about the other girls' dreams of men. Conchita criticizes every single one of their male suitors for different reasons, and Herminia finally asks her "A ti, ¿cuál es el que te gusta?" to which she responds, "Preferiría ser hombre y casarme contigo" (83). This conversation introduces Herminia's conflict between the mirrorlike presence of Conchita and her future husband, when she starts to realize that no man can satisfy her better than she herself or Conchita can.

Herminia is forced to confront her dilemma of pursuing her personal wants over marriage when she attends a carnival filled with masked and disguised individuals in the streets of the city. Herminia becomes angry as she passes by a jury with a mask in her hand, symbolizing her self-judgments that will force her to see her true, unveiled self. "Estaban indignadas... Herminia al pasar la carroza por frente a la tribuna del Jurado, gritó, con el antifaz en la mano y la boca desdeñosa: —¡Cursis!" (84). Her auto-scrutiny is reinforced when a masked Pierrot approaches her joking about the idea of her becoming a marquesa, forcing her to realize that she does not actually like the Marqués de Ojeda but wants to create an upstanding social image for herself: "Adiós, Herminia; cualquiera te aguanta de marquesa" (89). This Pierrot also publicly exposes the truth that the marqués is only interested in Herminia because he wants to sexually possess her and views her as nothing more than a *jaca* [mare] that he can mount to satisfy his lustful passions, exemplifying a mirror of hidden truths: "Herminia, ponte en guardia con el prócer, que no quiere más que a su jaca, ¡la gran jaca que debía ir a los toros! (88) The Pierrot proceeds to warn the marqués that he should not abuse women, a foreshadowing of the exploration of the female psyche that will reveal truths to men that they do not want to accept.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ The Pierrot states "¡No abuséis de las muchachas!... ¡No las llevéis al fondo de la mina!" (88).

This masquerade at carnival also brings Herminia's masked passions to the surface in a process of self-spectatorship. Terry Castle describes how women used disguises and masks during carnival to liberate themselves from their prescribed social roles and to pursue their own desires, which is what will happen with Herminia (255). Castle also mentions that the masquerade involved a game of seeing and being seen, just as carnival serves as pleasurable outlet of self-observation for Herminia to help her understand her own inner wants:

The masquerade had its undeniably provocative visual elements: one took one's pleasure, above all, in seeing and being seen. With universal privileges granted to voyeurism and self-display, the masquerade was from the start ideally suited to the satisfaction of the scopophilia and exhibitionist urges. Bodies were highlighted... The event put a premium on the sensuality of the visual. (38)

Herminia becomes, then, a spectator of herself when she drifts off into a sensual fantasy, imagining herself as a desirable woman being pursued by both Conchita and the *marqués*, who provide her with the perfect combination of erotic aggression and affectionate protection:

Conchita que había recibido los ataques de Pagés, se refugiaba al lado de Herminia, atrayendo hacia sí, con algo de protección masculina, a la muchacha acorralada por Ojeda que envalentonado por la bebida y por la complicidad de la noche, se aproximaba en lúbricos contactos a su novia. Herminia sonreía, con la boca anhelante y los ojos nublados, en una dulce inconsciencia, sin atreverse a protestar por rozamientos que no sabía si eran de Ojeda o de Conchita. Además, no ignoraba que lo discreto y lo usual en tales casos era callarse. (90–91)

The fact that Herminia thinks that she should remain silent during this experience, especially because of the grey zone of following the rules of propriety afforded by the lack of light and the champagne all the characters have consumed, shows her internalization of societal expectations for women to hide their desires, which began during her childhood when she attended a carnival with her sister Esther, back when the family had a lower socioeconomic status. In this memory, she gets lost in a crowd of men harassing her. Herminia and Esther's lack of agency in the face of male control is subtly revealed when the narrator describes how Esther felt asphyxiated, while

Herminia had to accept the indecent comments from men, as if she were chewing the dust emitted from the busy atmosphere: “Recordaba lejanos paseos de Carnaval a pie, perdida con su madre y sus hermanas entre la muchedumbre, recibiendo el manoseo lascivo de horteras, de chulillos y de viejos libidinosos. Una vez, Esther había estado a asfixiarse” (91).

Although Herminia was lost, confused, and harassed in this childhood memory, she views the present experience at carnival as something more “delicate,” revealing that she has begun to have a new type of dreams, in which she escapes male domination to become a creator of her own desires: “Esto de ahora le parecía mejor: no era mascar el polvo, no era oír desvergüenzas y presenciar escenas y ademanes de una lubricidad abyecta; no era recibir los confetti como pedradas en los ojos... Era algo más delicado, aunque fuera lo mismo” (91). Herminia’s disguise gives her the courage to break free of her feminine shackles. She imagines seeing her “friend” being kissed by a harlequin, whom she assumes is her boyfriend: “Acababa de ver en un coche a una amiga suya respondiendo a los besos de un arlequín, que debía ser su novio” (91).

Herminia’s masturbatory theatrical role play amid this carnivalesque context begins when she veiledly allows the kisses by Conchita and the marqués in a drunken-like state where society’s traditional limits are temporarily suspended:

¡Besos!... ¡Besos!... En la nuca sentía los bigotes del marquesito, y en las orejas, rojas y ardientes, la humedad febril de unos labios, tal vez los de Conchita... Y experimentaba el deseo de besar a su vez, medio rendida, medio ebria... El deseo de besar... como adivinadora, la dulce boca de su amiga se le brindaba muy cerca de la suya. Y la aceptó.
(91)

In this impermanent state of freedom, Herminia is the receiver and enactor of pleasure when she even *desires* to be kissed by her friend and mirror image Conchita. Although Herminia initially enjoys the marqués’s moustache caressing her neck, her fantasy ends with her lips pressed against the looking glass, as embodied by Conchita.

Later that night, Herminia has another reverie involving the marqués when she returns from the theater after her carnivalesque performance, opens the doors of her balcony, and cleans off the window to have a clear view into the illuminated streets (94–95). Herminia’s gazing off the balcony reveals that she is undergoing a process of self-spectatorship to develop a sense of knowledge and subjectivity. The balcony can be viewed as a site of viewing the theater of what happens in the public realm, revealing that Herminia is watching herself on stage in a theatrical performance of the self where she will negotiate her private and public identities.⁵⁷ Xiaojing Zhou describes how the balcony allowed individuals in the nineteenth century to develop a sense of subjectivity in an introspective process of seeing and being seen that permitted the manipulation of images to suit one’s desires:

the balcony observer’s superiority over the crowd below suggest the spatial relationship between the observer and the observed [that] in part constitutes the subjectivity of the former. Moreover, the observer on the balcony is not a passive recipient of what is already there down in the street; he or she selects, organizes and interprets the sights, thus producing the identity and knowledge of the objects of his or her gaze. (45)

Spengler describes a similar scenario in Elizabeth Stoddard’s story “Concerning Two Voyages” (1872), when the female protagonist Miss Sinclair becomes a spectator of herself when she gazes through the window to create her own fantasy, as if she were an audience member in the theater:

The narrator arranges herself at the cabin window like a spectator in the balcony of the theater, indulging in her voyeuristic pleasure of watching the muscular men at work. In the same way as Lee’s narrator, Miss Sinclair turns men of a lower social status into objects of her scopophilia desire, thus self-confidently asserting her own subjectivity as a form of social power. (331)

⁵⁷ Balducci compares the balcony to the window in the nineteenth century as spaces that blurred divisions of private and public: “How is privacy/the private sphere defined when strangers have visual access to your home? Not only could apartment dwellers spy on their neighbors, but they were themselves also placed on view for other Parisians by their own windows and balconies” (115).

In Herminia's fantasy on the balcony, she observes herself being forcefully dominated by aggressive male suitors, while also being aroused by gentle caresses and sweet words that emerge from Conchita. As Herminia looks off the balcony, she vividly recalls the developments of the night where she attended carnival and a costume ball. She imagines and wishes that she could have stayed at the costume ball, emphasizing the idea of masquerade as a space to experiment with other identities and roles. She fantasizes about herself sitting alone in the theater booth with a glass of champagne in front of her, ready to become an observer of herself in an inebriated state where her willpower will become suspended and she will be forced to reunite with her authentic self (95). This performance begins when Herminia remembers her male suitors approaching her drunkenly, dancing with her, and rudely caressing her body. Herminia recalls how she lost control of her willpower, getting lost and asphyxiated in the sensual, foggy environment, but then she mustered the will to stop those that act ungently, unlike the tender way employed by her mirroring companion Conchita:

El marquesito la estrechaba al bailar y ella sentía, al través del tul de su antifaz, el aliento de su novio, cálido, con una acritud de alcohol que la mareaba. Habían ido de un extremo a otro de la sala bailando lentamente. La atmósfera, espesa como neblina por el humo de los cigarros y el polvo de la alfombra, medio la asfixiaba, debilitando su voluntad para toda defensa pudorosa... Y el marquesito, envalentonado por la impunidad, con la chistera "a lo golfo", bailaba ceñido, apretándole el talle y obligándola a tropezar con una de sus piernas. Ramoncito Pagés, que solo había conseguido un *schotis* con ella, fue aún más violento y logró indignarla con sus desvergüenzas: toda su carne había sentido la fiebre de aquel... granuja, y en un momento en que la mano de Pagés intentó una grosera caricia, ella le rechazó altiva, con tal brusquedad, que Ramoncito por poco mide el suelo. (96)

We have already studied the link between dancing, mirroring, and multiple, irreconciled selves in "La meningitis y su sombra," when the male protagonist Carlos Durán was dancing with María Elvira Funes, his suppressed reflection, before a group of spectators, which force him to come to terms with his forbidden fears and desires.

While twirling around with these masked individuals, Herminia gets in touch with her inner self, when she runs off to hide and she is left sad, alone, and confused. In this moment of solitude Conchita, her mirroring self, appears with her gentle touch and leads Herminia out of this fearful atmosphere of male aggression—“Vamos mujer, ¿qué ha sido? Ven; apóyate en mi brazo” (97). Conchita brings Herminia to the private family booth in the theater, where they will drink champagne and converse behind a thick curtain: “Quedaron en el fondo, solas, amparadas por la cortina de terciopelo y, como ella todavía respirase anhelosa, su amiga le descubrió el pecho y le hizo aire con el abanico, diciéndole que no llorase” (97). This veiled, solitary booth in the theater away from the public eye allows Herminia a contemplation of her true self, who appears to her as an Other, or as a friend who understands her emotions and desires. In this moment of auto-contemplation, Herminia’s inner thoughts are projected through Conchita’s voice encouraging her to be brave and to stand up to men: “No llores, tonta; los hombres son así. Hiciste muy bien en defenderte. ¿Qué se ha creído ese tío? ¿Que una chiquilla tan linda como tú va a consentir....? ¡Oh, no llores! Estás nerviosa... Sí... ¡Pobrecilla rica!...” (97).

Conchita makes Herminia aware of her beauty and self-worth by repeatedly exclaiming: “¡Qué bonita eres! ¡Qué bonita eres!” (97, 98). Conchita’s voice is depicted as a musical melody that sends Herminia into a sensual rapture, as she feels her friend’s hands caressing her body and disregards all of her exterior surroundings to completely immerse herself in her secret fantasy in the darkness of the theater booth:

Y Conchita, con su voz musical, ahogándose en suspiros y sus tibias manos, que parecían cubiertas de seda, y su boca húmeda y fragante, le daba la impresión de un joven guapo y de maneras exquisitas, que se hubiese disfrazado de mujer... En aquella penumbra del antepalco, adonde todo lo exterior, música, luz y rumor de muchedumbre, llegaba amortiguándose, ella sonó despierta... El marqués, Conchita y Ramoncito hablaban con una misma voz de amoroso deseo. Y sin responderles, ella se estremecía ante la idea de ser amada, de ser querida. (97–98)

By describing Conchita's voice as a musical tune that awakens Herminia's desires, the narrator further suggests that Herminia is getting in touch with her authentic mirror reflection through masturbation. Emily Wilbourne mentions a similar occurrence with the female protagonist Florinda in the seventeenth-century Italian play *Amor nello specchio* (Love in the Mirror; 1622), by Giovan Battista Andreini. Wilbourne argues that Florinda's ability to hear her own voice in masturbatory fantasies allows her to see herself from an external perspective and develop a sense of verbal subjectivity enacted through musicality: "My focus on aurality traces a persistent articulation of sexuality through locality: as the object of Florinda's affections shifts outward from self to other, her mode of expression shifts from sound to semantics, from music to language" (56). Wilbourne reinforces how Florinda's masturbatory practices allow her to form a bond with an exterior image of herself in the mirror by hearing an echo of her own musical voice that reiterates her passions:

The changes in sounding rhythms represent the changes taking place within Florinda's body, a hot excitement that alters her interior state and the sonic force of exterior manifestations. As the performance spectacularizes the affect of sound beyond mere semantic content, Virginia-Florinda performs an Echo effect, staging the conjunction of the female voice and female sexuality as song. (58)

The imaginary musical echo in Herminia's mind reveals to her the secret world of her sensations, forcing her to shed the naïve innocence she possessed at the beginning of the novel: "Todo el mundo secreto de sus sentidos y toda la íntima vehemencia de su carne se confabulaban en un desvarío, en un desmayo, en una abdicación de su pudor, de su temor, en algo profundo y contradictorio que le hacía aborrecer y desear al mismo tiempo" (98). This mixture of desire and disgust reveals Herminia's guilt at pursuing her own wants over societal expectations for women. However, Herminia embraces her desires when she rejects her male suitors and gives into

Conchita's kisses in this moment of reverie: "Y ella, vencida, desmayada en una ansia de amor y de ensueño, había respondido a los besos suaves y vagarosos de Conchita. ¡Conchita!..." (98).⁵⁸

Herminia's enjoyment is interrupted by Conchita's father, followed by her future husband the marqués; that is, her internalization of public gazes pressure her to give in to patriarchal authority. The marqués immediately asserts his dominance over Herminia:

—¿Dónde te metiste? He andado loco, buscándote por la sala, por el foyer... hasta que Pagés me dijo que estabas con Conchita [...] ¿Qué te pasó con Pagés? Algo me han dicho. Yo no quería que bailases con él. Solo yo tengo derecho de bailar contigo, yo solo... Y a besarte y a... Herminia, te adoro, te adoro... Esta noche soñaré contigo. ¡Mira que si nos huyésemos! (98)

Instead of submitting to the marqués's authority, Herminia envisions him as a ridiculous idiot who does not threaten her one bit in his state of drunkenness: "Ella midió con la mirada turbia al marquesito. Lo encontró ridículo, con la corbata ladeada y los ojos empequeñecidos por la borrachera" (99). Although the marqués tries to intrude into Herminia's private fantasy by telling her that he will dream with her that night, she refuses to let him do so, an indicator of her blossoming desire for independence: "No, no voy... Tú te has confundido... te sobra una copa o una botella" (99).

The self-pleasuring retelling of the night events is interrupted here, bringing the reader back to Herminia's bedroom, by the balcony, and then to her bedroom, where she undresses. For the first time, Herminia is not cold when she takes her clothes off, but rather experiences a heated, suffocated passion resulting from her prolonged inability to express her inner longings: "No tenía frío al desnudarse, como otras noches. Tenía acaso calor, sofocación. En camisa y con los pies desnudos entró de nuevo en el gabinete. ¿Qué iba a hacer allí? Pero ¿no pensaba

⁵⁸ This blending of repulsion and desire will also be observed in Consuelo's masturbatory nightmares in chapter 6.

dormir?” (99). When Herminia tries to turn the light off and sleep, to avoid interaction with her naked body, the mirror captures her reflection and she notices her erotic suppression through her tangled hair and the bags beneath her eyes. Herminia also discovers that there is still makeup caked on her face, a remnant of her efforts to cover up her true desires (99–100).

In this moment of introspection, Herminia wishes she could sleep naked like Conchita, revealing her wish to embrace her authentic persona. However, this idea of shedding her mask of conformity plagues her with a fear of surveillance, which is evidenced by her darting gazes around the room before deciding to remove her clothes (100). Herminia does work up the courage to remove her clothes in order to proudly gaze upon her body and to recognize its beauty and desirability: “Podía hacerlo... Era aquel cuerpo suyo, blanco, dulce, suave, el que Ojeda quería llevar a Fornos... al Ideal, ¿para qué? Era aquel cuerpo suyo el que Ramoncito había apretado brutalmente y el que Conchita, blanda y mimosa, había defendido con caricias” (100).

Herminia’s “nakedness,” or in other words the exposure of her true self, causes her to worry that someone will barge into her bedroom to discover her vulnerable, without her mask of gender conformity. She imagines that these spectators of her dream would witness her getting lost in admiration and pleasuring of her own body:

¡Si los tres la viesan en aquel momento! Y adoptó posturas de estatua y de bailarina, sintiendo al contemplarse una indefinible emoción en la que el rubor y la lujuria armonizaban. ¡Sí, deseaba ser amada! Deseaba que la adorasen con adoración más completa que la que ella misma podía consagrarse. (100)

This embarrassment makes Herminia fearful to go back to sleep, which could cause these guilty hidden thoughts to subconsciously come to the surface again. She also turns off the light and begins to feel coldness upon her body, contrasting with the light and warmth that Conchita brought her in the shower to revive her from a state of insentience. As Herminia struggles to

fight off her masturbatory fantasies, her arms start flailing, but she is eventually unable to avoid the urge to caress her body:

Apagó la luz y llegó a tientas a su cama. No podría dormir. Las sábanas frías la hicieron estremecerse; pero reaccionó en seguida, subiendo el embozo hasta el cuello y frotándose los brazos... Sus pensamientos, lejos de cambiar, parecían acentuarse con la sensación del cuerpo desnudo entre las sábanas y con el dulce contacto de sus manos por el torso. Nunca había sentido, tan delicada como entonces, la voluptuosidad de acariciarse. (101)

It is the echo of Conchita's voice praising Herminia's beauty that will give her the courage to re-enter her private fantasy, beginning to establish a relationship with her inner voice to understand her wants:

Cruzaba los brazos de manera que los apretados y redondos senos se irguiesen en la palma de sus manos. Los abandonaba después con lentitud, y los dedos entreabiertos recorrían la línea mórbida del vientre. La voz amorosa de Conchita llegaba como un eco a sus oídos:

—¡Qué bonita eres! ¡Qué bonita eres! (100)

It appears that there is no single man or woman existing who can fulfill Herminia's passions, leading her to create a fantastical conglomeration composed of different individuals with unique qualities that she finds alluring, such as the soft caresses of her "friend" Conchita and the exciting, yet fearful erotic aggressiveness of her male suitors:

Pero su delicado sensualismo entraba en una fase de vehemencia y de ardor. No quería acariciarse sino sentirse acariciada... Por su amiga, por el marqués, por Ramoncito, por algo o por alguien que fuera voluptuosidad y rudeza, roce de seda y ardor de llama, ¡Ser amada, ser amada! (100-01)

During this fantasy Herminia sheds her thought of the male suitors and returns to her memory of Conchita caressing her in the shower that symbolized her self-discovery, which appears to drive her to orgasm: "Luego el recuerdo de Conchita enjugándola en el baño la sumía en una onda tibia de ansiedad sexual. Debatándose entre las sábanas, jadeante, sus ideas adquirirían una manifestación neurótica" (101). The narrator labels Herminia's fulfillment of her desires as

“neurotic,” which illustrates the intrusion of the omnipotent medical gaze into her fantasy, a gaze that has disturbed the protagonists of all the other texts in this dissertation. This lingering medical vigilance causes Herminia to experience bodily sufferings that transport her into a nightmarish realm of delirium, where she imagines being watched in this moment of sexual surrender: “Creía ver llegar a los amigos de la casa para sorprenderla débil, desnuda, sin defensa, sin la máscara de altivez que usaba frente ellos” (101).

This fear of being scrutinized for partaking in self-satisfaction over heterosexual norms causes Herminia to be driven away from her orgasmic thoughts of Conchita and to reminisce about the men in her dream to choose the perfect husband. Herminia is a spectator of herself in this introspective recollection, envisioning her body being touched in different ways, while reflecting upon which man excited her the most with his physical abilities, personality, and emotional tenderness:

Y se imaginaba la caricia mansa de Santelmo, el ataque brutal de Morata, de Ramoncito, del marqués, del ingeniero belga, de Molina... Todos caerían como fieras sobre su frágil cuerpo de muñeca. Esta idea la amedrentaba y la excitaba. ¡Oh! ¿Cuál entre todos?... Gustavo era guapo y arrogante... Álvarez la miraba de un modo cariñoso y amable... Gilberto Ruiz ponía en ella sus ojos negros, brillantísimos como expresando un ansia lúbrica. (101)

Despite Herminia’s attempt to choose a husband from this selection of men, she despises these male suitors and views them as meaningless phantasms of her imagination that she has created to satisfy her burning desires: “No sabía... los despreciaba... Eran espectros de varón, fantasmas... No eran todos juntos, vestidos de frac, frívolos y sonrientes, el hombre con quien soñaban su carne y su espíritu de virgen voluptuosa...” (101–02).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ This idea of a woman crafting a male phantasm to suit her desires was also observed in “La meningitis y su sombra,” but in Quiroga’s text the reader was able to see the male reaction to this expression of female autonomy and male rejection.

