

WATER WOMEN: RECLAIMING EROTIC AGENCY THROUGH IMAGE
IN THE TRANSATLANTIC NINETEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Rhi Johnson, *Water Women: Reclaiming Erotic Agency Through Image
in the Transatlantic Nineteenth Century*
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When water appears in text, it holds the load of meaning that culture has weighted it with; it is heavy with associations to birth and death, to freedom and loss, and to the feminine. Within the heteropatriarchal social system of the nineteenth century hispanophone world, femininity is strictly bounded. This dissertation, situated at the intersection of gender studies and new materialisms, uncovers the layers of female agency and subjectivity that can be accessed through contact between female characters and the water by exploring a series of poetic images that cross boundaries of nation, language, gender, and canonicity. These interrelated points of contact allow for the expression of female sexuality and a vibrancy in the experience of life, work, love, and death that cannot be accessed through a binary system of analysis: be it victim and oppressor, angel and whore, or object and subject. Through an exploration of the entangled agencies of the feminine and the material, this project helps to broaden the idea of femininity in the social imaginary of the nineteenth century.

Using a diffractive methodology, each chapter analyzes one facet of the contact between the feminine and the water. The first chapter considers women at the water's edge in authors including Curros Enríquez, Pérez de Zambrana, and Ros de Olano. Dialoguing with liminality and the agential realist construct of intra-action, it finds space for amorous contact, female desire, and the physical representation of loss where the water becomes a border that is

impossible to cross. Crossing that boundary to enter the water is the transgressive claiming of liberty and identity explored in chapter 2, with authors including Espronceda, Massanés, Gómez de Avellaneda, and Pardo Bazán. Here, the agentive surrender to the water articulates a sublime born of a disprivileged societal position. Chapters 3 and 4, treating Arolas, Isaacs, and Rosalía de Castro, interrogate how literary water suicide can deconstruct a social system. Through retellings of myths, death as a rejection of oppression, and the appropriation of feminine tropes by a male character, these chapters explore how water death blurs the lines of gender and representation.

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INTRODUCTION: WHERE THE RIVER MEETS THE SEA

Marine estuaries, the ecotone where sweet waters pour into the sea, are some of the most fertile places on earth. The energy of the tides that meets and influences the unidirectional flow of the river, the resource sharing and recycling between different types of habitats, and the diverse flora that can survive in these zones lead to as intense of biotic productivity as in highly cultivated farmland (Kennish 1). Among estuaries, Galicia's Rias Baixas are something special, as their plankton richness, the temperatures caused by the NW Africa upwelling current system, and their layered circulation system, with fresh water flowing out over the landward current, have made them one of the most biologically diverse marine regions (Sousa 248; González-Gómez de Agüero 1).¹ And yet, the highly elevated nutrient levels in marine estuaries put them at risk for eutrophication: the decomposition process of the phytoplankton and macro-algae whose growth and reproduction cycles are massively stimulated by high nitrogen and phosphorous levels in littoral water systems lead to oxygen depletion in those water systems, which in turn has negative repercussions for water flora as well as for organisms that live in the bottom of a water column (macrobenthos) and fish populations (Villares and Carballeira 90). The waters are so nutrient dense that they cannot continue to support life.

¹While settlements have existed in the Rias Baixas since human prehistory, working in and with the sea in ways that left archeological treasure troves, recent urban and industrial development, and the climate and weather disturbances caused by climate change, have degraded these early anthropocene deposits (González-Gómez de Agüero 1).

Reading water in literary texts leads to this same problem. The water, in its relationships to the human, is overloaded with meaning, with story; it holds too much to be encompassable. In her memoir *The Truth Book*, Joy Castro sees that “[l]iterary critics have a field day with water, with its symbolism. We love its fluidity. *Sex*, we say easily, as if we know. Or *baptism*, *life*, *renewal*. Or *death*” (42). That facility and multiplicity in meaning has led us to take the water for granted or to avoid it where it appears in texts. When the feminine comes into contact with the water, it is so rich that we cannot read it as a whole. And yet, reading that connection is the project of this study. The meaning that exists in the connection between the feminine and the aqueous, what it illuminates about the social imaginary of the nineteenth century—and reaching from this period in both directions—allows access to a new understanding of femininity: in its sexuality, its agency,² and its relationship to society both as an experience and a system of oppression. Accessing the meaning in the water, in its interaction with the feminine, is made possible by a diffractive reading.