The narrator attributes Herminia's nightmares to society's denouncement of natural female desire that blossoms during puberty. She wants to let out screams and moans as an outward expression of her passions, but due to her internalization of social norms for women, she fervently attempts to suppress her sensations:

Pero ¡qué triste aquel insomnio con el pudor en derrota, con el cuerpo febril ansiando entregarse, rendirse, verse sometido por el amor físico! Era el tremendo martirio de la pubertad aherrojada por todos los absurdos y todas las hipocresías. Herminia sintió ansia de gritar, de gemir... y mordiéndose los labios con violencia y con rabia, intentó dominarse (102).⁶⁰

It is only through fantasizing that Herminia feels comfortable to play out her desires. Sleeping provides Herminia with the solace to pleasure her body, since she will be in a state where her willpower will be suspended and cannot be held responsible for her remorseful actions that transgressed norms of womanhood: "Después, cuando el sueño comenzaba a poseerla, rendida en una laxitud apacible, volvió a recrear sus manos en el contacto de sus senos y volvió a deslizarlas con dulzura y suavidad amorosa por la línea mórbida del vientre" (102).

This unjust suppression of the female imagination, independence, and sexual desire continues in the next scene in the clinic of Antonio Álvarez. Álvarez has a conversation with Gustavo, Esther's male suitor, which exposes how pathologization served as a mechanism to mold women into prescribed gender roles, while preventing them from satisfying their personal wants. The two men discuss the hysterical condition of the Montaña sisters, which subtly reveals the disease of hysteria as an invention of patriarchal society to keep women in a place of subjugation, an idea mentioned by Clúa Ginés:

Sin dejar a un lado conceptos que flotan en el universo cultural de la época (el peso de la herencia familiar, la degeneración como rasgo que afecta a la sociedad, etc.), la novela parece llegar a una conclusión rompedora: la enfermedad no es la expresión de una

⁶⁰ This connection between female suffering, shame, and expression of sexual desire, observed in *La condesita* and "Los guantes de goma," will also be broached in chapter 6.

patología individual, de una anomalía en el sistema social, sino todo lo contrario, la materialización de la presión que la norma moral, aceptada socialmente, ejerce sobre los sujetos. (152)⁶¹

Álvarez tells Gustavo that he should marry Herminia's sister Esther, so that she no longer has "dreams of a hysteric," but rather fantasies of marriage and maternity. Álvarez is particularly concerned about Esther's attendance at dances and carnivals with men, events where women would explore their concealed passions in a performance of the self (107).

Álvarez also expresses his concerns about women's blossoming sense of subjectivity, making a reference to the previous episodes of carnival and the masked ball where Herminia used her imagination to explore her suppressed fantasies:

¡Los episodios de *La boca de la mina* y del baile del Real! ¿Pasaría nada de eso si los hombres y las mujeres se amasen normalmente? Por no dar al amor su natural y física expansión, por creer inmorales las exigencias del instinto, se ha creado la lascivia repugnante, la lujuria del cerebro... Da asco y da rabia... En aquel baile, al enterarme de la aventura de Herminia con Pagés y contemplando a las parejas que bailaban acopladas y las orgías de los palcos, de una lubricidad manifiesta, yo pensaba: «¿No sería mejor que se desnudasen todos y cada hombre tomase a su mujer, cada fauno a su ninfa?» (109)

In this passage, Álvarez ponders the possibility of naturalizing sexual attraction and eliminating moral imperatives of society, but he reverts to traditional patriarchal ideals when he depicts women as instruments of male pleasure who lack the power to make their own decisions in regards to their "mate." Despite the medic's final misogynistic reflections, his comments illustrate how he is beginning to imagine a different social arrangement that accommodates the changing roles of men and women, something that he will continue to do throughout the course of the novel, discovering that marriage is not the solution to "hysteria."

⁶¹ This same idea of female hysteria as an invention of patriarchal control will also be subtly revealed in *La enferma*, when Consuelo is urged by her physician to marry during adolescence when she starts to experience sexual desires. Consuelo later attempts to express her passions when she is married, but her husband shames her and tells her that she is sick, showing that women continue to risk pathologization.

The pathologization of women rejecting their prescribed roles continues when Álvarez leads Gustavo into the sick rooms of his patients and stops at a room lodging a hysterical and nymphomaniacal female patient, whose illness is rooted in her decision to marry at a late age (111). Álvarez also takes Gustavo to the room of a tubercular woman, who spends her days in bed in solitary contemplation, prolonging the engagement with her boyfriend, who has gifted her a watch that slowly ticks with the passage of time: “El otro día le traje un relojito de plata. Ella la tomó con sus manos, casi transparentes, huesos y piel, y seguía la marcha lenta, lenta del minuterero” (113). Álvarez concludes that this woman is yet another hysteric, to which Gustavo responds in a joking manner, “¿También?” Álvarez reveals the ridiculousness of his own diagnosis when he says that pretty much all women are hysterics and that neurosis is an epidemic that affects all of society:

—También. ¿Qué? ¿Le sorprende? Vamos, me cree usted un maniático. Usted dice: «Para este hombre todas las muchachas son neuróticas.» Todas, no; casi todas. Vivimos en la edad patológica: la humanidad está enferma, más enferma que nunca. (114)

This ironic medical reading reveals the emerging destruction of the hysterical paradigm that served to perpetuate female inferiority in the nineteenth century and beyond and to halt women’s movement towards equality. The fact that all women are neurotics for the doctor subtly reveals the normalization of the new woman, whose power was depicted in terms of sickness due to the threat that she posed to patriarchal stability.

Conchita sees the truth behind Álvarez’s fake diagnosis of hysteria and knows that the disease is a mechanism to strip women of their independence. When Herminia expresses her fairy-tale view of marriage to Conchita in a subsequent scene by depicting the institution as “una cosa bonita,” Conchita refutes her friend’s idea by describing marriage as “un rapto” that works to mold women into objects of male control (126). Herminia is not ready to accept this harsh

reality, which is revealed when she hurriedly gets dressed, just as she did after her shower with Conchita, when she imagined the marqués gazing at her through a keyhole and judging her for rejecting the demands of womanhood.⁶² Although Herminia tries to “get dressed” to conceal her fears about marriage, Conchita continues her interrogation, which ultimately pressures her friend to confess that she does not love the marqués but rather wants to get married to create a proper social image for herself: “La verdad, Conchita... no sé... Yo no soy como mi hermana. No sé amar de ese modo romántico. Si he de casarme con Ojeda, pues con Ojeda. ¿Qué más da? Me gustaría casarme, tener mi casa, mi auto, mi turno segundo y cuatro sombreros cada temporada...” (130).

In a subsequent conversation in the gabinete, Herminia’s blossoming awareness of gender roles is illustrated when she finally accepts Conchita’s theory that all men are the same type of egotistical beings who are incapable of loving women. However, she does see marriage as an opportunity to satisfy her sexual curiosities, transforming it from a mechanism of female submission into an outlet for erotic expression:

Ojeda me es indiferente, sin llegar a repugnarme. Sirve para marido y eso me basta. Soy de la opinión de Conchita: todos los hombres son iguales. Te confieso que lo único que me inspira el marquesito es cierta curiosidad. Tanto me habla de lo que va a hacer y deshacer conmigo, sobre todo a deshacer, y me lo dice de tal modo que, a la verdad, a veces me excito también. (157)

While the marqués’s talk about how he wants to pleasure Herminia drives her erotic fantasies, her desires will remain unfulfilled after marrying him, leading her to fantasize about reuniting with Conchita.

⁶² “Ah... pero voy a vestirme...—exclamó Herminia— el salto... las babuchas... En camisa me enfrió” (127).

The marqués's failure to satisfy Herminia's emotional and physical desires is foreshadowed when she tells her sisters and Conchita that he reminds her of "uno de los monos del Retiro" (156). Later, Conchita will also label him as an insignificant "mono" and "orangután" who does not understand nor deserve Herminia. The repeated associations with a monkey and an orangutan, combined with the marqués's incomprehension of his future bride evoke a passage from Honoré de Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage* (1829), first translated into Spanish in 1841. In Balzac's marriage treatise, he describes the sexually and emotionally inept husband as a failed musical artist and as an orangutan trying to play the violin:

¡Cuántos orangu... quiero decir, hombres, ¡se casan sin saber lo que es una mujer!
¡Cuántos predestinados han hecho con ellas lo que el mono de Cassan con el violín! Han roto el corazón que no comprendían, como han tirado y despreciado la joya cuyo secreto les era desconocido. (88)

Balzac also argues that love should be a musical melody that awakens a woman's desires, while depicting her as a sensitive instrument with mysterious desires:

El amor es la más melodía de todas las armonías. Tenemos de él un sentimiento innato. La mujer es un delicioso instrumento de placer; pero es preciso tener un conocimiento exacto de sus delicadas cuerdas, estudiar la postura, la tímida clave, el caprichoso y mudable deseo. (88)

While the marqués is depicted as a brutish monkey who cannot "play music" for Herminia, Conchita always manages to touch Herminia's heart and awaken her desires with her "voz musical," evoking the anxiety that women would reject men to masturbate because only they themselves could understand their emotional and physical wants.

Herminia uses the mirror to contemplate how sexual relations would be with the marqués if they were to get married, and she is left with a dark premonition in her mind. Herminia's fearful visions of having sex with her potential husband begin when she goes to the Estanque for a summer vacation with her family, a house by a body of water that projects mirror reflections.

While at the Estanque, Herminia undergoes an internal crisis about her marital obligations and receives frequent letters from Conchita that allow her to analyze her dilemma from an external perspective: “De Conchita se tenían noticias en el Estanque con gran frecuencia. —Conchita sí es una amiga —decía Herminia” (196).

While Conchita’s letters sway Herminia towards her desires for independence, she is burdened by social demands when she contemplates her dilemma through the lens of her “hysterical” sister Esther, who undergoes a hysterical attack and enters into a state of depression because her male suitor Gustavo has failed to marry her. Herminia fearfully imagines what her life would be like if she too remained single:

Contemplándola Herminia experimentaba por primera vez sensaciones de tedio, de honda tristeza, de pesimismo. ¡Qué horrible era la vida! Compadeciendo a su hermana, temía por sí misma, preguntándose qué suerte le estaría reservada. La alegre vida de la Agencia, llena de frivolidades inocentes y de emociones que excitaban sin profundizar demasiado, parecía muy lejos... (197).

By describing how the theatrical life at the Agency, which was filled with disguises and masks, is now far from Herminia during her time at the Estanque, the narrator subtly suggests that Herminia will learn to abandon her masquerade of identity and come to terms with her true emotions. Herminia starts to see that women in her society have been blinded by a nonexistent ideal of a romantic marriage, and that they risk becoming mere objects of male pleasure if they decide to mold themselves into the image of the *ángel del hogar*.

Herminia knows the marqués does not love her and only wants to use her to satisfy his lust, yet she still tries to convince herself that marrying would give her a more “tolerable” life, especially because she does not want to end up as a single, suffering hysteric like her sister. However, this assertion in Herminia’s mind is suddenly clouded by nightmarish visions of the marqués shrouded as a lubricious ape, emphasizing the aforementioned idea in Balzac’s treatise

that several men in nineteenth-century were brutish orangutans who would never understand the female body and psyche (198–99). Herminia is surprised about her new ability to self-reflect on such a profound level and again tries to shake off these negative thoughts about love and marriage. However, her reveries continue to reveal that getting married would strip her of her independence. While at the Estanque, Herminia sits in the illuminated gabinete staring at portraits of royalty, using them as mirrors to contemplate her own happiness when being converted into a marquesa (200). According to Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, “mirrors are described in terms of portraits, and portraits in terms of mirrors. Both communicate obvious signals and elevate the stature of conventional truth” (152). Melchior-Bonnet also highlights the connection between the portrait and one’s false societal image: “From applying face make-up before the mirror to commissioning a touched-up portrait, it all came down to having a presentable face to the world. Both the mirror and the portrait allowed people of obscure origins a means of denying their true identity” (152). When Herminia starts to contemplate her identity in these portraits, her reflection will no longer appear in her friend Conchita, but in the marqués presenting himself as a looking glass through which his future wife will see herself.

The disappearance of Herminia’s reflection into the marqués occurs when he talks about their marriage during the sunset. The marqués thinks Herminia is more beautiful in the darkness, a time when she would be unable to see herself in the mirror (204). The threatening annihilation of Herminia’s true being into her social mask is revealed when she and the marqués stop at a double stairway together and all light disappears. Herminia sees nothing but a black shadow before her eyes:

El marqués y Herminia se detuvieron en el rellano de la doble escalera de entrada al hotel. Anohecía. En lo hondo comenzaban a encenderse los faroles de la estación. Al final del jardín, en el bosquecillo de acacias y de álamos negros, la sombra era completa. (204)

When Herminia loses touch with her reflection, the marqués asserts his dominance, calling her “esquiva” and telling her “Vas a ser pronto mi mujer... seremos muy felices, muy felices... Tendrás cuanto desees. Yo no sabré cómo cuidarte ni cómo satisfacer todos tus caprichos. Vas a ser pronto mía, muy pronto...” (205). The marqués half openly and half veiledly admits that he will fail in satisfying her wants as a husband, but he does not care, since she will be forced to submit to his authority, confirming Conchita’s suspicions about men that Herminia was too scared to hear. The light, courage, and knowledge that Conchita brought to Herminia is transformed into blindness. The power of Herminia’s gaze disappears when her eyes wander back and forth and she sees nothing but dark shadows: “La voz del marquesito, balbuciente, sonaba muy cerca de su oído. Temerosa de que su cara, al buscar la de él, tropezase con sus labios, permanecía inmóvil con la mirada errante por las sombras del jardín” (205).

Herminia associates the marqués’ possessive behavior and her lack of agency with their wedding night, which would be a prologue to the rest of their lives together. The marqués tells Herminia, “Querría que esta noche de verano fuese la noche de nuestras bodas, ¡Herminia, Herminia!” (205). The marqués proceeds to kiss Herminia on the lips against her will, and in this moment the marqués’s lips stop to cover Herminia’s eyes, further suggesting that marriage would extinguish her liberating gaze of self-pleasure in her husband’s desires (206). This scenario is depicted as a hallucinatory reverie within Herminia’s mind that allows her to undergo a trial of her future before the mirror, when the narrator describes the marqués as an actor or a character in a novel that Herminia had read. The narrator also mentions that this scene in the forest has emerged during Herminia’s hours of solitary reflection:

Toda la ilusión de la boda, de la nueva vida brillante que parecía tan próxima, comenzaba a desvanecerse. Era atroz... pero ella le tenía un gran miedo a lo desconocido, y la idea de aventurarse por el jardín, sombrío y silencioso, donde él la esperaba agazapado detrás

de algún arbusto, con el oído atento y la respiración contenida, como un ladrón, como un espía, como un bandido de aquellos de teatro y las novelas, le daba un gran miedo, un terror nervioso, inexplicable... Inexplicable, porque al mismo tiempo, algo como un impulso secreto, como una sugestión del peligro, le había llevado varias veces en aquella eterna hora de reflexiones y de espanto. (208)

This trial before the mirror confirms Conchita's previous assertion that marriage for women is "un rapto," depicting her again as a predictor of the future who can help Herminia to choose the right path in life to ensure her happiness.

Because Conchita is Herminia's mentor who forces her into a dialogue with the self, she goes to see her friend to seek advice (214). Conchita receives Herminia in her "gabinete blanco," a place of secrecy filled with light and mirrors. Conchita is depicted as an all-knowing power when Herminia relates the loss of her purity to her, or her mirror, who encourages her to keep playing her role of the brave, independent woman: "¡Pobrecita mía! No sufras. Todo se arreglará, yo te lo juro. Comprendo tu situación. No es para menos... Pero, mira, no te acobardes. Sigue así, valiente, fuerte, en tu papel..." (217). Conchita refers to the marqués as an orangutan who cannot appreciate Herminia's worth, while taking her friend back to an autoerotic realm of pleasure. Conchita compliments Herminia's body and reiterates that no man will be able to fulfill her desires for soft caresses and affectionate love:

los hombres son cobardes, repugnantes, groseros. Tú lo sabes bien, pobrecita mía. Yo te lo dije muchas veces, pero no me oíste, no quisiste hacerme caso. Acuérdate aquella noche del Real, en un baile... El salvaje de Pagés quiso confundirte con una de esas que bailan en los merenderos; a ti mi vida, pobrecita mía; a ti, que eres tan dulce, tan delicada, tan fina; a ti, que mereces un amor suave, lleno de caricias blandas... Y el otro salvaje [...] ha profanado ya tu cuerpo de raso... (221–22).

Conchita encourages Herminia to use these dreams of self-spectatorship as a tool of knowledge to understand what she actually wants in a partner and to see that heterosexual relationships are unfulfilling for women because men have no interest in getting to know women's desires and view them as mere sexual objects.

When Herminia realizes that her failure to listen to Conchita has made her a prisoner of patriarchal authority, since the marqués has robbed her of her virginity and left her with no other choice but to hope he will marry her, she falls on the brink of death after taking a high dose of laudanum. Álvarez is summoned to her house, and Conchita is the one to answer the door and lead him into Herminia's bedroom. The narrator describes how Herminia is about to fall asleep under the effect of the narcotic, but this time, instead of providing her with an outlet to explore her hidden autoerotic desires, sleeping will symbolize her imminent death (231). Herminia's transformation from the slumbering, moribund muse of the male poet at the beginning of the novel into a self-assured creator of her own desires has been reversed by her sexual relation outside of wedlock with the marqués, her unsanctioned pregnancy, and the uncertainty that the man who took advantage of her while she had fainted will save her from opprobrium by marrying her. Herminia's family and doctor have to keep her from falling asleep and dying or, in other words, have to push her to renounce her selfhood, to have her mirror overtaken by the marqués. However, Herminia's cheeks go back to their lividness from before she discovered herself in the mirror, and she repeats "Quiero dormir... Dejádme dormir..." (232).

Álvarez assumes his responsibility as the doctor who must penetrate the mind of the female hysteric to "illuminate" her "hidden disposition" (Porter 258). To understand Herminia's secrets, Álvarez turns to Conchita: "Ya era hora de que él investigase los «móviles de la extraña resolución» de la pobrecita Herminia. Y buscó en la alcoba a Conchita, que debía de estar en el secreto" (233–34). The narrator also suggests that Herminia's secret lies in Conchita's gaze, emphasizing that she is a mirror that holds the enigmas of Herminia's fears, desires, and passions: "Ella quería que desapareciese aquella sombra de tristeza que rodeaba a todos... Pero ella, seguramente, estaba mejor que nadie en el secreto. Lo decían sus ojos" (235).

Conchita forces Herminia into another interrogation of the self to revive her from her state of unconsciousness and endow her with a sense of intelligence, a scene that Álvarez has the privilege of observing, helping him to unlock the causes of this case of “female hysteria”: “Sospechaba y quería saber... Saber plenamente para, en todo lo que pudiese, ayudar a la pobre Herminia a resolver su conflicto. Miró a Conchita, interrogándola, y Conchita le respondió con una mirada de inteligencia” (236). Conchita and the medic decide that they must work together to save Herminia from death, and that to do so they must go to the theater (237). The theater-like wedding ceremony will serve as a site of auto-spectatorship that reveals hidden aspects of the self. Álvarez watches Herminia get married in front of an audience, composed of actors from *La Agencia*:

Aramis, en su crónica de salones, opinaba que Herminia y el marquesito “unían sus destinos para siempre”. Antonio Álvarez no se arriesgaba a compartir aquel optimismo. Precisamente entonces, cuando el frac del marquesito y el vestido blanco de Herminia se reunían amorosamente bajo el yugo nupcial, ante los ojos de los invitados, que eran los antiguos amigos de la Agencia, él dudaba y sentía una gran amargura... (238)

The newspaper gossip column commenting on the happy life Herminia and the marqués will live together reveals the fake performance that Herminia is putting on before society, and also makes the medic realize that maybe marriage is not the solution to end women’s sufferings, as he originally claimed in his clinic.

Herminia’s true self comes to the surface in this process of self-spectatorship when Álvarez interprets the bride’s feelings through Conchita’s sadness—she is gazing at the marqués as if she were the one marrying him:

Álvarez pensó que tampoco Conchita estaba alegre. Cuando sus ojos y los ojos de Ojeda se encontraban, volvía la cara con disimulado desdén, reapareciendo su sonrisa al ser las brillantes pupilas de Herminia las que buscaban las caricias de las suyas. Conchita no podía estar alegre: recordaba, seguramente, aquel episodio trágico y grotesco del suicidio frustrado de Herminia y los días de ansiedad que le siguieron (239–40).

The meeting of Conchita's gaze with her illuminated pupils reveals Herminia's wish to reunite with the mirror, where she can return to her autoerotic bliss where she was the creator of her desires and save herself from her suicide that will be brought on by marriage with the marqués. When this locking of eyes occurs, Conchita and the marqués enter into an imaginary competition:

Y habían querido luchar, Conchita y él, por un sentimiento de amistad y justicia que no era de los más frecuentes en los tiempos actuales. Conchita, acaso, había puesto en combate una vehemencia extraña, luchando por conquistar algo que, en definitiva, significaba para ella una derrota: la derrota de una gran ilusión, de un ensueño de pasión prohibida... Antonio Álvarez sonrió. (240)

This image of friendship and justice represents the fight for female equality that Insúa subtly suggests can be achieved by destroying the false, fairy-tale illusion of the outdated model of marriage, which has perpetuated the suppression of women's desires for centuries. Marriage should be a friendship instead, in which men listen to women's emotions and passions, just as Conchita is able to do with Herminia.⁶³ By acting as a spectator of Herminia's performance of the self before the mirror, Álvarez begins to view Conchita as a friend to men, because she is able to reveal hidden truths about what women actually want:

A pesar de sus rectas ideas sobre el amor, no se atrevía a condenar a Conchita: la dulce amiga, la gentil... —pensó un instante la palabra, la gentil extraviada, —dijo al fin, bien merecida, por la nobleza y la pureza de su corazón, una disculpa. ¡Era muy generosa y muy inteligente aquella enemiga amable de los hombres, que, tal vez, no lo fuese siempre... (240)

Six days after marrying, Herminia receives a letter from Conchita asking: “¿Eres feliz? ¿Estás contenta? ¿Crees mi linda Herminia, que te gustará el matrimonio?” (250). We have found that the letter is a metaphor for gazing in the mirror and coming to terms with one's

⁶³ The transformation of marriage into a wished-for bond of equality will be further analyzed in chapter 6.

secretive desires in a fantastical process of self-observation. Due to the guilt that Herminia feels for not enjoying marriage and her unhappiness with conforming to norms of femininity, she says to herself that it is much too soon to ponder such questions so early in her marriage and, for the first time, she is hesitant to respond to her friend. As she reads the letter, her husband gazes at her from the bedroom and intrudes into the gabinete, the intimate feminine space that has symbolized her inner desires through the novel. The marqués invades Herminia's mirror by projecting his vigilant gaze into her moment of self-reflection and then by asking: "¿En qué piensas, nena?" (251). Herminia gives a fake answer to give him the illusion that she has transformed into a self-sacrificing wife who lives solely for her husband: "En nada —repuso; y luego dulcemente: —En ti. ¿En qué puedo pensar yo sino en ti?" (251).

Herminia's words are depicted as a fake performance of the *ángel del hogar*, since she cannot stop thinking about Conchita's letter. She fantasizes about kissing her friend once again, stressing her desire to unite with her reflection, which she starts to lose touch with after marrying. However, Herminia tries to shut Conchita's voice out of her mind and convince herself that she can be happy with the marqués, illustrating her fear of rejecting prescribed roles of womanhood to be an independent woman:

Ella prefería, sin embargo, cerrar los ojos, como los cerraba bajo los ardientes labios del marido, antes que mirar atenta en la dirección que Conchita señalaba. No, no podía contestarle, porque, de seguro, Conchita iba a sorprenderse cuando ella le contase... «que le gustaba el matrimonio, que le gustaba el marqués». (254)

Although Herminia tries to continue her masquerade of identity by faking her happiness as a wife, the truth will be revealed in a masturbatory fantasy provoked by Conchita's letter.

Herminia forgets about her husband and trembles with pleasure as she reminisces about her moment of solitary self-discovery in the shower, which led her to have several other masturbatory explorations in the reflective streams of water: "Se estremeció dentro del ligero

ropón de batista y encajes que la cubría . . . recordando las manos de Conchita, que habían enjugado su cuerpo tantas veces al salir del baño... ¿Por qué pensaba de aquel modo en su amiga?” (252).

It is evident that Herminia receives superior satisfaction in these autoerotic imaginings of Conchita where she is an agent of her own desires, because now that she is married, her sexuality is controlled by the marqués. She feels forced to put on a performance of a scared, submissive woman in their sexual relationship and is not free to initiate sexual intercourse with her husband whenever she pleases:

Y como viese en los ojos del marqués el brillo que precedía a sus arrebatos carnales, Herminia se encogió en la butaca, fingiéndose presa de un gran terror. En aquella actitud, falsamente pudorosa, su belleza adquiriría una seducción nueva. Chispeaban sus pupilas tras las negras pestañas; la boca conservaba durante unos instantes la doble línea roja de una contracción que no era una sonrisa y que expresaba un anhelo, y toda la piel blanca y tersa se escalofriaba por el ansia física de sentirse acariciada... El marqués, que había alargado una mano hacia el escote, dio un paso atrás, se miró en el espejo del armario, y sin deajo de sonreír, arreglándose la corbata:

Ahora no, mi vida— murmuró—: no conviene abusar. (253–54)⁶⁴

Herminia’s loss of sexual self-expression in her marriage is emphasized by her sadness, her once glowing pupils that have become hidden beneath her eyelashes and the coldness that has suddenly overtaken the heat that she experienced when admiring her naked body. Herminia’s inability to voice her desires is also paralleled with the marqués’s usurpation of the mirror: “Pasó a la alcoba. Ojeda en el gabinete seguía frente al espejo” (254).

The marqués’ refusal to satisfy Herminia’s wants and his sudden domination of the mirror leads her to confess to herself that she is not happy in marriage, a secret that she also

⁶⁴ In *La enferma*, Consuelo will put on this same act of innocence and submission in sexual relationships with her husband, because she feels that as a wife, she must conceal her natural passions.

plans to reveal to her reflecting friend in their correspondence: “Comenzaba a no gustarle el matrimonio. Se lo diría a Conchita... «Mira, hija, Manolo es una fiera... a sus horas.»

Indignándose gradualmente, hubo un momento en que se dijo que no quería a su marido. “No le quiero, Conchita; le resisto, ¿sabes?, pero te juro que no le quiero” (256). Herminia redirects her passions and emotions to the mirror when she starts to receive love letters from Conchita on her honeymoon, a time in which she would be expected to dedicate all of her attention to her husband (263). These love letters act as proxies for Herminia’s masturbatory fantasies, given that are depicted as secret mirroring confessions of her passions, which she hides from the marqués. Zubiaurre studies the connection between masturbation and love letters by describing how the letters mirror women’s desires that can lead to self-touching:

Love-letters too can be held and read with only one hand, thus leaving the other hand free for masturbatory practices. In fact, a woman reading erotica (in the form of a book or letter) is touching her body with both hands, because isn’t the text always about her? (209)

The mirroring nature of these letters between Herminia and Conchita is subtly revealed when Herminia traces Conchita’s masculine words with her hand, as if she were aiding in the writing process, while imagining Herminia’s dreamy gaze. This joint writing and gazing suggest that these letters are solitary interactions with the looking glass that allow Herminia to discover herself in the eyes of an Other to develop a masculine type of self-knowledge.

Herminia’s escape into an autoerotic dream world to satisfy her sensual wants left unfulfilled by the marqués is depicted in a subsequent scene of Conchita sitting alone in her gabinete one morning reading Louÿs’ *Aphrodite* (1896), fantasizing about Herminia and the way that she pleased her friend’s body before she submitted to marriage. This fantasy symbolizes Herminia’s longing to return to her moment of masturbatory discovery that provided her with superior pleasure. Conchita associates the beauty of Herminia’s body with its autonomy from

patriarchal control and the fact that it does not belong to her husband or a child, it exists for her own pleasure and admiration:

Los desnudos suaves y ligeros de las ilustraciones, grabados amorosamente, la llevaban, por amable sucesión de ideas, a pensar en Herminia. No hacía mucho tiempo, una tarde, su amiga la recibió en el baño, como en la inolvidable época anterior a su matrimonio, y pudo observar con dulce regocijo que su cuerpo había salido ileso de la maternidad. (279)

Zubiaurre argues that in nineteenth-century erotic illustrations, the book was depicted as a woman's mirror that would inspire sexual dreams, in which they could contemplate their desires, envision the future, and eventually realize that masturbatory reveries were a superior alternative to male sexuality, paralleling Herminia's fantastical self-journey through the looking glass throughout the novel. In regards to a passage about the dangers of the female reader in the fin-de-siècle Spanish magazine *La Vida Galante*, Zubiaurre comments:

As expected, the virgin who reads voraciously until late at night ends up falling asleep over her book. Dreams soon populate the virgin's aroused imagination. These, of course, are about love, and about the future husband who will satisfy her secret desires. Finally, the author emphasizes that married women, although disenchanted with reality and its resemblance to fiction, nevertheless keep reading the same novels and having similar dreams—only this time they dream about lovers as an antidote against their husband's vulgarity and insensitive behavior. (204)

Zubiaurre also argues that reading could allow women to identify themselves with the characters in a process of self-spectatorship, which is precisely what will happen in this scene of Conchita reading, when she imagines a scene involving another Aphrodite that will appear to her as Herminia (205).

Conchita's identification with the nude Aphrodite in the novel begins when she drifts off into a dreamlike state and hears the words from the novel echoing in her mind to fuel her fantasy of corporeal self-admiration "Por un momento la escena tuvo algo de la belleza y del ensueño de aquella otra de *Afrodita*: «Tus senos son dos escudos de plata que han hundido su punta en la sangre ...» «Tus piernas son como dos trompas de elefantes blancos...»" (280). The mirroring

between Conchita and Herminia's fantasies is demonstrated when the marqués intrudes into Conchita's reverie inspired by her readings, brandishing the same whip that he had in Herminia's prior autoerotic dream: "Pero el marqués, entrando de repente, con botas de montar y el látigo en la mano, deshizo por completo el encanto. —Herminia por Dios, date prisa. Me avisan que están ensillados los caballos" (280). While immersed in this sensual reverie, Conchita suddenly hears Herminia's voice calling her to say that the marqués has run off with all of their possessions to France because he is in financial trouble (281). Suddenly, Herminia's marriage becomes a complete disillusionment: not only does the marqués fail to satisfy her physical and emotional wants, but her title as a rich marquesa is nothing but a façade, confirming the truths that appeared to her in her dreams throughout the novel but that she was too scared to accept.

Conchita helps Herminia to reconnect with her inner self to once again experience sensual desires that had been extinguished by her thoughts of the marqués:

Las grandes emociones de aquellos días habían adormecido en su ser todo deseo voluptuoso. El recuerdo del marqués le molestaba; pero ahora, reconfortada por la cena, con el alma abierta todavía al optimismo y la imaginación propensa a divagar, sentía, cada vez que Conchita, muy linda con una bata gris, la mirada diciéndole aquellas frases raras y mimosas a que era tan aficionada, una suave zozobra y un extraño florecimiento de su curiosidad sensual... (299–300)

The fact that Conchita is communicating with Herminia through her gaze emphasizes that she functions as a looking glass that reiterates her personal desires. Although the marqués was incapable of understanding Herminia's emotions, her friend steps in once again to show her the flattery and affection that she needs to awaken her passions: "Sus palabras, insinuantes y alentadoras, eran como un halago jamás sentido: sosegaban al angustiado corazón y ejercían, al mismo tiempo, otras influencias extrañas, llenas de una inquietud seductora" (300). As Herminia converses with Conchita, shadows begin to appear behind a sheet of white silk that covers the

wall, suggesting that her conversations with her friend allow her to see herself in the eyes of an Other, as if she were gazing at an image of herself on a screen to analyze her persona (300).

Herminia hears the sweet melody of Conchita's voice resonating among the mirrors of her friend's room, emphasizing the previously mentioned connection between music and female masturbatory expression. Conchita reminds Herminia of her own self-worth, while telling her to stop thinking about the marqués, who has done nothing but threaten her sense of wholeness and independence. Conchita hints that Herminia will undergo a transformation once she falls asleep that night: she tells her that she needs to rest, while stating "eres otra" (301):

No pienses en él siquiera. Piensa en lo que tantas veces te he dicho: en que tú eres muy linda para ser desgraciada. No sabes aun lo que es amar... Yo te digo que una hora de voluptuosidad es todo lo que debe buscarse en la vida... Pero es tarde, es ya muy tarde, Herminia. Ven... Tienes que descansar... ¿Tú ves? Con la cena tan ligera y el vino, eres otra... Eres la de antes, tan linda, con los ojos que te fascinan y la boca...

Conchita se acercó a Herminia y la besó en la boca. (301)

While Conchita's fascination with Herminia's eyes evokes the power of a woman's gaze to sculpt her own desires and identity, a theme that was also explored in *La condesita* and "La meningitis," the final step in Herminia's achievement of self-wholeness is achieved through kissing herself in the glass by kissing the mirroring image of her friend.

The consummation of this kiss leads Conchita to take Herminia to the bed, an idea that makes Herminia happy, since she will be able to continue the process of self-reflection: "Muy bien! Me encanta, porque charlaremos. Estoy cansada, pero no tengo sueño... Ganas de hablar contigo, de oírte... Luego me quedaré dormida" (301). While engaging with her inner voice, Herminia finally develops the courage to take off her mask by allowing Conchita to undress her. When Conchita removes Herminia's clothes, her cheeks regain their natural flush, highlighting that her liveliness and self-consciousness that was threatened by the marqués's intrusion into the mirror has finally been revived by embracing her inner voice (301).

Before this moment, Herminia had been alienating herself from her naked body and was too scared to accept her nude persona, as when after the ball she had been lying nude in bed caressing her body: “Creía ver llegar a los amigos de la casa para sorprenderla débil, desnuda, sin defensa, sin la máscara de altivez que usaba frente a ellos” (101). However, when Conchita joins Herminia in bed, she takes delight in the examination of her nude body before the mirrored body of her friend and once again finds superior pleasure in her own reflection surpassing the image of the marqués: “¡Desnuda! No era la carne áspera del marquesito. Era un cuerpo como el suyo: terso, duro, sedoso, perfumado” (301). Conchita encourages Herminia to embrace her authentic self, reminding her of all the times that she encouraged her friend to sleep naked: “Siempre he dormido así. Te lo he dicho... Tu debías hacer lo mismo...” (301). Jing He describes a similar phenomenon in which a woman’s gaze upon her own body takes on the guise of lesbian encounter that brings her back in touch with her childhood fantasies:

In this sensual dream of Niuniu, the social taboo of lesbianism is finally broken. Through the fixed gaze of the mirroring female body with its dazzling beauty and hidden power, Niuniu regains her obliterated sexual identity and boldly plunges into Ho’s kisses and touching that rekindle a childhood or pre-oedipal memory of familiarity: “my pulse quickened and I began to tremble, until at last I listened to her with my heart, held her within my heart of hearts” (126–27).

Herminia’s admirable self-identification in Conchita’s beautiful body is followed by a nude embrace between the two women, in which their lips are locked the entire night. Rays of light penetrate into the bedroom first thing in the morning, contrasting with the prior image of Herminia’s desolately dark bedroom before her masturbatory awakening in the shower. This nude union and prolonged kiss of self-recognition ends the alienation between Herminia and “her friend,” transforming them from two separate beings, into one single, unmasked woman who knows her true self and is not afraid to express it:

For Lacan, the mirror does not simply reflect the self, despite any literal visual correspondence between bodily appearance and mirror image. The mirror is an agent of self-construction used in the creation of an ideal that cannot yet be realized. Eventually the child ‘grows into’ the image of wholeness and mastery that produced the initial pleasure. But before this mastery of body and of language, the child learns control over an image. This mirror image is possibly one of the first things a child is able to control. Children learn to control themselves by learning to control an image, an other. The assumption of the mirror image is a process of seeing the self in an other, of making an identification. (Klein 57)

When Herminia’s masquerade ends and she is left with nothing but her nude self, the medic is forced to confront the truth as he makes his final reflections on the condition of the female hysteric. In the last scene of the novel, Álvarez is riding in the car with one of Esther’s suitors, Santelmo, to Don Roberto’s funeral as the sun’s rays begin to illuminate their funerary clothing: “La luz suave de un atardecer de mayo entraba en el coche y parecía atenuar la nota fúnebre de las levitas y las corbatas negras” (303–04). This glow of light is followed by a conversation about Herminia’s rejection of the Marqués de Ojeda. Santelmo asks Álvarez: “¿Puede usted creerlo? A Herminia no le ha hecho ninguna gracia que vuelva su marido,” to which Álvarez responds: “Es natural. Ojeda es un tipo francamente odioso y le va a resultar muy ingrato reanudar la vida con él” (306). Santelmo immediately attributes Herminia’s dismissal of her husband to Conchita’s influence, illustrating how the mirror has allowed Herminia to develop into a strong, independent woman who has seen the truth behind women’s oppression in society: “Creo que Conchita... ¿No se ha fijado usted en el ascendiente que tiene sobre Herminia?” (307). Álvarez is unsure of how to respond to Santelmo’s sly comment and wonders whether Conchita’s hatred of men can be attributed to her intelligence or whether she is just another sick, neurotic woman:

Álvarez no quiso corresponder a la sonrisa maliciosa de Santelmo. Tenía verdadero afecto por Conchita y no pensaba en juzgarla ligeramente, aunque el solterón de Santelmo lo invitase a ello. Acaso estuviera en lo cierto la inteligente muchacha. ¡Eran tan horribles

los hombres! Pero... Conchita era otra neurótica, otra víctima como Herminia, como Esther, como Melita; otra víctima de [...] (307)

Álvarez tries to complete his diagnosis of these women as the car pulls up to *La Agencia*, but he suddenly finds himself speechless. After “dissecting” the female hysteric by intruding into the gabinete to gaze into Herminia’s private mirror to read her thoughts, the medic not only realizes the emptiness of his diagnosis of hysteria but also reveals his uncertainty surrounding who is to blame for the irreconcilable tensions between the sexes in society:

No encontró de pronto a quien echarle la culpa, y como el coche acababa de detenerse frente a la Agencia, tuvo que dejar incompleta su reflexión. Arriba esperaban la madre y las tres hijas, con sus trajes negros y ojos llenos de lágrimas, desorientadas frente al porvenir... Y era preciso llegar junto a ellas, no con la cara jocosa de los concurrentes al cotillón de Año Nuevo, pero sí con un brillo de amistad y de esperanza en la mirada. (307)

By depicting these women as gazing towards the future, while stating how men must join by their sides with a glow of friendship in their eyes, Insúa illustrates that women’s roles are rapidly changing and that they are beginning to envision new possibilities for themselves, refusing to be men’s inferiors. Insúa also reveals that men are going to have to accept this new reality if they do not want to be rejected by women, and that they are going to have to start treating women like their friends. Otherwise, women will seek the love, advice, affection, flattery, and sexual satisfaction that they need through their companion Conchita, the self-gratifying, all-knowing looking glass.

On the one hand, Herminia’s autoerotic relationship with the mirror and her seemingly lesbian correspondences with her authentic reflection and true inner being Conchita expose how women were rejecting their traditional roles on various levels, providing female readers with a liberating mirror through which they could imagine new possibilities for themselves. Herminia’s fantasies reveal women’s recognition that men could not provide them with the same satisfaction

that the looking glass could: a friend, sexual lover, and confidant who would listen to their deepest fears, secrets, and desires. On the other hand, Herminia's masturbatory reveries expose how men were undergoing a crisis, as they found themselves pressured to renounce their patriarchal dominance to understand women's wants. While male readers of the time would have been turned onto this novel for its explicit sexual content of female masturbation and lesbianism, they would have also been able on their own, or forced narratively, to use the text as a mirror to contemplate their own fears of how to cope with women's rapidly changing roles—which would in turn push them to reassess their own roles.