Diffraction is the process of a wave system spreading out as a consequence of passing through an aperture or around an obstacle. If a beam of light is sent through slit, it produces on a screen bands of dark and light representing reinforcement and cancellation; if that beam is sent around an object, the same bands will appear, ringing the object. While wave diffraction is more commonly related to optics than to oceanography, water waves are subject to a similar diffractive process when they move through an apparatus (over a breakwater, or through an aperture), and a water wave that passes around a barrier will diffract radially. Alternatively, diffraction at a gap in an obstacle will result in a diffraction pattern that looks like concentric rings spilling out from the

²The idea of agency, key to this project, is a slippery one. I would like to offer Karen Barad’s definition, as a starting point: “Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfiguring of the world” (Barad 141): Agency is an action. It is a doing, or a capacity to do.

point of passage (Ippen 263–65). While the patterns and specific mechanics of wave diffraction around or between breakwaters has enough variables to take it far beyond a single simple model, the idea of the wave that passes from a small space into a wider one and ripples outward in semicircular peaks and valleys —or the bands of light separated out by bands of darkness— is an apt image for what this project does, as those bands of light, or the peaks in a diffractive process, allow for the articulation of separate aspects of the wave. Where the wave is an idea, or an image, like the woman in contact with the water, examining different parts of the composite whole will allow us to understand the structure, as well as its application and meanings.

One of the key utilities of a diffractive reading is that it retains the relationships between the different diffract elements. A diffractive methodology, as Donna Haraway articulates it in *Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, is about finding the points of difference and interference, the “history of interaction;” it is a way of reading that is committed “to making a difference and not to repeating the Sacred Image of Same” (273). Building on this basis, in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: The Quantum Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, where she brings quantum physics into parlance with the humanities, Karen Barad signals the power of diffraction as marking “differences from within and as part of a tangled state” (89). Conceiving of this entanglement allows us to read the interrelations of things, rather than bifurcating the world and leaning on binaries like the social vs. the natural or nature vs. culture. I find it to be particularly useful in searching for agency and the construction of a feminine self within a critical landscape that has focused on the necessary work of framing the female experience in terms of oppression and victimization, or the political resistance thereto. Rather than reflecting and recreating the societal systems that delimited

female expression, a diffractive reading helps us to find the spaces within that system where agency and subjectivity blossom.

By diffracting the image of the woman in relation to the water, this study will delve into several of the bands of meaning within that larger phenomenon, laying out their meanings and how these different diffract elements interact. This kind of reading produces “a participative rupture in the linearity of the single elements’ performative properties” (Iovino, “The Living” 73). When the image is diffracted, it allows us to see different phenomena, different aspects, different affective meanings of the image as a whole. This project itself functions the same way, where the apparatus is the reading of the intra-action of femininity and water, which diffracts into the different images, that then further diffract -and thereby interact with and find support in other theoretical and cultural apparatuses. Diffracting the water, so full of meaning that it becomes eutrophic, allows us to see much more deeply into it, to see more than the systems of societal expectation, the push-pull of power and oppression, and to use this image to reclaim female agency in the transatlantic nineteenth century.

This is the first study of nineteenth century Spanish and Hispanic literature that takes a relationship with the water as its point of departure. While this study holds the echoes of centuries of Western mythological, folkloric, and artistic production and resonates into the present, the nineteenth century —and the hispanophone nineteenth century in particular— is uniquely appropriate for its focus for two reasons. Firstly, with the Romantic movement, the nineteenth century saw the peak of Western culture’s artistic, and therefore cultural, focus on the primacy in value of emotion in the human experience; its end is marked by the echoes that followed decades after. Secondly, this moment saw not only a growth of knowledge, education, transportation technology, and the popular press that led to more diverse authors producing

literature and growing audiences for it, but also the trans-Atlantic dismantling of a colonial system: a process that is intrinsic to the transition to the formation of the twentieth century as it existed. The series of images that I use to show these interactions add dimension to our current conception of feminine agency and sexuality in the social imaginary of the century, and bring the nineteenth into dialogue with contemporary discourses on sexuality, gendered labor, mental health, and female bodily autonomy.