This conflictive reconsideration of both male and female roles will be further explored in the next chapter on *La enferma*, which deals with a wife named Consuelo who, like Herminia, believes that marriage should be a bond of equality and a friendship between spouses. However, Consuelo struggles to exert her agency and express her desires to her husband to take on this new role of the liberated wife. Consuelo's husband also experiences difficulties in assuming the sudden husbandly obligation to treat his wife as an equal and to fulfill her physical and emotional needs

CHAPTER 6: HUSBAND OR HYPNOTIST? HYSTERIC OR EQUAL? MARITAL TENSIONS AND STRUGGLED SEXUAL EXPRESSION IN EDUARDO ZAMACOIS'S *LA ENFERMA* (1869)

While in *Las neuróticas* Herminia's pleasurable autoerotic explorations and introspective reveries provided her with a sense of wholeness, along with the courage to express her true wants, the female protagonist Consuelo of Eduardo Zamacois's *La enferma* suffers from masturbatory nightmares that reflect a monstrous mirror reflection of her repressed desires that she never manages to clearly articulate in the novel. Consuelo, like Herminia, undergoes an unmasking of identity; however, while the unveiling of Herminia's persona allows her to achieve selfhood by uniting with her desirable mirror image, Consuelo is horrified when confronting her authentic self in dreams at the theater. Consuelo's sensual yet painful dreams expose her guilty erotic wants that she is too afraid to express to her husband Alfonso because of her hesitancy to step out of the role of the traditional submissive wife, a role that was being called into question at the time.

Alfonso desperately longs to understand and fulfill his wife's secretive desires, leading him to summon his close friend, a hypnotist by the name of Gabriel Montánchez, who uses his medical powers to penetrate Consuelo's psyche. Similar to how the medic Álvarez invaded the *gabinete* of the Montaña sisters to "dissect" the female "hysteric" in *Las neuróticas*, Montánchez's gaze has the power to pierce Consuelo's insides like a knife to understand the inner workings of her fantasies (45). As in *Las neuróticas*, the window into the mind of the female hysteric can represent an intriguing source of voyeuristic pleasure for the male reader but

also a disturbing reflection of changing gender roles. When Consuelo's forbidden desires come to the surface in deceitful performances of wifely submission, autoerotic nightmares, and hypnotic trances, men are compelled to confront the intimidating truth about women's natural sexual desires, while assuming the new responsibilities of gratifying women's needs, treating them as equals, and renouncing their patriarchal authority to permit female agency.

Consuelo and Alfonso's characters reveal the ways in which the roles of both husbands and wives were changing in late nineteenth-century society to create a bond of spousal equality, a topic broached in *La condesita* and *Las neuróticas*. However, in *La enferma*, the reader is taken into the bedroom of this couple and provided with intimate observances of their struggled communications, mutual incomprehension, emotional tensions, and masochistic sexual encounters, all of which reveal how spouses experienced difficulties in assuming new roles in marriage. Whereas Consuelo attempts to break free from the mold of the *ángel del hogar* to assert her own desires, she ends up putting on a performance of submission that entraps her in a masqueraded identity of a childish, dependent, and voiceless wife who pretends that sexual pleasure is an undesirable punishment for her that puts her husband in control.

Alfonso tries to assume the position of the husband who understands his wife's emotional and physical needs, but he fails to do so, treating her like a child and undermining the seriousness of her marital demands, which she is only able to express through a language of innocent dependency. In addition, Alfonso relies on science to decipher Consuelo's desires instead of communicating directly with her. Because Alfonso is dependent on Montánchez's powers to "dissect" his wife through his gaze, while blindly trusting his diagnosis, he ends up falling into the trap of believing that Consuelo is a sick hysteric. Although Consuelo blatantly tells Alfonso that she loathes Montánchez, that she is not sick, and that her hysterical diagnosis is

nothing but an invention to torment her, he continues insisting that she is ill because he does not know how to communicate with her about her needs. Alfonso's reliance on the medic's diagnosis ends up backfiring when Montánchez possesses Consuelo's body by raping her against her will, an act that reveals the frustrated male attempt to control and tame the enigmatic, desiring body of the female hysteric through medicine and pathologization in fin-de-siècle society.

The nineteenth-century French female writer Rachilde shares this pessimistic vision of the physician. Michael Finn argues that in Rachilde's fiction

the doctor's most meaningful role is that of the evaluator of normalcy, especially in the field of sex and gender. . . . The unnamed doctor who examines the adolescent heroine of *Monsieur Vénus* is one of these categorical men. The young girl's moods and sensual awareness bring forth an immediate and terminal diagnosis. If her natural immorality is not curbed she is destined to be a heartless nymphomaniac. (81)

Melanie Hawthorne also describes how in Rachilde's fiction the doctor is depicted as an unethical man who uses his sexual knowledge to seduce and gain power over women, very much like what will happen in *La enferma* (190). By allowing his wife to be placed under hypnosis by Montánchez, Alfonso fails to assume the new husbandly role of treating his wife like an equal. Although Alfonso uses these hypnotic sessions to understand her wants, he ends up making her feel like she is a dehumanized specimen of scientific study, reflecting Asti Hustvedt's idea that

Hypnosis was the first step in a transformation from natural to artificial and was used effectively to turn the "natural" hysteric, with all her unpredictable symptoms and deceptions, into an artificial woman whose corporeal and mental plasticity rendered her completely malleable, ready to be reinvested by science. (63)

Zamacois reveals that it is a mistake for husbands to rely on medicine to comprehend the unspeakable erotic mysteries lurking within their wives' imaginations, due to misogynistic doctrines surrounding the pathologization and taming of female desire. Because Alfonso allows Montánchez into the couple's bedroom, each time Consuelo tries to imagine her husband

pleasuring her in her dreams, his identity becomes confused with that of a cruel, satanic medic who tries to violate her body with his scrutinizing and shaming gaze.

This blurring between the roles of husband and medic can be observed in other texts from the time, all of which show the detrimental effects it has on the “hysterical” wife who is wrongly viewed as sick, because her desires are repressed and misunderstood under the objective lens of science. In regards to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s American novel *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), David B Morris states:

The doctor-husband in Gilman’s story treats his wife with tyrannical solicitude, including the threat that if she fails to follow his instructions exactly he will send her to Mitchell for a rest cure. . . . The wife whom her husband treats like a child ultimately ends up locked in the attic-nursery where she imagines that she sees a crouched woman imprisoned behind the bar-like stripes of the yellow wallpaper. (114)

Similarly, Gustave Flaubert’s earlier novel *Madame Bovary* (1855) deals with a hysterical wife whose “unrealistic fantasies on life and love cause her to be dissatisfied with her dull, doctor husband. She has two hopeless love affairs and finally dies from a self-inflicted dose of arsenic, unwilling to succumb to domestic obliteration” (Peschier 136). The consequences of these slippery boundaries between science and marital intimacy are taken to the extreme in a story by the Mexican writer Carlos Díaz Dufoó, titled “La autopsia” (1901). This story revolves around a “nymphomaniacal” surgeon’s wife who ends up prostituting herself because she is unsatisfied by her inexpressive husband’s cold, objective way of viewing her sexual needs. Whereas in *La enferma* Alfonso uses the hypnotist Montánchez to dissect his wife with his unsympathetic medical gaze to understand what Consuelo wants, the husband of “La autopsia” literally dissects his wife’s body with the scalpel to discover the mysteries of her sexuality when her prostituted cadaver arrives at his laboratory.

Although Alfonso is not a doctor himself, he uses Montánchez as an intermediary to communicate with his wife about the unspoken sexual tensions in their marriage, causing Consuelo to feel resentment towards her husband and to experience an even stronger need to conceal her wants from him. This husband/medic identification has tragic consequences in *La enferma*, as it does in the aforementioned works, not only for the “hysteric,” but also for the husband himself. Consuelo ends up dying out of guilt and horror when her body is literally violated by the medic, an act that also figuratively denounces the attempt of science to control a woman’s body and desires. At the end of the novel, Alfonso recognizes his error of blindly trusting in Montánchez when he loses his wife, kills the hypnotist in a bloody duel, and then commits suicide on a train ride to Paris, a trip that he was supposed to take with Consuelo. As a result, the reader observes the consequences of the lack of communication and transparency between the married couple in their frustrated attempts to assume the new positions of husband and wife in this institution that is being transformed into a bond of equality. About the tragic outcome of the story, Lou Charon-Deutsch states:

La enferma has no hero, not even in the Carlylian sense. Certainly it is not the unresourceful husband Alfonso Sandoval, nor his hysterical wife Consuelo Mendoza who acts as the text’s cipher of truth but whose words and nervous symptoms are misinterpreted by everyone but the narrator. (63–64)

Before delving into the analysis of *La enferma*, it is germane to discuss the transformation of marriage that was occurring at the time. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, newly developed arguments for wives’ physical pleasure, emotional well-being, and overall spousal equality were tearing down the long-lived tradition of patriarchal dominance in marriage. The ideal for turn-of-the-century bourgeois women of Spain was the angel of the home or *ángel del hogar* I have discussed throughout the previous chapters, “a meek, homebound, asexual, pious, and selfless creature” who “inhabited the private, domestic sphere and lived

entirely for her husband and family” (Jago 79–80). Gradually, feminist discourses, marriage compendium manuals, and medical treatises converged to create a more realistic image of a wife who expected her husband to fulfill her natural sexual desires, listen to her intimate wants, show her the same loving tenderness that she provided to him, and allow her the same social freedoms that he enjoyed.

As mentioned in chapter 5, Honoré de Balzac illustrated the need for husbands to understand their wives’ bodies and emotions in his treatise *Physiologie du mariage* (1867). Similarly, in *La condesita* Felisa and Aurora viewed marriage as a form of slavery, evoking John Stuart Mill’s feminist theories in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), published in Spanish in 1890 as *La esclavitud femenina*, with a prologue by Emilia Pardo Bazán. In her article “Marital Slavery and Friendship: John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*,” Mary Lyndon Shanley argues that Mill wanted to end this master/slave relationship in marriage by creating a friendship based on equality: “The fundamental assertion of *The Subjection of Women* was not that equal opportunity would ensure the liberation of women, but that male-female equality, however achieved, was essential to marital friendship and to the progression of human society” (229). Rachel P. Maines also argues that nineteenth-century medical treatises on hysteria were tearing down this traditional notion of the “intrinsic purity of womanhood” by arguing that erotic satisfaction was essential to a woman’s well-being (9). Angus McLaren describes how this new pressure to satisfy wives created a source of intimidation for husbands, which is precisely what we will see with Consuelo’s husband in *La enferma*:

Marriage, having taken on a new emotional significance in the nineteenth century, posed the inexperienced man with his first sexual test. Although marriage manuals commonly cautioned grooms not to give vent to their unbridled lusts, some men wondered if they would pass muster. (103)

Perhaps because of the husbandly intimidations that the desiring wife aroused, women could still risk pathologization for trying to voice their erotic wants:

Women who defied the boundaries of femininity by seeking the right to use birth control, to pursue sexual satisfaction, to move freely outside the home, to vote, or to have equal access to education and job opportunities could now be accused of sexual perversions such as nymphomania or lesbianism. Truly feminine women found complete satisfaction in their domestic role of wife and mother. Only perverted women, that is, manly women with large clitorises and voracious sexual appetites, would want anything more. (Smith 162–63)

This lingering condemnation of a wife's vocalization of sexual desire can explain why Consuelo views her passions as shameful, evil, and monstrous. Consuelo has dreams of disguised devilish beings who caress her beneath her skirt, kiss her body, and possess her against her will, images that can project her unspeakable desires for Alfonso to pleasure her.

Consuelo identifies this masked devil of her nightmares as none other than the hypnotist Montánchez. In these dreams it is specifically Montánchez's gaze that terrifies her. Given the connections between the mirror and the gaze, I interpret the medic's stare as a mirror of Consuelo's repressed desires that she longs to have fulfilled by Alfonso. Because Consuelo knows that Montánchez has been summoned by her husband to expose the mysteries of her psyche, she views his gaze as an evil, distorted mirror of her unarticulated wants that are unethically forced out of her through hypnotic possession.

As seen in "La meningitis" and "Los perseguidos," the gaze of the other can project a shadowy, repressed reflection of our own being, an image that terrifies us, yet simultaneously captivates us for its ability to take us to a fantasy realm where social constraints no longer exist. Elizabeth Grosz underlines this idea by discussing the nineteenth-century popularity of freakshows:

The relation we bear to images of ourselves is drawn from this simultaneous and ambivalent reaction: the mirror-image threatens to draw us into its spell of spectral

doubling, annihilating the self that wants to see itself reflected. At the same time, it gains pleasure from the access it gives to the subject's exteriority, from an illusory mastery over its image. Fascination with the monstrous is testimony to our tenuous hold on the image of perfection. The freak confirms the viewer as bounded, belonging to a "proper" social category. The viewer's horror lies in the recognition that this monstrous being is at the heart of his or her own identity, for it is all that must be ejected or abjected from self-image to make the bounded, category-obeying self possible. (65)

This fear of recognizing oneself in the abject other can also explain why Consuelo is unable to confront her mirror image head on. Instead, in her dreams she sees masked devils, which serve as incarnations of her guilty desires and her deceitful identity as the pure, submissive, and asexual wife. Because Consuelo believes that Montánchez can read the secrets lodged in her mind, it is his gaze that lurks beneath the diabolical mask of deceit that she often sees in the theater, the recurring place of self-spectatorship in these texts.

Consuelo can see these horrifying hallucinations when she fantasizes about her husband fulfilling her desires, but this also happens when she is alone analyzing her persona in the mirror to develop a sense of subjectivity while admiring her beauty. These emotions of shame projected through Consuelo's reveries of auto-exploration illustrate how women in late nineteenth-century society were trying to understand and assert their own wants to create an autonomous identity for themselves, a new ideal of womanhood that was suddenly emerging. However, as seen in several of the previous texts of the dissertation, a stigma still surrounded female "self-love" in patriarchal society, an idea that represented threatening notions of women's independence. Carol Holly demonstrates this idea in her discussion of the married female protagonist of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's "The Angel over the Right Shoulder" (1852):

She shames herself for nurturing her own ambitions and, through the cheerful resolution that follows, coerces herself into reaffirming what the conduct books, the women's magazines, and a good deal of fiction in the mid-nineteenth century portrayed as women's divinely appointed role in life, that of the submissive, self-sacrificing 'angel in the house.' (Holly 44)

In “Shaming and Reclaiming Women’s Sexuality through Cinematic Depictions of Masturbation,” Megan Tagle Adams argues that this shaming of female self-cultivation can still be evidenced in today’s society through the stigmas surrounding masturbation: “There remains an evident investment in effecting a sense of shame around women’s masturbation—a stigmatization that suppresses authentic and varied expressions of women’s self-actualization in identity formation” (23).

These notions of shame surrounding female self-pursuit, sexuality, and masturbation can be observed in theories related to the nightmare. In “Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present,” Charles Stewart argues that “the nightmare has a history worth exploring for what it might reveal about successive Western conceptualizations of terror, sexual desire, and the self” (282). Stewart also argues that “erotic dreams came to be placed in a separate category centering on masturbation” and that “erotic dreams involved a form of mental masturbation” (294). In another of Zamacois’s novels, titled *El misterio de un hombre pequeño* (1914), the nightmare is linked to guilty female autoerotic desire, an idea that is also present in *La enferma*.

El misterio revolves around an image of a mystical little man named Don Gil who appears in the nightmares of all of the sexually frustrated young women in the make-believe community of Puertopomares, a town filled with single men who prefer to remain bachelors rather than take on the daunting task of marrying a “hysterical” young woman who would have certain sexual and emotional demands. In “The Representation of Perverse Desire in Eduardo Zamacois’s *El misterio de un hombre pequeño*,” Ed Moffatt describes the repressive situation of these women:

The impact of this peculiar state of affairs on the women of the community is acute. Those not already made mistresses and still of marriageable age are instructed by local

figures of authority to remain as chaste and without desire as possible and when the desire is too strong, to marry without delay. This is of course, an impossible injunction to fulfill since none of the men are willing to marry. The psychological consequence of continually trying to repress desire is an increased vulnerability to its uncontrollable return, expressed according to Freud through dreams, parapraxes, etc. (169)

It is probable that this expression of female sexual desire through masturbatory dreams is the reason why Zamacois chooses his title to be *El misterio de un hombre pequeñito*:

The Babylonians explained orgasms during sleep as being the work of a “maid of the night” who visited men during sleep and of a corresponding “little night man” who visited women during their sleep. The Egyptian/Jewish notion of “pollution” carried over to Christians who treated it only slightly less alarmingly than they did voluntary masturbation; in the Middle Ages, they blamed it on the devil, who sent a succubus to lie under men and an incubus to lie upon women. (Dixon and Dixon 54)

In *El misterio* and *La enferma*, the female protagonists dream of a tiny diabolical man who enters their rooms and forces them into sexual intercourse. These female nightmares are depicted as enjoyable and horrific at the same time, illustrating how women in nineteenth-century society used autoerotic dreaming as an outlet to explore their guilty desires that they felt uncomfortable expressing in reality:

Todas las mujeres dieron en la habituación de soñar con él. La misma pesadilla, dulce y horrible por igual, rodaba de alcoba en alcoba, ni aún las casadas, dormidas al lado de sus esposos se libraban de ella. Don Gil aparecía en los dormitorios, tan pronto por una ventana como por la puerta, sin hablar adelantábase hacia sus amadas, las tomaba y se iba. Esta alucinación, que robó a muchas caras virginales su color y entristeció precozmente el mirar de algunas niñas, fue como una de aquellas epidemias de ninfomanía que los obispos medievales combatían con el fuego y el agua bendita. (*El misterio* 72)

The narrator of *El misterio* also depicts this tiny devil as a rival to husbands; he knows their wives’ sexual secrets, much like the satanic gnome of Consuelo’s dreams will represent a distorted mirror of her hidden passions that she cannot articulate to Alfonso.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ The narrator of *El misterio* states:

Las esposas hablaban á sus maridos de las posesiones disparatadas á que el enano las sometía, y éstos la comentaban después entre sí. Los hombres llegaron á mirarle como á

In *El misterio*, Zamacois attributes these horrific yet pleasurable female nightmares to the “masochistic spirit” of women, which is caused by the repressive nature of patriarchal society that influences them to be ashamed of their natural desires:

Jamás estudió la teratología monstruos ni prodigios semejantes á los fantaseados por el espíritu masoquista de la mujer, para quien las espumas y quintas esencias mejores del amor residen, antes que en la natural y sana voluptuosidad de la caída, en el sufrimiento ó castigo que frecuentemente acompaña á la posesión. Como las hembras de todas las especies, la mujer espera á ser tomada, y constituyen legión las que, llevadas de una humildad morbosa, prefieren el golpe á la caricia. Las mujeres raras veces descubren el cenit de la locura carnal sin el acicate del dolor físico; diríase que el tormento de la desfloración perdura en ellas como un rito, y que en su alma dócil, reducida de madres á hijas á ineluctable esclavitud, las emociones de martirio y de voluptuosidad se confunden. (71)

In *La enferma*, Consuelo is depicted as a masochist whose only way to express and fulfill her desires is through a masquerade of sexual submission to her husband, which would ease her anxieties of guilt for stepping out of the mold of the angelic wife. Gaylyn Studlar explains this strategy of the female masochist by stating “performance of dramatized powerlessness allows the masochistic female subject to use suffering and, in particular, suffering attached to “sacred” aspects of femininity such as sexual purity as the deceptive cover for the exercise of forbidden powers-and pleasures” (44). Consuelo’s inexpressible passions in her marriage also come to the surface in her nightmares that involve the repulsive devil who forces her into sensual encounters against her will. Lou Charon-Deutsch has suggested that despite Consuelo’s apparent horror

un rival. Un odio criminal germinó contra él. Era el brujo aliado del Diablo; el hierofante árbitro de todos los recursos de la lecanomancia y de la brizomancia; el íncubo sádico para quien ningún cuerpo de mujer bonita guardaba secretos; el vampiro que marchitaba en las mejillas de las vírgenes las rosas de la salud, mordisqueaba sus senos y las enseñaba las láminas lascivas del Libro del Pecado; el iniciador astuto por quien las niñas permitían á los muchachos que, jugando, las cogían del talle, á deslizar sus manos más abajo... (243)

upon being sexually possessed by this imaginary devil, she may actually be secretly inviting these exciting erotic advances:

There is also the suggestion in all of Consuelo's rape fantasies and nightmares that Gabriel represents sexual excitement, that subconsciously, at least, Consuelo wants the 'black' arms she dreams about to really snatch her away from what readers can only imagine as a dreary existence. (69)

In line with Charnon-Deutsch's assertion, I argue that this phantasm represents Consuelo's longing for her husband to pleasure her, a desire that becomes distorted under her feelings of shame that are largely provoked by the internalized medical gaze.