The literary corpus that this project treats is intentionally inclusive of both canonical and non-canonical authors, from Spain (and Galicia), Colombia, and Cuba. It is also composed of texts by both male and female authors, without intentional demarcations of how women write an image versus how men do, though there are certain places where this study discovers, perhaps, some trends in representation based on authorial gender.³ What I find much more telling is that male authors who write sentimentally, or in ways that evince emotive subjectivity and agency in their female characters seem more likely to have, like is all too common in regard to female authors, to be written off as poor artists or merely versifying their autobiography. I lean into this mixing of canonicity, identity, and historical moment both because it helps to underscore the universals that exist in symbol and image in Western culture, and conversely to disentangle the hispanophone instantiation of the figurative weight of those universals from the anglo- and francophone traditions in a period when Spanish cultural production is often subsumed in critical treatments of a continental system. It also allows me to lift up the work of some authors whose

³In her introduction to *Narratives of Desire: Nineteenth-Century Spanish Fiction by Women*, Lou Charnon-Deutsch unpacks the problematics of writing about authors based on gender (women), or who happen to all be of the same gender (men) (2–3). The canon continues to shift, to undo and redo itself as readership and perspective changes, just as we —that problematic feminist ‘we’ (Charnon Deutsch and Labanyi 1)— continue to press for a “gender-neutral rational subject” (Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas* 5) who is not immediately and already male.

writing has been undervalued in comparison to their contemporaries. By opening up our understanding of how nineteenth-century femininity functioned, this work illuminates some of the roots of contemporary perceptions and prejudices, and allows us to better see the present and the future through the past.

Just as the nineteenth century offers particular vertices for investigation, water too is an excellent vehicle for such a study. Not only has water been tied to femininity and fertility for as long as women have grown new life swimming in amniotic sacs, but such liquidity of their nature has formed part of the argument for their irrationality and incapacity, from the beginning of western medicine, with Hippocrates's wandering womb, and continuing to this day with the conception of women as "too emotional" for serious consideration. That overcharge of emotion (most often linked to tears) being a feminine trait is a foundational component in the societal restriction of male sentiment and the expression of emotion, leading again to the nineteenth century's aptness for this work. Furthermore, I would return to the fact of water's myriad of cultural significances. This plurality does not detract from its utility as an element of a study of cultural perception. Rather, it is not, in literature, inert material, but rather, in the words of Serenella Iovino's material ecocriticism, "a site of narrativity, a storied matter, a corporeal palimpsest in which stories are inscribed" (Iovino, "Stories" 451). So, when we say that water is both birth and death, it is. When the edge of water both creates a permissibility for the erotic and is the site of mourning for love lost, those things coexist and interrelate.⁴ When the water means

⁴While this study looks at waters both sweet and saline, there is also really valuable work to be done on the relationship between a particular watershed, with the specificity in the storied-ness of its matter, and the creative human output that engages with it. See, as an example, Louise Chamberlain, whose work on the Severn estuary interrogates this waterway's role as frontier and borderland in relation to poetry, to find the tangled, "fraught relationship between material borderlands and poetic representation" (98).

both sublime freedom and death for women who transgress its borders, there is freedom in that death, and both death and eroticism in that freedom. The water, as this dissertation will show, functions as an objective correlative that layers and interconnects these different emotions.

Matter, Meaning, and Femininity

It is through the mattering of the water *as* a cultural signifier that its interrelation with femininity is illuminative and adds to our understanding of the plural feminisms and femininities in the nineteenth century. The main framework that will allow access to the meaning in the matter of the water is drawn from material ecocriticism, and Barad's new materialist theory of agential realism. Material ecocriticism allows us to read the material in text *as* text (Iovino and Oppermann "Introduction" 6), to see "[a]ll matter ... [as] a 'storied matter.' [As] a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces" (1–2). By reading the material in text as a text in itself, we can access both how it matters (how it has significance) and its matter (its substance as an actant).⁵ This idea of matter as agentic or as an actor in text can be understood through another tenet of Barad's agential realism, the neologism of intra-action. Intra-action, as differentiated from interaction, is a radical shift in the way that we consider how phenomena come to pass. Barad holds that a phenomenon is the "mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (33): that agency does not precede the phenomenon that is created out of it, but that agencies emerge through their contact, through their intra-action. This concept allows us to see the meaning created through the entangled agencies of female characters and the water itself. Rather than seeing the water as merely setting, or by dint of its lack of consciousness, as