The masochistic nature of female masturbatory dreams presented in *El misterio* and *La enferma* is also demonstrated through an image of an incubus in Henry Fuseli's eighteenth-century Swiss painting *The Nightmare* (1781). In this painting, a young woman is collapsed on the bed sleeping in a sensual pose immersed in a nightmare, while an incubus sits on her chest staring back at the viewer, and a diabolical mare gazes at the dreamer. In *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli*, Andrei Pop argues that despite the horrifying nature of these diabolical creatures, this painting portrays a distorted form of female sexual agency: "to say categorically that *The Nightmare* is about witchcraft or race or whatever the demon represents is to miss the inaccessibility of the woman's experience. And if the demon is the sleeper's nightmare, then there is no external aggressor, but an expression of her desire" (123). Edward Burns also describes how in the second version of this painting the woman has fallen into a slumber after gazing at herself in the mirror to explore her desires, which will be played out in her nightmare of the incubus:

She has a bolster comfortably supporting her shoulders, and seems to have fallen back from a mirror, which occupies the right of the picture. Even more striking than the suggestions in the ecstatic but comfortable pose, and the facing mirror, that the figure is conscious of the creature's visitation, has indeed willed or conjured it, is the form of the creature itself. (810)

The discussions of this painting are pertinent to my analysis of *La enferma*, since I argue that, although Consuelo's sensual dreams are presented as nightmares, these are ambivalent images of horror and desire that are welcomed yet detested. She does not have the courage to openly express her desires to her husband; she is scared of being judged for transgressing traditional notions of womanhood.

These diabolical, nightmarish visions representing Consuelo's hidden fantasies appear in the opening scene of the novel when she wakes up alone in her marital bed after suffering from a feverish night of insomnia filled with bloody creatures that danced before her eyes. The fearful characters that appear in Consuelo's hallucination, paralleled with the morning light infiltrating through her bedroom windows, reveal her fears of confronting her true reflection. Consuelo's longing for erotic expression comes to the surface when the reflective lights in her bedroom cause her to hear murmurs of imaginary voices and to stare at a fur coat sitting on a chair. Consuelo's fascination with the fur coat hints at her fantasies of sexual agency and her craving for Alfonso to fulfill her desires, given the publication of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870). In *The Cultural Politics of Fur*, Julia V. Emberely highlights that "Masoch virtually reinvents feminine despotism in the guise of a fur-clad, whip-wielding woman in black velvet knee-breeches with high leather boots" (73). Emberely also explains that "*Venus in Furs* enacts a drama of surrogate mastery where power is willingly shifted by a man to his mistress" (75).

Consuelo's frustrated desire for erotic fulfillment by her husband continues when her fixation on the fur coat transforms into a hallucinatory image of a top hat, "a familiar phallic symbol" (Harvey 146). Consuelo has difficulty seeing the face that is hidden under this hat, leading her to hold her hand in the guise of a telescope to help her reframe the reality of the object in her room. Suddenly, top hat and the wearer become more reminiscent of genitals as she

notices that the hat is “negro y peludo” and that underneath “había una cara redonda, mofletuda y riente” (3) with “un ojo hinchado y la nariz torcida; una nariz ciranesca, insolente y sensual” (4). This round face with a swollen eye creates an image of the penis, evoking “an identification of the eye with the genitals (especialmente el phallus)” in ancient Roman tradition (Barton 96). Similarly, the connection between the nose and the genitals was previously discussed in chapter 2. The fact that this nose is described as “sensual” and “laughing” also highly suggests that Zamacois was projecting an image of repressed sexual desire through this hallucination.⁶⁶

This irrecognizable laughing, sensual face hiding beneath the hat exposes Consuelo’s sexual guilt when it transforms into a hideous animal wandering among the shadows: “Siguió mirando y la visión tornó a descomponerse: el sombrero de copa se prolongaba convirtiéndose en hocico; la cara, formada por un trozo de piel blanca, parecía el terrible pechazo del animal; las patas se bosquejaron en la sombra” (4). The narrator hints that this is a private performance of the self: Consuelo trembles in fear, moving the muslin curtains that drape her bed, creating a contradictory image of secrecy and transparency. Curtains will be a recurring theme in this novel to expose the tensions between private and public selves, as well as between truth and appearance. For example, Charlotte Borie argues that in Charlotte Brontë’s nineteenth-century *Jane Eyre*, “curtain enclosure” represents “a dramatization of the self” where “truth is both hidden and revealed” (107). During her secretive fantasy behind the curtain, Consuelo subtly voices her craving for affection from her absent husband: “Cuando venga Alfonso... le diré: señor Sandoval, ¿cómo me tiene usted tan abandonada? ¿No me quiere usted ya? Y le daré muchos besos, muchos... y un abrazo muy apretado” (4).

⁶⁶ The connection between laughing and sexual desire was discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 4 of the dissertation.

The secrets lingering in the couple's marriage become open to external observation when Alfonso arrives and opens the curtains to the balcony, causing a grey light to infiltrate the bedroom, a color that creates an image of light trying to break through. Consuelo's desire for affection from Alfonso is mistaken for illness when he asks "¿Te sientes peor?" and encourages her to lie down (6). The heat from the blankets revives Consuelo's temperament, suggesting that what she really wants is heated passion in bed. However, Consuelo masks her desires by acting in a childish manner, pleading with Alfonso to entertain her with stories (6). As Alfonso submits to his wife's demands, she immerses herself into a fantasy realm where she can be the author of her own desires, something that she is too scared to do in her marriage:

quería volver; siendo lo más chistoso que si no la petaba el hilo del cuento ella misma se erguía en autora y lo modificaba: este episodio no estaba bien y convenía suprimirlo, o buscar otro, pues de lo contrario se negaba a seguir escuchando; también los personajes habían de llevar nombres simpáticos. (7)

While Alfonso's stories provide a temporary distraction from Consuelo's boredom, her guilty erotic desires come to the surface when she falls asleep and has a nightmare of a man trying to possess her, a phantasm that will repeatedly embody her unspeakable longing for Alfonso to satisfy her.

Upon hearing about his wife's dream, Alfonso wishes that the hypnotist Gabriel Montánchez would arrive to help him decipher this enigma of his wife's imagination (8). The narrator mentions that the most distinguishable aspect of the medic's appearance are his eyes, establishing the connection between the gaze, the mirror, and self-observation:

Pero lo más notable de su fisonomía eran los ojos; ojos pardos muy oscuros, que miraban fijamente, con expresión punzante, cual si fuesen capaces de leer a través de los cuerpos opacos; su fascinadora atracción llegaba a ser insoportable; era la mirada del hombre de genio que todo lo sabe, y también la del aventurero audaz que a todo se atreve. (9)

Montánchez functions as a mirror that forces Consuelo to confront her buried passions when he sits in front her, lights a match, and orders her to gaze at him without blinking (9). He forces Consuelo to undergo this examination at least five times, while finally complaining that he is unable to capture her gaze “Estese usted quietecita —exclamó Gabriel sonriendo—; así no puedo observarla los ojos” (9). Consuelo voices the pain and distress that this medical gaze causes her when she tells Montánchez “no quiero que me mire usted; me hace daño,” but Alfonso will continue to allow these examinations in a desperate attempt to know what his wife wants (9).

Despite Montánchez’s supposed powers to understand what is wrong with Consuelo, his inability to capture her gaze leads him to fall back on the typical nineteenth-century diagnosis of hysteria. Montánchez asks her if she feels a ball in her throat, suggesting that she is suffering from “el bolo histérico.” In *Tratado elemental completo de las enfermedades de mujeres* (1840), Luis Oms y Garrigolas explains this particular symptom of female hysteria:

Esta especie de bolo misterioso, que se ha llamado bolo histérico y sube por oscilación hacia el cuello, al pasar por la región epigástrica determina una sensación de peso y una opresión dolorosa con palpitaciones en la rejion precordial, y frecuentemente va acompañado de un frio glacial, ó de un calor intenso. (98)

When Montánchez wrongfully labels Consuelo as sick though she is actually just unhappy with her repressive life, Consuelo is infuriated with both him and her husband. This scene begins to present the mistake of nineteenth-century husbands of bringing the medic into the marital bedroom to analyze their wives as if they were specimens, rather than treating them as friends and equals: “Entonces Consuelito Mendoza se enfureció; estaban ofendiéndola y su marido lo permitía. ¿Hola, ¿conque todos menospreciaban sus dolores?” (10).

Consuelo decides that she is going to liberate herself from both her husband and the medic’s orders by “eating what she wants” and “going to the theater without anyone’s permission,” comments that can suggest an immersion into sensual dreams that provide her with

a superior alternative to reality (10). The link between eating and sexual desire has already been discussed in other texts of the dissertation. Similarly, the theater has been identified as a place where individuals can enter into a dream realm of self-spectatorship to fantasize about playing transgressive roles that rebel against gender norms. However, when Consuelo tries to explore her wants in these imaginary performances, she is overwhelmed with fear and guilt, leading her to see diabolical images of monstrosity.

Consuelo attempts to escape patriarchal authority when she immerses herself into a private world of fiction. She goes into her husband's office and gazes through the window, while she simultaneously observes portrait busts of famous authors such as Calderón, Cervantes, and Shakespeare. Consuelo's observation of these busts reveals that she will become an author of her own desires through fictitious fantasy, especially since these statues will come to life later in the novel when she is experiencing a masturbatory dream of a gnome sliding in and out of a door, caressing her beneath her skirt, grasping her body, and kissing her. In "The Interiorization of Identity: Portrait Busts and the Politics of Selfhood in Pre- and Early Revolutionary France" Ronit Milano concludes that "the portrait bust neither functioned as a merely decorative element, nor was it simply an index of cultural agendas; rather, in an interior space, it operated as a reflection of the beholder, forming part of his or her own selfhood and consciousness" (88).

In the early twentieth century novel *En los jardines de Lesbos*, the Colombian author José María Vargas Vila plays on this connection between the portrait bust and the mirror by describing female masturbatory self-creation as a form of artistic sculpting.⁶⁷ The protagonist of the novel, Margarita de Atienza, professes her passion for sculpting only young, female busts

⁶⁷ This idea also appeared in *La condesita*, when Felisa referred to herself as Prometheus during her masturbatory dream.

that remind her of her moment of autoerotic self-discovery before the mirror, when she passionately gazed at a reflection of herself, disguised as a female lover, in a fountain during her adolescence. Margarita prefers to be a sculptor, because it allows her to be a woman in charge of her desires, rather than serving as an object of domination in patriarchal society: “yo, amo la Fuerza, no para sufrirla sino para ejercerla; hay en mí el Alma de un Conquistador; domar la Belleza con mis manos, y hacerla inmortal con mi cincel” (107). The idea of the female masturbator as a sculptor of her own desires also appears in Thomas Rowlandson’s aforementioned illustration *Lonesome Pleasures* (1810), in which a woman pleasures herself behind a curtain, while she gazes down at a sculptures and portrait busts of women, which can serve as reflections of herself.

While in the office, staring at the portrait busts, Consuelo contemplates her passions. She presses her head against the cold glass of the window to cool the burning heat that radiates from her mind: “Allí era donde Consuelito Mendoza pasaba las mañanas, cosiendo junto a la Ventana hasta la hora de almorzar: a ratos apoyaba la frente sobre el cristal para sentir una impresión de frialdad que aliviaba los ardores de su cerebro” (11). Similar to how the window allowed the character Quiroga to analyze himself from an external perspective in “Los perseguidos,” the window acts as a looking glass that splits Consuelo’s being into two entities in a process of self-observation. “Entonces su espíritu parecía desligarse del cuerpo; éste yacía allí inmóvil, conservando la actitud que adoptó al sentarse, mientras el otro se disipaba en lo infinito o era absorbido por ese *no ser* que en las horas de reflexión y recogimiento flota sobre nuestras cabezas” (11).

Consuelo recognizes that she is faking her angelic performance of the submissive, asexual wife who lives for her husband as she fixates on the snow outside, while suffering from a

hidden interior fire. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe how the image of whiteness was used to denote the ideal image of the pure, passive woman who had no inner conscience and who would never dare to gratify her own wants:

The Victorian iconography of female whiteness is, to begin with, most obviously related to the Victorian ideal of feminine purity. The angel in the house is a woman in white, like Milton's "late espoused saint," her dutiful chastity manifested by her virginal pallor, her marble forehead, and the metaphorical snowiness of the wings Victorian poetry imagines for her. (615)

Since Consuelo watches the snow falling outside while she suffers from a clandestine inner heat, this scene exposes her external performance of purity and submission in her marriage. Consuelo fantasizes about tearing off this disguise of the snowy *ángel del hogar* when she gets tired of looking down in a stance of timidity and sees the flakes rapidly falling. When Consuelo gains the courage to look up and to shed this outer whiteness, her body magically rises from the ground. As Consuelo's body rises, she fantasizes about leaving her old self behind, which is illustrated when she envisions passengers on a train watching the outer landscapes disappear behind them during their journey (12).

Consuelo's introspective gazing takes the reader back to the awakening of her sexual fantasies as a young girl, fantasies that emerged when she stared through the window but that were quickly suppressed by patriarchal society. When looking through the window as a child, Consuelo stared at the *pollitos* that populated the fields by her Aunt's house, longing to possess them, kiss them, and sleep with them (13). Although Consuelo furtively spies on the *pollitos* to grab one to satisfy her dream, she is unable to escape her Aunt's vigilant authority, foreshadowing her obligation to conceal her sexual passions—sharing the bed with the loved animal, kissing it—throughout the rest of her life in patriarchal society:

Resuelta a dar satisfacción a este deseo, espío pacientemente la oportunidad de allanar los dominios de la señora Daniela; pasaron más de quince días sin que la anhelada coyuntura

se presentase; ¡qué mala suerte!... los pollitos serían, cuando ella los cogiese, casi unos gallos. (13)

Consuelo's failure to attain her fantasy during childhood causes her to become overwhelmed with sadness and to be subjected to medical diagnosis, just as it does during adulthood, when she struggles to express her desire to Alfonso. Consuelo's sexual repression displayed in this scene with the *pollitos* is later associated with the development of her masochistic fantasies, when she witnesses her father about to whip a young boy as a punishment for placing an obscene drawing in her pocket. This event is described as an arousing moment for Consuelo that initiates her into puberty and shapes her sexual life with Alfonso, since masochistic performance allows her to express her desires under a façade of wifely submission.

The narrator hints at Consuelo's inexpressible sexual frustrations with Alfonso when he describes the way in which she spends her days—sewing his clothes only to tear them up, rip the buttons off, and re sew them (12). To alleviate these passions, Consuelo puts on a performance of submission. One day, after the couple finishes lunch, Consuelo silently and amorously observes her husband drinking coffee by the fire, which as previously mentioned were considered erotically stimulating activities at the time. Alfonso is unaware of the fact that his wife is admiring him when he gets up to go to the casino. Consuelo attempts to indirectly express her desire for pleasure to Alfonso by shutting the curtain to create an intimate space of privacy (17). However, instead of telling Alfonso what she really wants, she interrogates him for his motives of leaving:

Conque, ¿vas a salir?

¡Diantre... ¡no sé!... (17)

Since Alfonso appears to not understand the true reason for Consuelo's question, she results to acting like a needy, childish woman to convince him to stay with her, referring to herself as a

“mujercita.” The narrator hints that Consuelo’s behaviors are part of a performance when he describes her transformation into “another woman”:

Consuelo sintió uno de aquellos vehementes arrebatos mimosos que la transfiguraban en otra mujer.

—Bien mío, no salgas, complace esta vez a tu mujercita. El tiempo es malo, llegas al Casino mojado de pies a cabeza, manchado de barro, tiritando de frío... ¿y para qué? [...] Verás, jugaremos al tute, al ajedrez, me contarás cuentos... ¿verdad que sí? ¡Concho, hijo, cuánto tardas en responder! ... Di, ¿te quedas? ... ¿eh? ... ¿Te quedas? (17)

Although Consuelo cloaks her desires under the innocent acts of storytelling and playing games, the narrator reveals that Alfonso is subtly aware of his wife’s performance, one in which he is also complicit: “Realmente Sandoval ya estaba decidido a quedarse, pero no quiso rendirse tan pronto” (17). While Consuelo feels that she must play the role of the innocent wife, Alfonso is feigning the part of the traditional husband who does what he wants without regard for his wife’s desires by acting as though he would only submit to Consuelo’s desires after seeing her beg.

The fact that Alfonso was planning to stay all along reveals that he actually wants to satisfy Consuelo’s demands. When Alfonso decides to renounce his authority to fulfill his wife’s desires, he admits his weakness while comparing himself to Hercules and her to Omphale:

Pero el hombre es débil, y Hércules hilando a los pies de Onfala es el ejemplo que mejor demuestra cuan grandes son el imperio y poderío que las faldas tienen sobre los pantalones; por eso yo, que te quiero tanto o más que Hércules a Onfala, me rindo a tus suplicas, bribonzuela, y con tal de verte alegre renuncio a todo y... ¡me quedo! (17)

Victor I. Stoichita and Anna Maria Coderch explain how depictions of Omphale and Hercules represent a reversal of power dynamics in relations between the sexes:

According to tradition, the story illustrates a secondary episode in the adventure of the great Greek hero Hercules, who, carrying out the orders of the Oracle of Delphi, set off for Lydia, where he became the slave (in keeping with other slave-spouse variants) of Queen Omphale. There he was forced to wear women’s clothes and do women’s work, while Omphale wore his lion skin and carried his club. This tale of castration is all the more powerful as the hero is the very symbol of masculinity. (39)

Given this information, Alfonso's comparison illustrates emergent discourses on a wife's need to express her desires and the husband's obligation to understand and gratify her needs. However, it is difficult for both Consuelo and Alfonso to adopt these nuanced roles for married couples, which is evidenced by this masquerade that inhibits direct communication.

Consuelo's inability to express her desires is further revealed when the narrator states that Consuelo is "enajenada de gozo" but that she does not know how to express these emotions of enjoyment to her husband. In an attempt to initiate intimacy, Consuelo sits between her husband's legs, kisses and kisses his hands, while they gaze at each other *contemplándose con sus miradas de un idilio mudo* (16–17). The fact that the narrator depicts the couple's mutual gazing as a "mute" romance, points to the inability of both spouses to vocalize their true thoughts.

As Consuelo sits on the floor kissing Alfonso's hands, asking him how much he loves her, this position of docility bores her when she gets up from the floor to be more comfortable: "Consuelito, aburrida de permanecer en el suelo, quiso cambiar de posición, mas no acertaba a colocar cómodamente las piernas. —¡Concho siempre me lastimo!" (18). Consuelo's desire to change positions from her place on the floor reveals that she is actually playing this role in order to break out of her performance of obedience; however, the fact that she hurts herself when trying to get up reveals a struggle to achieve this goal.

Consuelo's sexual intentions behind her request become clear by the exposure of her black socks beneath her skirt. Alfonso acts like he is scandalized by his wife's garments when he exclaims "¡Qué vergüenza! ¿Le parece a usted eso decente? [...] pareces una chiquilla mal criada" (19). Alfonso's comment demonstrates that he is playing the part of the traditional husband who would be outraged by his wife's audacity to initiate sexual pleasure. Because this is

a rather new idea in marriage, Alfonso is unsure how to react to his wife's behavior, leading him to fall back onto the common male strategy of covering intimidations towards the desiring woman with enigmatic passions by diagnosing her with illness: "¡Pobre enfermita!" (19).

This transformation of roles between husband and wife being played out in this performance leads to a power struggle:

—Si quieres reconciliarte conmigo, ven aquí.

—¡No, ven tú!

—Eres más empalagosa que un tarro de almíbar! ¿Qué? ¿haces lo que mando o me marcho y no vuelvo hasta la madrugada? (19)

Although Alfonso tries to label Consuelo as an excessively "sweet" wife, the narrator hints at her hidden motives of seduction as her husband approaches her, and the erotic allure of her body is subtly exposed beneath her black outfit that attempts to conceal the truth of her desires:

Alfonso, compadecido, acercóse a ella; seguía tendida con abandono delicioso; bajo su traje negro, sencillo como el de una colegiala, se bocetaban las formas lujuriantes del cuerpo, y estaba tentadora, con esa seducción irresistible que tienen las mujeres bonitas cuando lloran de amor. (19)

Consuelo rejects her masqueraded image of the affectionate wife when she says that sweet things nauseate her, and she becomes angered with Alfonso for calling her "empalagosa" (19). When being confronted with his wife's desiring body and her rejection of her "sweet" identity, Alfonso once again calls her sick because he does not know how to deal with this notion that Consuelo is not an idealized angelic being but a real woman who possesses natural passions.

Consuelo openly denounces Alfonso for calling her sick, while exposing hysteria as a male-invented disease that keeps women in a place of subjugation as if they were slaves to men, echoing the nineteenth-century feminist evocation of marriage and slavery also seen in *La*

condesita. Consuelo reveals to Alfonso that she is not a hysteric, but that she is sad because he no longer provides her with the love that she needs:

No estoy enferma; ésas son calumnias que el mundo inventa para atormentarme. Lloro porque me tratas muy mal, porque no me quieres, porque te aburre en mí todo lo que antes te divertía, porque soy para ti menos que una esclava... Menos, sí; pues he oído contar que muchos hombres quieren a sus esclavas como a sus propias mujeres... (19)

While this challenging of female hysteria was presented in *Las neuróticas*, in *La enferma* the denouncement is much more powerful because it is coming from a female protagonist who tells the reader firsthand that she is not a hysteric but rather a victim of patriarchal suppression who feels compelled to conceal her desires. Alfonso is completely perplexed by his wife's comments and almost laughs at her when she presents him with this very serious discourse that he wrongly reads as fickleness. Alfonso's behaviors illustrate his inability to comprehend Consuelo's needs, as well as his unpreparedness for dealing with this new role of the assertive wife who questions patriarchal mechanisms of power (19).

Because Alfonso does not understand how to give Consuelo what she wants, she tries to make herself cry to calm her sexual frustrations (19). Alfonso inquires about her motive to 'cry,' but because she has been previously shamed by her husband, she feels that she must conceal her passions rather than explaining to him directly what she longs for. "No sé, quizá ninguno, pero siento sobre el pecho un peso muy grande que me impide respirar y estoy cierta de quitármelo llorando" (20). Consuelo's yearning to cry masks her desire for her husband to bring her to orgasm: "literary tears are tied to fulfillment of desire, including erotic desire, as the iconography of literature from the ancient world to the present reminds us. Indeed, literary tears are often a metonym of orgasm" (Rabinowitz 250).

Consuelo's inability "to cry" causes her so much frustration that she slaps herself in the face, a masochistic act intermingled with desire and self-shaming that causes her eyes to briefly

moisten. Consuelo pleads Alfonso to aid her in this process by shouting “¡Virgen qué nerviosa estoy!... Alfonso, dime algo, hazme algo para que llore...,” while flailing her arms as if she were a prisoner being tortured (20). This continued pressure for Alfonso to satisfy his wife leads him to bring her to bed, but she is still unable to articulate her passions, causing her to pull her hair out in an irritated act of unquenched desire (20). Alfonso is extremely irritated and worried about Consuelo’s actions, illustrating that he does not know how to comprehend this stifled expression of her wants. To achieve this goal of making his wife cry, Alfonso has the idea of punishing her by spanking her buttocks with a slipper, a “castigation” that perhaps he thinks she would enjoy because of her masquerade of childish docility. It appears that Consuelo does want these spankings when she shouts “¡Sí, por Dios, sí... dámelos!” (20). Consuelo also receives ecstatic pleasure from this spanking, emphasizing the idea that her only available outlet to express her desires is through a performance of masochistic submission, something that she learned early on in childhood.

While Alfonso delights in this control over his wife’s body, he soon realizes that Consuelo is actually enjoying this “punishment” and that she is manipulating him to whip her to fulfill her secretive desires. Consuelo’s distorted expression of sexual agency breaks through when she places herself face down on the bed and trembles with pleasure as her husband spansks her:

Ella misma se puso boca abajo, con la cara sobre la almohada, esperando impaciente. Toda aquella flagelación envolvía una voluptuosidad extraña. Sandoval, sin otros ambages, sofaldó a la joven y cogiendo una chinela levantó el brazo sobre aquellas carnes turgentes que parecían vibrar de placer bajo la fina tela de la camisa. Consuelo permanecía inmóvil, suspirando dulcemente, esperando el castigo, deleitándose con él, al fin recibió el primer golpe y su cuerpo tembló más de sensualidad que de dolor. (20)

Despite Consuelo’s enjoyment of the spankings, she pretends to Alfonso that she is suffering, to keep up her façade of the submissive wife who is controlled by her husband: “Esposo mío,

piedad para mí, no me Pegues más, ¡basta por Dios!...” (21). This sexual “punishment” would also make Alfonso more comfortable to satisfy his wife’s desires because he is given the illusion that he is maintaining his husbandly authority over his wife’s body. This encouraged spanking is further revealed as a secretive avenue for sexual communication between the couple, when Consuelo finally breaks out into the long-awaited sobs.

Alfonso seems to understand his wife’s furtive manipulations, causing him to spank her even harder, allowing her to achieve orgasm through this unspoken expression of desire:

Tenía los ojos colorados y las lágrimas corrían abundantes por sus mejillas. Pero Alfonso, comprendiendo la fina voluptuosidad de aquel capricho, quiso extremarlo, y desasiéndose de la joven continuó macerando sañudamente aquellas carnes blancas y duras; ella sollozaba, retorciéndose en un espasmo; después, juzgándola bastante castigada, se acostó a su lado para consolarla. (21)

When Alfonso intensifies his spanking, it illustrates that he actually wants to pleasure his wife and is trying to read between the lines when it comes to her enigmatic wants. This act also appears to provide Alfonso with pleasure, since he is giving his wife what she desires, while maintaining his imagined stance of power in this sexual encounter. The fact that Alfonso consoles Consuelo after this “punishment” reveals that his intention is not to hurt her, but to fulfill her wishes that she is unable to openly articulate to him and he is not able to read properly.

The night of the spanking there is a lingering tension in the room when the narrator states that the couple went to bed early because they were both frightened by the “coldness” of the evening. This awkward chilliness can refer to the nineteenth-century pathology of frigidity, or female coldness, a disorder that denoted insatiable, yet unquenched female passion:

Belief in female frigidity or in women’s total indifference to sexual stimuli was popular with both physicians and the public. One theory was that in the hysteric, frigidity and insatiability were combined in women who went from lover to lover seeking the gratification that a supposedly normal female would have experienced in coitus with her spouse. (Maines 60)

Another outlet that the so-called frigid hysteric could seek to gratify her unfulfilled desires was through masochistic fantasies:

Assumptions of women's natural masochism threatened only by the danger of exaggeration fed into a new set of concerns about the deeply pathological problem of frigidity. This kind of frigidity, depicted in psychoanalytic visions of female 'self-punishment' (auto-punition), was a disguise for perversions such as a masochism that had replaced normative coital longing. (Moore 151)

Consuelo can be considered a variation of the frigid wife because she is harboring intense sexual desires that she cannot communicate to her husband but can indirectly express through "perverse" masochistic performances. Consuelo's suppressed passions come to the surface in her dreams, which also involve elements of pleasure and pain, just like the nightmares of the repressed wives of Zamacois's novel *El misterio de un hombre pequeñito*, because of the supposed "espíritu masoquista" of women caused by their internalization of sexual shame and submission in patriarchal society.

In Consuelo's dream the night of the spanking, she imagines that it is a cold winter afternoon and that she is alone in the house lamenting "la prolongada ausencia de Alfonso," details that suggest her insatiable, unfulfilled marital desires that take the guise of frigid masochism. In this dream Consuelo is confronted with monstrous mirror reflections of herself as she attempts to sculpt her own guilty desires. She returns to the office filled with portrait busts and sees a gnome in front of the chimney, surrounded by the portrait busts that have left their pedestals, gazing at Consuelo in a scene of self-interrogation.⁶⁸ Consuelo acts as a spectator of herself while she hides behind a curtain listening to her wants being expressed indirectly through these phantasms, who discuss carrying her away to a distant land, a conversation that symbolizes

⁶⁸ As seen in my discussion of *El misterio de un hombre pequeñito*, Zamacois uses the image of the tiny devil man as an incarnation of an incubus that visits sexually frustrated wives in their dreams to satisfy their passions.

her desire to escape her repressive lifestyle. As soon as Consuelo listens to these voices, she is overwhelmed with horror and notices that the gnome is wearing a disguise of the devil, a costume that subtly exposes her sexual desires, which are hidden beneath a deceitful identity of submission. Similarly, the medieval Italian writer Tomasso Garzoni argued that Satan was “the inventor of masks” and “who, in the guise of the malicious serpent, seduced our first mother to excess” (qtd. in Johnson 79).

Consuelo’s theatrical self performance continues when she travels to the opera with Alfonso in her dream, which as seen in *La condesita* was a site of introspective female gazing that allowed women to discover their desires in a pleasurable game of seeing and being seen. However, contrary to Aurora’s enjoyable masturbatory experience at the opera, when Consuelo is watching this performance, her sexual fantasy becomes intermingled with emotions of terror. She feels coldness, an indicator of her concealed “frigid” frustrations, and is transported to her marital bed alone to play out her wants in the absence of her husband, a drama that will bring her into contact with a monstrous reflection of her inner being:

Estaba con su marido en un palco del Teatro Real, viendo una ópera cuyo argumento desconocía. De pronto tuvo frío y se levantó para vestirse el abrigo que había dejado en el antepalco: este era una alcoba, su dormitorio de la calle del Arenal, con su otomana, su mesa de noche y su cama matrimonial vestida de blanco. Sentóse en el lecho a reposar: tenía jaqueca, las notas llegaban a sus oídos debilitadas, tenues, remedando suspiros. (24)

The soft sounds of the music that resemble sighs suggests that Consuelo is immersing herself in an enjoyable fantasy where she can imagine how she wants Alfonso to pleasure her. However, these sensations of pleasure become fused with horror when she sees the same diabolical gnome that appeared above the chimney in the office, but this time with disgusting features: “entró un hombre muy pálido, sin pelo de barba, con las mejillas arreboladas, las ojeras grandes y

separadas del cráneo, los labios descoloridos, el pelo áspero y cortado a rape, la mirada inmóvil y sin expresión, las manos exangües como las de un muerto” (24).

Despite his grotesque appearance, the sexual connotations of the gnome are evident when Consuelo imagines that this little man has entered beneath “las faldas de alguna señora,” while observing him slowly and playfully attempting to penetrate the doorway with his legs, an image that suggests sexual intercourse (24). The devil also tries to possess Consuelo with his arms and lips, causing her to experience emotions of revulsion and attraction, revealing that this disgusting creature does provide her with a certain degree of satisfaction: “La joven comenzó a tiritar de miedo; no podía huir ni gritar, ni defenderse; la espeluzante aparición ejercía sobre ella atracción fascinante” (25). By imagining that her willpower is suspended in this encounter, Consuelo can fulfill her repressed desire to be satisfied in her marital bed by this demon that deep down she wishes were Alfonso:

El fantasma maldito tenía la fuerza de una realidad espantable: la boca del horrible engendro oprimió la suya con un beso mortal, mientras una mano, fría como el mármol, la palpaba bajo las faldas. Estaba tendida en el lecho, sin poder desasirse, jadeante, a punto de ser vencida... (25)

In Consuelo’s dream, she does receive the pleasure that she wants in her marital bed, but in a distorted manner, due to her guilt at expressing her desires to her husband. It is revealed that the shame Consuelo feels towards her passions is provoked by her internalization of the condemning male medical gaze when the devil’s eyes suddenly transform into the gaze of her hypnotist Montánchez.

When Consuelo recognizes this gaze that she has seen on several other occasions in her dreams, the hypnotist tells her that he wants to represent “la última escena de la ópera,” a quote that suggests she must finish this performance of the self to expose her desires that she attempts

to hide from both him and her husband. However, Consuelo feels compelled to end this exploration of her passions, because she worries that Alfonso could show up and surprise her in the middle of this autoerotic fantasy, an intrusion that makes her ashamed of herself:

No, no... puede venir Alfonso y enfadarse conmigo [...] Suélteme usted, se lo ruego, porque si Alfonso nos ve aquí solos y abrazados, es capaz de matarnos. Oh... si el supiera que un hombre me ha tenido entre sus brazos, me daba un tiro... Suélteme usted... oigo pasos... es él... es él. (25)

Consuelo's fear of her husband watching her in this moment of sexual self-exploration and the imaginary echo of his approaching footsteps is similar to Herminia's worries of the marquis spying on her through a keyhole in *Las neuróticas* during her autoerotic discovery with Conchita in the shower. Both cases expose how women struggled to express their inner selves due to societal demands of womanhood in patriarchal society.

Alfonso is determined to understand his wife's nightmares that continuously wake him up in the middle of the night and her "strange" comportment in bed with him, leading him to seek the help of Montánchez, even if she does not want the intervention of the medic. The fact that Alfonso resorts to the services of the hypnotist rather than communicating with his wife highlights the tensions in this marriage provoked by Consuelo's struggled attempt to vocalize her needs, as well as Alfonso's fear of confronting them. However, not only is Alfonso scared to hear what his wife wants, he also does not know how to broach this conversation, since this idea of succumbing to a wife's demands is something different to previous traditional ideas about marriage.

Because Alfonso does not know how to handle this situation, he falls back onto traditional ideas of hysteria and is brainwashed by Montánchez's idea that his wife is sick. To understand Consuelo's "sickness," Alfonso relates to the hypnotist the most private details of Consuelo's sexual development and their intimate experiences:

Sandoval comenzó a referir cuantos detalles recordaba que podían contribuir a poner de relieve la índole de la enfermedad. Describió la niñez de Consuelo, el susto a que aquellos padecimientos parecían referirse, las ocupaciones a que se entregaba, su afición a la lectura y al teatro, sus ensueños y sus extravagantes supersticiones. Cuando refirió el ahínco que la joven puso en ser azotada, Montánchez no pudo abstenerse en sonreír. (35)

The fact that Montánchez smiles when he hears about the spanking suggests that he knows Consuelo's secretive motives in her masochistic performance of submission to Alfonso that allowed her to cover up her transgressive desires. Since these details of Consuelo's sexual behavior will later cause Montánchez to fall for her, construe a plan to seduce her, and finally rape her, Zamacois also hints at the perverse nature of the male physician who uses the enigmatic body of the "female hysteric" as a source of personal fantasy. In this regard, Rachel Mesch quotes the nineteenth-century French physician A. Reinwillier, who stated in the preface to his medical manual *Hygiène pratique des femmes* (1854) that "woman is the most interesting, most complicated, and perhaps the most important subject that has been given to man to observe" (107). Mesch concludes that "this voyeuristic pleasure linked to male scientific authority helps to explain why even texts not destined for a female audience devoted pages upon pages to detailing female maladies (107)."⁶⁹

Montánchez's fascination with the hysteric is depicted as a form of voyeuristic pleasure but also as a sadistic control when he later decapitates a cat beneath a portrait of Cleopatra, a female ruler who served as an emblem of nymphomania and female insatiability in the nineteenth century (Traffton 206). When Montánchez performs animal magnetism on the cat, it is an act that symbolizes his effort to penetrate the hysteric's psyche: "Aquel era el objeto único del difícil experimento pues había que demostrar la existencia o ausencia de la vida psíquica en

⁶⁹ What is relevant is that the male authors of the works of fiction studied here have taken on this role of the diagnosing, voyeuristic role of the physician.

la cabeza cortada” (*La enferma* 88). After achieving his goal, Montánchez gazes at the bloody, severed head with cold indifference, in the same way that he looks at Consuelo when he dissects her mind through his hypnotic powers. “Montánchez, absorto en sus pensamientos, miraba indiferente el silencio y trágico suplicio” (90).

Despite Montánchez’s malicious intentions, Alfonso thinks that this medic is his friend, in whom he can entrust all of the secrets of his marriage, leading him to blindly relate the most intimate details of his sexual relationship with Consuelo: “Alfonso continuó narrando minuciosamente la vida íntima de su hogar, no omitiendo ninguna peculiaridad, ni aun las más secretas y calladas, con la ciega confianza que le inspiraban el médico y el amigo” (36). This conversation emphasizes Alfonso’s inability to communicate with his wife, nor to treat her as if she were a real person instead of an object of scientific study, because his view of marital sexual relations has been clouded by medical treatises. The narrator indicates that there is no separation between science and Alfonso’s bedroom when he leaves Montánchez’s laboratory: “Alfonso salió, corriendo los cortinones que separaban la alcoba del gabinete” (36).

When Alfonso arrives home, he openly tells Consuelo that he has related all of their intimacies to Montánchez, who will soon be arriving to observe her body once again, a double violation of her privacy that disgusts her and makes her angry with her husband:

—Ya no hay remedio princesa. Montánchez vendrá dentro de algunas horas a tomarte el pulso y a mirarte la lengua; le he referido nuestra vida íntima sin omitir un detalle, ¿entiendes? ni uno solo... y el muy pillo se ha reído bastante.

—¡Asqueroso! (38)

Once the couple makes peace, Consuelo tries to furtively assert her desires when she tells him “¡Qué guapo eres! ¡No hay nadie como tú!” while showering him with kisses. Alfonso, intimidated by his wife’s intentions, fails to reciprocate her advances. “Sandoval se dejaba

mimar, sonriendo y sin devolver aquel diluvio de caricias” (38). This scene ends up as an expression of childish neediness when Consuelo fails to verbalize her true wants and pleads Alfonso to entertain her with another romantic story, a request that he is *scared* to fulfill “Un cuento! —exclamó él aterrado—. ¡Para romances tengo la cabeza!... (40).

Since Alfonso cannot provide Consuelo with the romance that she wants, she escapes into a state of dreaming whenever she is alone in the house. Only in this realm of fantasy does Consuelo have the courage to exert her agency and fabricate a more enjoyable life for herself:

Aquellas horas de soledad y recogimiento eran su Delicia, porque podía discutir consigo misma los mil proyectos que bullían en su cabeza y fantasear a su antojo. Allí nadie la forzaba a seguir esta o la otra conversación, podía discurrir libremente, sin aguardar a que su interlocutor hablase para responder ella, ni que observar cierto comedimiento en las palabras: allí no había estorbos; estaba sola, entregada a su albedrío, con un mundo de quimeras por delante. Consuelo se fastidiaba porque no atinaba a seguir con paciencia el lento curso de los acontecimientos naturales, ni podía doblegar el mundo a sus caprichos. Sabiendo que aquella imposibilidad duraría lo que su vida, hizo lo que los filósofos idealistas: fabricar un mundo de ensueños para refugiarse dentro de él cuando lo estimara conveniente y vivir feliz. (41)

When entering into this dream world, Consuelo gazes at herself in the mirror and sees “otra Consuelo,” just as Felisa saw an external image of herself when experiencing her “sueño fisiológico” in *La condesita* (42). Similar to what was seen with Felisa, Consuelo’s gaze upon herself initiates subjectivity, auto-awareness, and self-admiration. While Felisa was able to overcome the pain that her self-fulfilling dream caused her and temporarily transform into a sculptor of her own desires, Consuelo is unable to shake off feelings of shame for exploring her reflection in enjoyment. Consuelo’s behavior can be understood when taking into account Patricia Moran’s discussion of how the twentieth-century British writer Virginia Woolf displays a type of “looking-glass shame” in her autobiography and through her female protagonists: “Female sexual curiosity becomes linked to furtive, shameful emotions; throughout these descriptions Woolf’s emphasis is on forbidden sight and curiosity, followed by and shrouded in

subsequent shame and silence” (82). This information can also explain why Consuelo’s pleasurable mirror interrogations will cause her reflection to become clouded with darkness and later, the repulsive demon of her nightmares.

Not only does Consuelo’s black robe illustrate her fear of coming to terms with her true persona, but her hair is also covering her face, demonstrating her reluctance to observe her reflection. When Consuelo interacts with her mirror image, she wonders why she undergoes these introspective encounters so frequently and worries if it is because she is sick, internalizing Montánchez’s theories that brainwash her husband and keep her in a place of subjugation, or if it is because she possesses some sort of special talent:

—Esa soy yo —dijo la joven—; porque es indudable que lo que ahí veo es mi propia imagen. Agitó un brazo en el aire cerciorándose de que su sombra lo haría también, y pareció quedar más tranquila. —Estas cosas tan raras que me suceden —murmuró —no sé si atribuir las a que estoy medio chiflada, como dice Alfonso, o a que tengo mucho talento. (48)

Consuelo’s reflection reveals that she is subtly aware that medical discourses serve to prevent her from engaging in self-cultivation. Consuelo also participates in a self-dialogue inquiring if she actually knows herself, while developing a desire for verbal agency to revive herself from her current position of lack in her marriage with Alfonso, in which she feels compelled to suppress her desires:

¿Si yo me encontrase a mí misma en la calle, ¿me reconocería?... Seguramente, pues cuando me veo en un espejo sé que la figura aquella es otra yo. A veces pienso que mis palabras carecen de significado. ¿Qué es una sílaba, qué es una palabra, qué es un idioma? (48)

Consuelo’s reflections expose her inability to conform to conventional demands of womanhood, when she describes the way in which society looks at her as if she were a strange insect, just because she is different from others (42).