⁵Barad defines this duplicity as "simultaneously a matter of substance and significance" (3).

something less than an actor in the scenes where it appears, this concept that phenomena are born of contact allows the cultural meanings of water to influence the narratives in which it appears.

Material ecocriticism helps us to understand the water as more than inert material, as it traces the trajectories of natural-cultural interactions by reading them as “material narratives.” In other words, it analyzes the interlacements of matter and discourses not only as they are recreated by literature and other cultural forms, but also as they emerge in material expressions. It seeks the phenomena that are created out of the intra-action of human interpreter and material textuality (Iovino and Oppermann “Introduction” 6). Material ecocriticism discovers matter as a cultural palimpsest, holding meaning, and bearing stories; “[w]hat has too often been accounted inert materiality becomes in the works gathered beneath this rubric a site of narrativity, a storied matter, a corporeal palimpsest in which stories are inscribed” (Iovino, “Stories” 451). A couple of the main tenets of material ecocriticism that are of particular use to this project, in addition to the diffractive methodology discussed above are the narrativity of matter, and the idea of re-enchantment.

Tied to the modes of meaning production of other new materialisms, material ecocriticism considers matter not as an inert substance, but as a site of vibrant “processes where meanings coalesce with material dynamics” (Iovino, “The Living” 70). Here, matter has agency, and is endowed with meanings, “every material formation, from bodies to their contexts of living, is ‘telling’, and therefore can be the object of a critical investigation aimed at discovering its stories, its material or discursive interplays, its place in a world filled with expressive —or *narrative*— forces” (70; her emphasis).⁶ While meaning is created through the intra-actions of

⁶This idea of narrative is tied to the process of seeing and interpreting, meaning “the way our interpretation is itself intermingled with what it considers, in a material and discursive way” (Iovino and Oppermann, “Introduction” 9). This is the other aspect of the entangled agencies that

humans and their environment, by way of a diffractive lens that does not set nature in apposition to culture, material ecocriticism functions in line with other new materialist theories to establish for nature “a broader semantic spectrum; [having] less to do with ‘green ecology’ than with a much more blurred and multihued dimension” (Iovino, “The Living” 72).

In discussing the storied matter of the sea in the context of “Blue Humanities,” Serpil Oppermann delineates how new materialisms bring together the scientific and the figurative, not to impose empiricism on the humanities, but rather letting the re-enchantment of the material influence its interpretation:

New materialist theories [...] fashion a fold where imagination and reality collide, not to crash, but to blend. In this new materialist perspective (with its emphasis on the dynamic relationally between the real and the discursive), the sea would neither regress into textuality nor get confined within the scientific or sociopolitical modes of its materiality. This is the sea’s twofold condition: a physical geographical site and a vast domain of imagination that can never be conclusively charted. Such a double-coded aquatic site invites figurative submergence in the sea’s entangled physical, social, ideological, scientific, and aesthetic modalities. (Oppermann 446)

Barad introduces with agential realism, the fact of the impossibility of divorcing the interpreter, and the apparatus of interpretation from that which is examined. What we look for determines what is there, independent of what we want to find: “there is something fundamental about the nature of measurement interactions such that, given a particular measuring apparatus, certain properties *become determinate*, while others are specifically excluded. Which properties become determinate is not governed by the will of the experimenter but rather by the specificity of the experimental apparatus” (Barad 19). This incorporation of the apparatus in the interpretation of meaning has a huge ethical impact on the study of women (characters as well as writers), but also any marginalized or othered group: when the critical apparatus isn’t measuring alterity, we don’t get a very diverse outcome.