Consuelo also contemplates her inner character, wishing that she could understand who she truly is. This self-analysis allows Consuelo to scrutinize her external appearance and to recognize her own beauty, something that she imagines that Alfonso also enjoys “Soy guapa —dijo—; lo reconozco aunque tengo el buen juicio de juzgarme sin apasionamiento; además, lo que dicen por ahí y los delirios que le inspiro a mi maridito, lo confirman” (43). When Consuelo voices her realization that she should not gaze upon her reflection with passionate admiration, it is evident that she has internalized the idea that it is wrong for her to contemplate her own desires. Even though this mirror gazing does not involve explicit masturbatory satisfaction as it does with Felisa and Aurora in *La condesita*, Consuelo is still ashamed of her self-explorations. This brief pleasurable gaze upon herself transports Consuelo into a horrifying reverie of attending her own funeral and seeing her cadaver being carried through a group of judging spectators, a dream that symbolizes her fear of being publicly scrutinized for transgressing the bounds of traditional femininity. It appears that Consuelo’s introspective analysis before the mirror has also caused her to fantasize about sexual fulfillment with Alfonso—the devilish phantasm makes his presence to touch her body with its “manos ardientes” and to kiss her, while his hot breath caresses her face (45).

Alfonso’s longing to understand Consuelo’s enigmatic desires that are distortedly expressed in these nightmares is illustrated when he and Montánchez appear in the room as Consuelo fights off this imaginary phantasm that touches her body in a pleasurable yet repulsive manner. Montánchez knows that Consuelo’s clandestine identity can be deciphered by reading her dreams, when he immediately asks her “¿Estabas soñando?” (46). This becomes a mirrorlike interrogation for Consuelo, similar to what occurs with her nightmares, as she sits between her husband and the medic while the gas light illuminates their faces. Alfonso looks at Consuelo in

desperation as if pleading her to tell him what she wants, but she cannot even pay attention to her distressed husband because she is horrified by Montánchez's cold, objective gaze that has intruded into the couple's bedroom and made them incapable of direct communication (52).

The narrator depicts Montánchez as a judge who appears to Consuelo in her solitary moments of self-observation, displaying the power of the internalized medical gaze to destroy her fantasies and to prevent her from stepping into her desired role of a wife who can openly voice her needs to her husband:

Su trabajo fue prolijo como el del juez que procura poner al reo en contradicción consigo mismo: hablaba repetidamente y de diverso modo de los mismos temas, unas veces preguntando y otras afirmando rotundamente, y en tanto que sus palabras y sus argumentos de médico experto obtenían confesiones de la enferma, sus ojos sagaces escudriñaban el semblante de Consuelo con tenacidad infatigable. (46)

Just like her private interviews of her self in her dreams, this interrogation with Montánchez causes her to feel “vergüenza y arrepentimiento.” However, Montánchez forces Consuelo to confront this demon of her nightmares when his eyes swarm through her insides in a process of hypnotic possession (48).

It is only in this subconscious state that Consuelo can recognize the tiny devil who appears to her in dreams at the theater, where she attempts to play out her fantasies of being pleased by Alfonso but always ends up being troubled by the vigilant medical gaze that lingers in their bedroom:

Estas palabras fueron para Consuelo una revelación; se acordó de las quimeras que tanto la atormentaban, de aquellos brazos inconmensurables, largos y negros como alambres quemados, que una tarde soñó se extendían tras ella para sugetarla; de la reunión de espíritus celebrada por un gnomo en un antepalco del Teatro Real, y de aquél horripilante monigote de estuco vestido con traje de tafetán verde, que al abrazarla se convirtió repentinamente en Gabriel Montánchez. (48)

When Consuelo remembers these dreams, she starts to cry, covering her face with a handkerchief, an act that symbolizes the shame that she feels upon having her passions exposed

to her husband in the presence of this scrutinizing medic, who has not only invaded her psyche by presenting himself in her dreams but also literally, through hypnotic suggestion.

Montánchez further places Consuelo under his powers by urging her to stare at a shining sphere, an object akin to a mirror. Consuelo feels a pain in her eyes as she gazes at a monstrous reflection of her unmasked self and confesses her forbidden desires that she is too scared to voice to Alfonso. Although Alfonso has been desperately trying to unlock the mysteries of his wife's passions to appropriately pleasure her, these revelations of truth clearly intimidate him, illustrating his fears of confronting his wife's demands: "cuando las crisis eran habladoras, Alfonso y su amigo escuchaban con vivísimo interés aquellas confesiones... y tan íntimas fueron en más de una ocasión sus confidencias que Sandoval hubo de taponarle la boca" (64).

Consuelo's desires become even more threatening when Montánchez puts her into a hypnotic sleep on a subsequent occasion. Alfonso sees the truth behind his wife's performance of angelic innocence when she experiences an outburst of uncontrollable and unquenched sexual passions. Consuelo runs around the room "buscando algún calor que mitigase el frío que penetraba sus huesos" and then crawls on the floor like a cat, scratching herself, heating her body, shaking and sweating, while letting out "quejidos angustiosos" (69). Montánchez reveals to Alfonso that his wife is suffering from a concealed inner heat when he blatantly refutes Consuelo's claim that she was cold at the beginning of this outburst. The hypnotist touches her body and shouts "Hace un calor insoportable; estás ahogándote!" (69). The narrator also compares Consuelo to a beggar who has fallen beneath the snow when this feline outburst ends, suggesting her unexpressed pleas for sexual satisfaction that she hides beneath an image of snowy conformity (69).

These outward expressions of Consuelo's frustrated desire under hypnosis provoke perverse curiosity in Montánchez, when he asks Alfonso on a subsequent visit "¿quieres que veamos como anda esta muchacha por dentro?" [...] propongo sondear su conciencia, lo que piensa, lo que siente, bañado en luz lo que tiene oculto en el corazón y detrás de la frente" (70). Alfonso is hesitant to put Consuelo into another hypnotic trance, an indicator of his concern for Consuelo's well-being, but Montánchez convinces him that this unjust domination of her mind and body can reveal some unknown secret to him. Just as was seen in Consuelo's nightmares, this hypnotic trance blurs her distinction of husband and medic when Montánchez urges her to confess what she thinks of both him and her husband at the same time: "Di lo que piensas de tu marido; si le quieres mucho, si le amas ahora más que el día en que te casaste con él; y di también lo que te parece Gabriel Montánchez" (71).

Although Consuelo professes undivided love for her husband, these pleasurable emotions immediately disappear when his image is replaced by Montánchez's gaze, a stare of medical scrutiny that has made her too scared to be herself in marriage. Consuelo remembers Montánchez's intrusion into her dreams of self-spectatorship when she tried to play out her fantasies of fulfillment in a performance with Alfonso, when she states that "Usted es el hombre de los brazos negros que quiso sujetarme una noche y me besó estando ensayando conmigo una ópera... una ópera, sí... ahora recuerdo... una ópera que no sé cómo se llama..." (72) Consuelo reveals that she wants the caring Alfonso that she loves to be acting with her in this autoerotic fantasy, not the cold medic, who makes her ashamed of her desires and who has begun to take over Alfonso's identity when she recounts her nightmare and screams for him to save her:

¡Alfonso, Alfonso!!.. —gritó Consuelo luchando por desasirse de un abrazo invisible.

Cuando el sueño magnético desapareció y Consuelo supo lo que acababan de hacer con ella, se fue a la cama llorando y diciendo que tenía el cuerpo molido cual si le hubiesen dado una paliza (72).

Consuelo's crying in this scene, along with the feeling that her body has been crushed, illustrate her shameful feelings of corporeal violation that her husband has permitted because he has been clouded by the medic's influence over him, which ends up veiling his desperate desire to understand Consuelo under perverse cruelty.

As Alfonso keeps allowing Montánchez to traumatize Consuelo with his hypnotic trances, his gaze replaces Alfonso's presence that used to provide Consuelo with happiness before the medic invaded their bedroom: "Gabriel Montánchez era el hombre misterioso que fue infiltrándose poco a poco en el seno de su hogar, antes tan tranquilo" (82). Montánchez starts making house visits to Consuelo when she is alone. In his hypnotic possessions, he acts like he has good intentions by telling her that he wants to be her friend. However, it will later become clear that he is just trying to seduce and ultimately rape her. This depiction of the deceitful medic illustrates how scientific theories of hysteria were not actually intended to help women but rather keep their bodies under male control. When Montánchez wants to know why Consuelo fears him, she reveals that it is because of his close proximity to her husband, illustrating the husband/medic dynamic that inhibited wives from freely expressing their desires.

While Alfonso provides Consuelo with feelings of happiness, she becomes ashamed when she imagines her husband's gaze to be that of Montánchez: "Yo solo presiento la proximidad de mi marido y la de usted; a Alfonso le adivino porque deseos extraños de cantar y de reír me anuncian su llegada; y a usted... por un malestar, una presión misteriosa, asfixiante, que me obliga a bajar los ojos..." (75). It is evident that what Consuelo really wants is for Alfonso to break free of the influence that medicine has over him, so that they can have a normal,

spontaneous marital romance that is not controlled by doctrines that perpetuate the traditional idea that wives with sexual desires are sick.

Consuelo gets her wish when she and Alfonso take a trip to the beach together and she is freed from Montánchez's presence. During this trip, Consuelo's health radically improves, something that Alfonso notices. However, he is hesitant to trust his own judgements of Consuelo's contentment and fails to realize that she is not sick but only wants more intimate time with him. Alfonso falls back on science instead of trusting his instincts when he goes to see Montánchez, who has a perverse thirst for maintaining his control over Consuelo's mind and body: "Alfonso, creyéndola definitivamente curada, visitó a Montánchez para hablarle del asunto. El médico mostróse desconfiado [...] —Es indispensable —concluyó— que Consuelo vuelva a someterse al hipnotismo" (77).

Montánchez knows that Alfonso is the real subject of Consuelo's nightmares and suggests that the reason she sees him as a pursuing phantasm is due to her sexual frustrations; he states that she is suffering from a case of "fixed ideas" in relation to her husband:

Consuelo te quiere demasiado; su amor hacia ti constituye un capricho que la acosa diariamente y la persigue hasta en sueños, como el recuerdo de un crimen, barrenando su cabecita enferma: por eso las diversiones contribuirán eficazmente a contrarrestar los destructores efectos de esa idea fija. (76)

As seen in "La meningitis" and "Los guantes," the notion of "fixed ideas" was related to the disorder of monomania, which was used in medical treatises as a trope to denote the obsessions of masturbators who were unable to shake their thoughts of sexual pleasure. This information suggests that Consuelo's nightmares do indeed represent a distorted form of autoerotic fulfillment that she wishes to achieve in bed with Alfonso but cannot due to their lack of direct communication without a medical go-between.

Although Montánchez knows what Consuelo really wants, he deceives Alfonso to get what he wants: possession over the hysteric's body. Montánchez tells Alfonso that Consuelo really needs to be liberated from her husband's presence, when in fact the reader knows that she craves intimate affection and sexual fulfillment from him. Following the hypnotist's advice, Alfonso tells Consuelo that she should go to the theater and have fun without him, but she is angered: he does not realize that she been going to the theater alone in her autoerotic dreams to imagine being satisfied by him. What she really wants is to "attend a performance" with her husband where they can have fun exploring new marital roles, instead of having their sexual relations controlled by traditional medicinal doctrines: "La joven, que al principio lo oyó con mucha complacencia creyendo hablaba de fiestas que habían de compartir, al comprender que trataban de transportarla sola a otro mundo de agitación, emociones y libertad, para ella, se enfureció" (79–80). Instead of going to the theater alone, Consuelo suggests that she and Alfonso take a trip to Europe together, where they can be intimate without the influence of Montánchez (84).

While waiting for this trip, Consuelo's sexual frustrations intensify, which is manifested through her supposed hysterical attack characterized by violent bodily convulsions, provoked by the thrashing storms outside (85). As previously discussed in chapter 2, the storm acts as a metaphor for female sexual desire, such as in Kate Chopin's story "The Storm," to depict a "sexual urgency" that "is so torrential that it constantly threatens to overwhelm social relations" (Bauer 26). To calm her erotic crisis, Consuelo satisfies herself by drinking chocolate and eating sweets in bed. Each time a small piece of cake falls to the floor, Consuelo wants to cry, a detail that highlights her desperate attempt for pleasure. Consuelo also struggles when bringing these

sweets to her mouth, suggesting the same guilt at self-indulgence that she feels in her autoerotic dreams:

Nunca se levantaba antes de las once, tomaba el chocolate en la cama, y mientras apuraba lentamente el contenido de la jícara y partía los bizcochos y casi lloraba porque un pedacito que la era *simpático* se cayó al suelo, su mano, un poco torpe, equivocaba frecuentemente el camino que conducía a la boca, y el bizcocho, mojado en chocolate, solía marcar la nariz una manchita oscura; entonces la joven se dejaba caer hacia atrás riendo a carcajadas con el cuello y los pechos descubiertos, la boquirrita y los ojos contraídos por la risa. (96–97)

Consuelo invites Alfonso to drink chocolate with her, a veiled attempt to initiate sexual pleasure, but this ends up being an awkward expression of desire that confuses Alfonso:

—Alfonsito —continuaba, ¿quieres una sopa de chocolate? Está muy rico; anda, concho, cernícalo, si no te pinto... Pero qué mal pensado eres!... Si a mí me hubiesen dicho qué querían hacer contigo, es decir, qué querían que tu hicieras conmigo... ¿entiendes?
—Ahora entiendo menos. Que si tú quisieras hacer conmigo lo que yo he procurado hacer contigo... ¿está bien así? (97).

Due to their inability for direct communication, Consuelo delights in the idea of the two of them putting on disguises to freely explore their sexual desires at Carnival and the theater, an idea related to her previous masquerade of submission that allowed her to express her desires in bed.

When carnival arrives, Consuelo is immediately drawn to the masks: “Era Domingo de Carnaval. Las máscaras ejercían sobre Consuelo atracción irresistible aunque ignoraba con el candor de una niña, los placeres de que las mujeres disfrutaban llevando el semblante bajo un antifaz” (100). Consuelo remembers that her delight in observing these masks began when she was a child gazing out the window observing carnival. Seeing the masks transported her into a state of reverie, in which she heard the soft sounds of piano music, suggesting that this practice of identity concealment became attractive to her at a young age to explore her desires that were condemned by patriarchal control.

It appears that masking provides both Consuelo and Alfonso with an avenue to explore their sexuality that they are unable to express to one another for fear of renouncing the traditional roles of husband and wife. The couple attends carnival together, where they observe the costumes and then indulge in food together to satisfy their appetites:

Porque Alfonso, lo mismo que Consuelo, gustaban de sentarse de cuando en cuando junto a una mesa de pino, a la luz de un mechero de gas, aspirando el fuerte olor a guisos escapado de las cocinas y oyendo las voces de los parroquianos que iban llegando: unos que paseaban discutiendo en voz baja, otros se asomaban a las ventanas para distraer su fastidio; luego venían los primeros platos y el ruido se amortiguaba según la verbosidad de los comensales iba cediendo su puesto al apetito.

Aquella noche se cenó bien; cuando Sandoval y Consuelo salieron a la calle, aun no eran las nueve; entraron en el Oriental a tomar café y luego se fueron a la comedia. Ambos iban contentos. (101–02)

Because the theater has been depicted as a place where individuals can fantasize about role-playing a new identity for themselves, this detail of the couple going to the theater together suggests that they are breaking free of traditional social conventions surrounding marital relations. This daring role transgression becomes more evident in the following conversation between the couple:

Es preciso —decía ella— hacer algo muy gordo, que suene, concho, para que salgamos en los papeles.

¿Te atreves venir a la zarzuela? Preguntó Alfonso olvidándose de lo mal que están los casados en un baile público (102).

When Consuelo expresses her delight at going to the theater to attend this dance that is considered scandalous for married couples, she and Alfonso immediately run home, suggesting that this theatrical performance will take place in the marriage bed. Further evidence to suggest this idea is the link between dance and sexual intercourse in the nineteenth century (McCarren 189).

However, after deciding that they will explore these new roles in the immoral dance of the Zarzuela, they run into Montánchez in the street:

—¡Pues, ale!... Corriendo a casa, que no hay momento que perder.

Al cruzar de nuevo la Puerta del Sol, vieron a Montánchez.

—Si quieres pasar la noche conmigo —dijo Sandoval estrechándole la mano y sin detenerse—, ve a la Zarzuela; allí estaré yo. (102)

When Alfonso invites the hypnotist to spend the night with the couple, it underlines his hesitancy to renounce the traditional vision that he has of Consuelo as the asexual, angelic wife. This idea that she is a woman with natural passions still scares him, constantly leading him to fall back on medical discourses that stress the idea that female desire was a manifestation of hysterical illness.

Montánchez tells Alfonso that he will not go to the dance, suggesting an attempt to abandon these medical doctrines and to view his wife in terms of equality. However, there will be a struggled effort to change these ingrained ideals, since Montánchez will still be at the dance, he will just be wearing a disguise. The fact that Montánchez's identity is concealed from both Alfonso and Consuelo at this dance, as if he were an undetectable vigilant presence, suggests that both of them have internalized traditional norms of marriage that place a strong burden on their intimacies in the bedroom.

When the couple first arrives to the theater, Consuelo is overcome with a curious excitement that scares her because the atmosphere of the Zarzuela is something very new to her: “Las luces, el calor, el ruido causados por la aglomeración de personas produjeron en Consuelo un sobrecogimiento que la hizo aferrarse estrechamente al brazo de su marido; aquel espectáculo, tan original y nuevo para ella, la atraía y la asustaba a la vez” (102). The couple observe scenes of unbridled lust and indulgence when they see men anxiously waiting on the arrival of women,

audience members drinking bottles of sherry and eating meat, disguised dancers rapidly twirling around with empty bottles of alcohol to fall onto the floor in a deep slumber (102). This “multitud ebria de vino y de vicioso júbilo,” seems to provoke anxiety in Alfonso, who distraughtly asks Consuelo “¿Te sientes mal?” (102). Alfonso’s worry that his wife is feeling ill in this atmosphere of unrestrained pleasure illustrates his internalization of her hysterical diagnosis that prevents him from satisfying her in bed.

To ease these anxieties, Alfonso leaves his wife’s side to greet some of his friends, instead of dancing with her. As in her nightmares, Consuelo’s expression of desire comes out in a monstrous form of masking due to the shame that she has internalized for rejecting traditional conventions of womanhood: “Terminado el baile, Sandoval dejó a Consuelo un momento para saludar a varios amigos que le habían llamado: en aquel momento un numeroso grupo de máscaras empujó a la joven hacia un extremo del salón” (103). Consuelo screams for Alfonso, revealing her longing for him to pleasure her, but he does not appear to rescue her. Instead, the masked individuals force Consuelo into a process of self-spectatorship by pushing her onto the stage alone and forcing her to dance.⁷⁰

Algunos desocupados, notando su turbación, se complacieron en aumentarla con sus voces y requiebros, y siguieron acosándola hasta acorralarla contra un ángulo del escenario. En esto la orquesta volvió a tocar y todos quisieron bailar con ella: Consuelo al principio pudo defenderse, pero después el miedo paralizó su lengua; un hombre medio borracho y disfrazado de diablo se arrodilló ante ella para verla el rostro por debajo de la sotabarba, y mientras con lengua estropajosa iba diciendo cuantas sandeces se le ocurrían, extendió la mano y pellizó una pierna. Consuelo dió un grito y retrocedió algunos pasos sin poder desembarazarse de otros importunos que, excitados por el cándido aspecto de la joven, abusaban de su turbación para manosearla. Y ya empezaba a acongojarse, cuando rompiendo violentamente el grupo de hombres que en torno de ella se había formado, la forzó a bailar, cogiéndola por el talle, una máscara disfrazada de astrólogo. (103)

⁷⁰ I discussed the connection between dance and self-spectatorship in chapters 3 and 5.

Because Consuelo is forced into this sensual dance on stage without her husband, while being harassed by a masked devil, the object of her autoerotic nightmares, this scene can be viewed as a guilty manifestation of self-pleasure. In this regard, Michael Finn argues that “In every discussion of onanism from the 1880’s, the jerky, convulsive movements of the St. Vitus dance, or chorea, are linked to female self-pleasuring” (85).