This project leans into the contact point between the sea as cultural and geographic entity, and the sea as a “domain of imagination,” and this reading uncovers new ground. In his cultural history of the sea, John Mack approaches a similar plurality from a different direction, holding that “[t]he sea, then, is not a single conception but often has a kind of cultural geography associated with its construction. Territoriality gives one expression of this: it is state-focused: the sea as native; and, beyond the horizon, the sea as foreign.” (Mack 89). This allows the sea the power to transform (91). Insofar as the sea changes and is changed, we return to the negotiation of agency between the human and its environment.

This kind of negotiation between the human and the nonhuman makes more sense when viewed through posthumanism. The situation of this project at the intersection of gender studies and the environmental humanities means that from its outset, it eschews an assumption of human exceptionalism, in terms of impact on narrative. Drawing on Haraway, Barad lays down a conception of the posthuman that establishes that culture —and the human— are not the source of all change, instead allowing nature to hold both agency and historicity. She instead calls “for an accounting of how this boundary is actively configured and reconfigured” (Barad 136).⁷ In the texts that this study will read, the negotiation of this boundary is omnipresent, and the stories that

⁷In “The Living Diffractions of Matter and Text: Narrative Agency, Strategic Anthropomorphism, and How Interpretation Works,” Iovino has discussed the critique that this “story” in matter is merely a metaphor, and that reading the agency in water, or other matter, is simple anthropomorphism: “Let us admit it: we do not know whether nonhuman agency taken in *itself-tells* a story. But we know that, when it *meets* our cognitive practices —when it intra-acts with us— this agency *produces* a story, and this encounter is a way of ‘bringing forth the world in its specificity, including ourselves’ (Barad 353).” (Iovino, “The Living” 84; her emphasis). For me, whether or not it is a metaphor or the application of empirical principles to aesthetics, or a literal truth, it functions as a useful way of looking, of seeing differently, and of conceptualizing both the interpreted text and the process of interpretation.

the texts tell are made much richer by viewing both the female and the water as participants in the co-creation of phenomena, rather than as actor and setting.

The other element that needs some grounding is other agency that intra-acts with the water: the nineteenth-century feminine. From 1841, there was an upsurge in the presence of women's writing and women writers in the Spanish-speaking world, driven by liberal reforms, the Romantic emphasis on sentiment that allowed female voices, and the growth in both press and readership (Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas* 1). And yet, it wasn't until after 1870 that basic education for women became standard, and even then, education for girls was focused on skills that would help in the securing of a good match, with a focus on housewifery and correct manners. Instruction in reading and writing were by no means standard, and even education for girls that permitted such barely did the former and often did not do the latter (Scanlon 15–17).⁸ In Kirkpatrick's words, the nineteenth-century Spanish ideal woman was the "angelic arbiter of domestic relations" (2). In Catherine Davies's history of Spanish women's writing, she defines the century's social role for women as rooted in her biological destiny: she was a "self abnegating wife and mother. The ideology informing Spanish society and culture was the sixteenth-century cult of the perfect wife, 'la perfecta casada', coupled with the bourgeois stereotyped ideal of the 1850s, the domestic angel or 'ángel del hogar'. Women were irrational and frivolous: legislation [making women legally subject to fathers or husbands] was there to protect them from themselves" (Davies 23). Female chastity—and therefore the negation of female sexuality—was paramount in female virtue, and the "virtuous woman was considered the most civilizing influence in society, a pillar of stability in times of upheaval" (Davies 23).

⁸For a more complete history of female education in Spain, see Scanlon.

Yet while the feminine stabilized society, women were not supposed to act publicly *upon* society: “The radical division of life into intimate and public spheres was also closely linked to an emerging system of sexual difference that identified femininity exclusively with the private world of domesticity” (Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas* 4). It is for this reason that much of the scholarship on female focused texts from this period seek out direct resistance to misogyny and gender-based violence and oppression.⁹ And that work is crucial to establishing plural female subjectivities in the face of social and legal systems that denied basic autonomy to women. But this is not the kind of feminism that this book explores. As Barbara Freeman discusses in *The Feminine Sublime*, “[w]ithout minimizing the extent and importance of women’s oppression, I argue that a too exclusive focus on women’s victimization may lead us to misread the orders of discourse through which women exert agency, even as they confront its limits” (Freeman 6). Joyce Tolliver follows a similar course in her book on Pardo Bazán, finding that “in addition to those stories that feature an explicit thematic focus on feminist questions, there are also countless stories that take up various gender issues in ways that may not be immediately apparent, but are perhaps all the more powerful for their subtlety” (Tolliver 39–40). This project too moves toward these perhaps subtler feminisms as it seeks feminine and female agency, and challenges conceptions of sexlessness and passivity. It seeks to deepen our understanding of the fully lived experience of women in the nineteenth century.