While Consuelo feels obligated to pleasure herself in this shameful dance on stage, she really wants to dance with Alfonso, which is evidenced when she runs towards her husband screaming his name. Alfonso tries to attack the astrologist dancing with his wife, who will later be revealed as Montánchez. The original excited intentions of the couple to explore their sexuality together at the theater during this audacious dance fail because of the physician’s influence over the couple. Alfonso is intimidated and hesitant to pleasure Consuelo, while she feels shame at expressing her desires, all because the disguised medic has intervened in their attempts to dance with one another.

From this moment on in the novel, there are brewing tensions between Montánchez and Alfonso, suggesting Alfonso’s questioning of the doctor’s influence over his intimate marital relations:

Las relaciones entre Gabriel Montánchez y Sandoval parecían haberse enfriado un poco: sólo de tarde en tarde se veían, y cuando Alfonso reprochaba a su amigo su tibieza, el médico se disculpaba alegando sus muchas ocupaciones y los libros que entre manos traía. (104)

Despite Alfonso’s new attitude towards the doctor, Consuelo worries that the hypnotist will ultimately defeat her husband, a fear that symbolizes Alfonso’s inability to stop viewing her as a hysteric and to treat her as his equal. “Ella no quería que Sandoval riñese con Gabriel Montánchez, porque el médico no era un hombre como los demás, sino un demonio que le vencería” (106). Consuelo also confesses her own failure to shut the medic’s influence out of her

mind when she imagines him pursuing her with bloody hands “en el lecho, en la mesa, en el teatro” (106). While the doctor’s bloody hands evoke an image of guilt, the bed suggests intimacy and the table points to the fulfillment of one’s appetites. In addition, the theater has been identified as a space where the couple can play new roles to break free of traditional marital conventions. However, Consuelo and Alfonso are unable to do this because Montánchez’s lingering presence of vigilance provokes fears of embracing new roles as husband and wife.

The question as to whether or not this couple is going to be able to transgress traditional boundaries to achieve a happy marriage based on equality and mutual expression plays out in the impending romantic trip they are supposed to take to Europe to be free of Montánchez’s presence. However, it appears that they will be unable to embrace this new model of marriage. Montánchez surprises Consuelo when she is alone one day and professes his love for her. He reveals that he is jealous of the romantic bond that the couple has together, and this is the reason why he intruded into their dance at the Zarzuela while hiding under the mask of the astrologist (112).

This scene presents an emerging rivalry between the cold, dehumanizing medic and the affectionate husband, who have different motives for understanding the “hysterical” wife. Montánchez admits to Consuelo that he has lured her away from Alfonso to achieve his plans of seduction (113). While Alfonso summoned Montánchez to create an avenue of communication between him and his wife to improve their intimate relations, Montánchez is only interested in possessing Consuelo’s body and placing her under his complete control. The medic rapes Alfonso’s wife and then tells her “pienso unir para siempre mi vida a la tuya... y con el tiempo conquistaré tu cariño y serás mía en cuerpo y alma” (116).

This violation transforms Consuelo's nightmares into reality. While Alfonso could have spoken with his wife about her frustrations that manifested themselves in shameful fantasies of a repulsive devil providing her with pleasure, his desire to summon Montánchez has allowed science to take control of her body. Consuelo reveals this mistake to her husband when she undergoes a severe physical and emotional crisis after Montánchez rapes her, which brings her close to death. As in the scene where she attempted to arouse Alfonso with her black socks, she reinforces to her husband that she is not sick but heartbroken because he has failed to provide her with affection:

Lo cierto es —murmuró con angustia—, que mi Alfonsito ha muerto o que ya no se acuerda de mí, pues nunca viene a verme. Me trajeron a este manicomio por loca, cuando en realidad no estoy enferma de aquí arriba, sino de aquí —dijo señalando al corazón—; éste es el que me duele, porque he querido mucho..., sí, mucho... a ese Sandoval, precisamente, de quien usted antes hablaba... (119)

Consuelo also starts to have trouble recognizing her husband, suggesting that she no longer sees him as the caring husband that he once was, but as the cruel hypnotist whom he allowed to violate his wife's mind and body.

The consequences of Alfonso's reliance on traditional medical doctrines become further apparent. Now that Montánchez has gotten what he wants from Consuelo, he refuses Alfonso's pleas to help decipher her "hysterical" sufferings. When Alfonso finally convinces Montánchez to analyze Consuelo, she confesses to the doctor raping her and dies immediately after, transforming the medic from Alfonso's friend into his hated rival. Alfonso and Montánchez enter into a gruesome duel, while Consuelo's cadaver lies between them on the bed, finally separating the roles of husband and medic that have been blurred throughout the novel: "Los dos hombres se contemplaron con furor: Sandoval estaba a un lado del lecho, Montánchez a otro, separados por el cadáver de la pobre niña" (154). The fact that the hysteric's dead body sits between these

two men reveals that it is inefficient for husbands to study their wives through the medical gaze to understand their wants, rather than treating them as equals and forming interpersonal relationships with them. Zamacois illustrates that the idea of the hysterical wife is nothing but a myth or a patriarchal creation that incarnates anxieties surrounding women's desires for equality and free sexual expression.

Although Alfonso has finally attempted to sever his identification with the medic when confronting Consuelo's violated cadaver, he is unable to relinquish Montánchez without a struggle: "Ya eres mío! —rugió Montánchez. Y le alzó en brazos para voltearle; mas no pudo y Sandoval cayó de pie. —Todavía no —murmuró éste.— ¡Pero lo serás... lo serás, perro! ..." (157). Alfonso tries to defeat the medic, but the narrator hints at a symbolic merging of their identities. When Alfonso is strangled by Montánchez, he is forced to drink his blood: "Aquella vez Sandoval quedó debajo, medio estrangulado: la sangre del médico inundaba su boca y en su angustia tenía que tragársela para que no le asfixiara" (157). The duel between the two men also ends up in a shared embrace, in which they are depicted as drowning in each other's blood (157). Alfonso's struggled attempt to kill the medic and the ultimate symbolic fusion between his and Montánchez's beings displays that husbands were not prepared to deal with confronting their wives' desires, leading them to fall back on simplistic misogynistic medical discourses that provided them with the explanation of hysteria. There are times in the novel when Alfonso seems to question Montánchez's doctrines, but he ultimately lets the medic shape his intimate marital relations and permits him to take control of his wife's body because he does not know any other way of communicating with Consuelo.

What is meaningful about the end of this novel is that in contrast to the other texts of the dissertation, there is not only an obliteration of the female protagonist who fail to conform to

gender norms, but Zamacois also kills off both of the male protagonists. After killing Montánchez, Alfonso commits suicide on the train ride to Paris, a trip that he was supposed to take with Consuelo to rekindle their romance without the influence of Montánchez:

Días después los periódicos publicaban la siguiente noticia: “Anoche, en un vagón del expreso Hendaya-París, se suicidó, disparándose un tiro en la sien, el señor A. S., muy conocido de la buena sociedad madrileña. Su muerte se relaciona con el crimen ocurrido en la calle del Arenal, del que dimos oportuna cuenta a nuestros lectores. La gravedad de este drama íntimo es de tal naturaleza, que nos impide ser más explícitos.” (157–58)

While Montánchez’s death reveals the need to eliminate oppressive medical discourses that were preventing marital equality, Alfonso’s suicide illustrates a new male attitude towards the idea of the female hysteric. His self-inflicted punishment reveals that he blames himself for trusting in Montánchez, the cruel medic who diagnosed his wife as sick and used his scientific powers to possess her body. The fact that he kills himself while traveling to France on the romantic trip that he was supposed to take with Consuelo illustrates his recognition that all she wanted was pleasure and affection from him, a revelation that came too late. While in the other texts of the dissertation the deaths of the female protagonists seem to punish women for transgressing gender boundaries, Consuelo is killed to show male readers the consequences of labeling their wives as hysterics rather than treating them as equals.

Eduardo Zamacois’s *La enferma* depicts the struggle of wives in late nineteenth-century society who felt compelled to hide their wishes, emotions, and sexual desires because of their expectation to conform to the *ángel del hogar* ideal. Consuelo’s character shows that wives were attempting to reject this role of submission to exert their own wants and achieve a bond of equality with their husbands. However, this proved to be a difficult process due to the prevalence of oppressive patriarchal discourses that deemed the desiring wife to be a hysteric. Although Consuelo blatantly states that she is not sick, she is still controlled by the medic’s gaze in

intimate relations with Alfonso and in her private autoerotic fantasies that the shame that she has internalized transforms into nightmares.

This novel also reveals how husbands were struggling to treat their wives as equals in the face of the indoctrination of traditional gender norms. Alfonso loves his wife and desperately wants to fulfill her desires, but he fails to do so for several reasons. For one, he is scared to renounce his patriarchal authority to succumb to his wife's demands, because this is a rather new idea in society. Alfonso is also intimidated by the fact that Consuelo is a desiring woman, not the angelic, asexual wifely ideal that society created for women. In addition, because Alfonso lacks the proper knowledge of how to please his wife, he thinks that the best way to gain this insight is through the lens of the physician, who could supposedly unlock the mysteries of the indecipherable female hysteric. However, interpreting Consuelo's desires through the medical gaze proves to have tragic, unsatisfying results. By letting Montánchez into his bedroom, Alfonso ends up pushing Consuelo away from him and destroying the romantic bond that they once shared. While both Consuelo and Alfonso attempt to explore alternative identities for themselves within the institution of marriage to create a bond of spousal equality, this ends up being a difficult process, demonstrating how men and women were struggling to adapt to rapidly changing gender roles and relations at the time.

CONCLUSION

Masturbation was considered a taboo topic in the nineteenth century as it still is today. It is perhaps for this reason that there are limited studies on fin-de-siècle literary works from both Latin America and Spain that explore this theme. While I have come across a few articles on the topic of masturbation in literary works produced in these regions at the time, to my knowledge there are no studies that trace this theme in multiple works of fiction and medical treatises to understand what it meant for the writers of the texts, as well as men and women in society. Masturbation is most obviously associated with the sexual practice of physically pleasuring one's own body, leading it to be viewed as a scandalous subject that is often silenced, shamed or laughed at.

In my dissertation I have revealed that masturbation was not just about shocking acts of physical pleasure, but rather represented a very complex, meaningful theme for male authors of the time. In these texts, masturbation is not purely physical; it is more often depicted as a serious form of mental reflection attendant to men and women's contemplation of their identities to form a coherent sense of selfhood. It is not surprising that overtly or tacitly these authors choose masturbation as a trope to demonstrate this private withdrawal into the self, since this activity "raises all the problems of the self and its existence" (Narayanan 815). Masturbation was depicted as a painful, yet pleasurable form of mirror gazing that allowed individuals to explore their desires, while understanding who they really were and how they related to their surroundings. Through this practice that was considered "a theater of the self," the characters

contemplate their identities through the eyes of others to develop a powerful sense of subjectivity (Laqueur 225).

However, when both sexes come to terms with their true selves in this performance before the mirror, they are overcome with shame because their reflection portrays an image of gender non-conformity that could lead them to be scrutinized and punished. The studied texts reveal that men and women longed for the ability for free self-expression and agency, but they felt compelled to repress their desires. The female protagonists are hesitant to step out of the mold of the *ángel de hogar*, while men are fearful of resisting standards of hegemonic masculinity. However, both sexes dare to rebel against these norms through masturbatory fantasy. Women shed their roles of purity, submission and childlike innocence to become—even if in a short-lived hiatus—mature, intelligent, self-assured, autonomous beings who are in touch with their bodies and emotions. In these autoerotic interactions with the mirror these female protagonists dream of standing up to men and rejecting them for their egotistical nature and their mistreatment of women. The masturbating men of the texts abandon their virile obligations and fantasize about embodying a feminine, sexually unrestrained other who gratifies his or her passions through excessive self-touching behind closed doors or through a realm of delirious sensual dreaming completely detached from reality.

Both men and women who stepped out of these norms not only internalized the idea that they were sick, but they were also subjected to medical diagnosis. Masturbation for these characters symbolizes a fervent desire to escape this oppressive reality which compels them to conceal their true selves by delving into a realm of fantasy. However, even this private world of reverie becomes haunted by illusory, vigilant social mechanisms of control. These onanistic mirror explorations often conjure specters of guilt, horror, monstrosity and shame, illustrating the

difficulties of the protagonists to come to terms with their inner desires that they only feel comfortable expressing in secrecy and solitude.

Going along with this connection between masturbation and the self, in the texts studied, masturbation largely acts as a trope for female self-love. While the term “self-love” was used to indicate onanistic pleasure, this term actually incarnates the idea that the late nineteenth century was an era that brought women’s issues and desires into the spotlight. Masturbation is largely about the attempts of the female protagonists to construct a liberated identity for themselves that reflected their own wants, rather than silencing their feelings under a masquerade of conformity to patriarchal demands.

Underlying this female self creation there is a simultaneous effort to construct a coherent and stable male self. However, all of the men in the texts suffer from a crisis of identity because they interpret themselves through the lens of oppressive medical discourses that made them feel disgusted with their bodies and passions. Men also fail to achieve a sense of self-unity because they are rejected by the women they love and because they feel extreme emotions of guilt and disappointment for failing to understand women’s needs. We have seen images of men who suffer from persecutory paranoia, hearing imaginary shaming voices and hallucinating of vigilant spectators due to their crises of identity. We have observed male characters who want to throw themselves into the mirror out of humiliation and who end up committing suicide because they have recognized their husbandly failures.

There are several facets to this “hysterical mirror” that have been explored in the dissertation. We have women who gaze at themselves and internalize the idea that they are sick hysterics for rejecting norms of femininity. We have male authors and male characters who observe themselves through the lens of a feminine hysteric for multiple reasons: to explore their

own forbidden sexual fantasies in an indirect manner, to contemplate their fears of sickness and feminization, to penetrate the mysteries of the female psyche, and to vent their preoccupations surrounding the reformulation of the masculine ideal that would now be structured around the needs of women. Because this hysterical mirror reveals changing roles for men and women, as well as the tensions in relationships between the sexes, we have seen the intricate dynamics of gender transformation at the time.

This study adds a novel contribution to the field of nineteenth-century Hispanic literary studies because it excavates an underexplored theme to demonstrate the complex facets of the shared crisis of masculinity that was occurring in Spain and Latin America. These texts reveal that women were demanding a reformulation of the masculine ideal and a revamping of gender relations to promote equality between the sexes. As can be evidenced in the texts of the dissertation, men were scared and angry of the thought of succumbing to female power. Men were worried by women's intellectual pursuits, creative inhibitions, intimate self-reflections, and their critical observances of society because they were becoming self-aware of their unjust social position, while exploring new futures for themselves that did not involve men, marriage or motherhood. Men were also intimidated by the woman who was aware of her physical and emotional desires because this meant that she would have higher expectations for her future spouse. This is a time when men were pressured to renounce their patriarchal privileges, to stop focusing on their own wants, and to understand what women needed. In addition, men were stripped of their sexual authority not only because they were pressured to satisfy women, but also because they were compelled to restrict their passions to conform to the masculine ideal.

My dissertation also provides a dual sided approach to gender studies, by analyzing the male and female experience in this era of "sexual anarchy" (Showalter 3). However, a limitation

to my study is the lack of a female voice. While I show how men were responding to female writings and feminist discourses expressed by women, I have been unable to find texts written by women produced at that time that deal with the topic of masturbation. As seen in the dissertation, men depicted masturbation as a threatening form of female power that granted women with desires of independence, intelligence, subjectivity, creative inspiration, self-confidence, and corporeal self-awareness. But did women themselves view this practice as a form of empowerment? Writers of the nineteenth-century Argentine magazine *La Voz de la Mujer* may have suggested this idea, but aside from this, I have been unable to find any other evidence.⁷¹ In these texts women are ashamed of their passions, leading them to subject themselves to clitoral cauterization, to view their bodies as dirty, and to suffer from guilty masochistic nightmares. However, these female experiences are told through the lens of a male author. To really understand how women felt about their bodies and sexualities, it would be necessary to study works authored by women themselves (142). This is territory I would like to assess in the near future.

Through the theme of masturbation, I have further explored non-canonical novels such as Sales de Mayo's *La condesita*, Alberto Insúa's *Las neuróticas* and Eduardo Zamacois's *La enferma*, all which present different male attitudes towards the movement of female equality in Spain, while utilizing diverse strategies of expressing the male predicament. Sales de Mayo treated female masturbation in a pornographic and misogynistic manner, while failing to develop Felisa and Aurora's characters with psychological and emotional complexity. He also leaves the

⁷¹ As mentioned in the introduction, Jaqueline Vassallo argued that these writers: "rechazaban el matrimonio por considerarlo «un contrato de prostitución» y ensalzaban la libre expresión del cuerpo femenino, el derecho al placer, la masturbación, el amor libre y medidas de anticoncepción" (142)

reader with the idea that these feminist, masculine women are sick, deviant individuals who need to be removed from society. In addition, Sales de Mayo chooses to present male masturbation in a very explicit manner, which differs from Quiroga's exploration of the theme.

Alberto Insúa and Eduardo Zamacois present the reader with multifaceted female characters who are granted with the ability to voice their feelings of sadness, fear and arousal in a more intimate, serious manner to express their difficulties of conforming to the feminine ideal. Female masturbation in these texts is also depicted as more of an emotional experience, that either brings solace and comfort to the female protagonist, or provokes emotions of horror caused by her inner suffering and sexual repression. Insúa and Zamacois also call into question the notion of female hysteria while suggesting to male readers that they should start learning to treat women as their equals if they did not want to be shunned by their counterparts.

In addition to unearthing these novels that are largely unknown, I have been able to conduct a new reading of short stories by Horacio Quiroga that have gained attention from scholars. While "La meningitis y su sombra" and "Los guantes de goma," have not been extensively studied, there are a handful of publications on "Los perseguidos." In all of these stories, Quiroga cryptically veils masturbation under other illnesses making it difficult for the reader to detect the theme without knowledge of medical treatises of the time. Exploring Quiroga's works through the lens of masturbation can provide new insight to the crisis of masculinity occurring in early twentieth century Uruguay and Argentina that the author portrays in his works and that has been signaled by scholars such as Todd S. Garth. The stories studied in the dissertation show how Quiroga projected intimate feelings of male suffering in his works caused by the medical victimization of the male body and desires. In addition, Quiroga's stories show how the combination of these medical treatises and hegemonic standards of masculinity

aroused fears of corporeal leakiness, feminization and insanity. Similarly, the crisis of masculinity in Quiroga's stories reveals men's feelings of sadness, humiliation and fear aroused by the self-sufficient woman who could satisfy her needs through her imagination or self-touching.

The topics analyzed in the dissertation are also relevant because they help to illuminate gender tensions present in today's society caused by male disdain for women's demands of equality. As Jack Meyers states:

We are at a historic moment in gender relations. The women's movement can move ahead with the active support, involvement and encouragement of men, or fall behind as men—especially young men—take arms behind the quiet, but active, angry men's movement. This conflict is playing out in politics right now. (1)

To alleviate these hostile relations between the sexes, Meyers stresses the need to cleanse society of traditional norms of masculinity that perpetuate notions of male superiority over women, an idea that the reader can take away from the nineteenth century texts studied in the dissertation.

The angry male responses to women's power signaled by Meyers continues to be represented through abject scenes of masturbation just as it was at the close of the nineteenth century. In *Masturbation in Pop Culture: Screen, Society, Self*, Lauren Rosewarne argues that female masturbation in present day cinema is depicted through the genre of horror to present "men's fears of female sexuality" (13). Rosewarne also explains that these depictions suggest that the masturbating woman "is not 'normal'" and that "she is a threat to the very fabric of society" (13). Megan Tagle also highlights the continued stigmas surrounding female masturbation in today's society:

While mortifying autoerotic misadventures seem to be a common trope in boyhood coming-of-age stories, today masturbation is largely accepted as a central component of men's sexuality and development. Women's masturbation, on the other hand, remains quite a different story. Whereas a man's admission of self-stimulation is rather mundane, a woman's is notable and at best downright scandalous at worst. (230)

This continued threat of female masturbation suggests that this practice incarnates more than just the idea of physical pleasure. As seen in the dissertation, female masturbation acts as a more profound symbol of female autonomy, knowledge, self-awareness, subjectivity and power. The fact that this activity is still a danger to men and that it remains labeled as a deviant, horrific practice suggests that the female fight for equality that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century is still very alive in today's society.

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