Enlightenment ideals of the rational subject (male), when shaping societal conceptions about gender, delineate separate spheres based on a biological binary, but relating to aspects of life far from the biological. Where reason is male, emotion is female—at least until the European male Romantics want to claim emotion for themselves—; where sexual passions are

⁹See, for example Kirkpatrick, *Antología* 67 and Valis, “Introduction” 24.

male, tenderness is female (Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas* 8). In this system, women came to have some, carefully delimited, power over the expression of subjectivity: that of emotion and the domestic (Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas* 8). And yet, women will enjoy sex, even when society tells them not to. What we must access is how that sexuality is represented, coded, and conceived. This is what this project does.

The Diffracted Image

The first diffraction of the image of femininity and water is the shore. Reading the edge of the water shows us a liminal space that allows for amorous congress absent—to a variety of degrees—in the societal expectations of female purity, the coding of eroticism or sensuality in contact with—in intra-action with—the water itself, and that affective space in a more sorrowful key, with love not enjoyed, but lost. The first chapter is broken into three sections, each treating one of these elements. The first, which uses the *Cartas amatorias* by Juan de Arolas and a cycle of peasant romance poems by Jorge Isaacs, demonstrates how the edge of water is a liminal space: connected to but outside of society's expectation that girls should be either virgins or wives. This liminality—accessed either through the performance of gendered labor or through bourgeois leisure—allows for a societal permissibility of lovers' meeting, leading the edge of water to be the site for the initiation of romances. That initiation is so often conflated with the consummation of said romance that 'going to the water' becomes code for sex.

The second section takes this erotic weight as its starting point, but absents the male partner. Given that an encounter at the edge of the water is always and already erotic, when that encounter is not with another human agency, but with the water itself, that intra-action too comes to hold a weight of eroticism. The construction of this sensual or erotic undertext in women's

contact with the edge of the sea is reinforced by the commonality of the ascription to the water itself of an active presence—an agency—, and through language used predominantly between lovers. The three poems in this section, one by Luisa Pérez de Zambrana, one by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and one by Rosalía de Castro all instantiate intra-actions with the water that are coded erotically: one focuses on the somatic response, one on the coding of a female erotic awakening through the sea, and one on the sea as seducer. The final part of this chapter reads at the edge of the same water the disenchantment of loss, entangling the loss of sensual pleasure and emotional closeness with the sufferings of life. This piece of the chapter, reading again Rosalía de Castro, Curros Enríquez, and finishing with a prose piece by Antonio Ros de Olano, figures love lost at the edge of the water in relation to the erotic weight that this shifting locus holds. This figuration of loss of love at the edge of the water as the center, the pivot point of all ill fate, all collapsed promise, draws deeply on the affective space that is the edge of the water, particularly in a locality marked by emigration and maritime labor.

In chapter 2, through the use of a gendered sublime and female maritime labor, I study how surrender to the water is an unheralded representation of freedom in works including Josepa Massanés,¹⁰ Pardo Bazán, Espronceda, and Gómez de Avellaneda. While the first chapter explores a female figure at the edge of the water, and the next will see her dead in it, the image treated here is the entry in to the water: the freedom in a surrender to it. The female agency in sexuality that is claimed in that freedom, and the relationship with the water from within it are informed (and then in turn inform) two main elements, the two slits in a diffraction apparatus.

¹⁰Josepa Massanés is also known by the phonetically modified first name Josefa, which is how she is referenced in many critical texts. I use the Catalan spelling, as does Navaz Ruiz in his edited anthology of her poetry, though not in earlier work. As the poet dedicated much of her career to the *Renaixença*, I want to use the spelling that marked her authorship during her life.

One is female maritime labor, in its relationship to patriarchal hegemony and the process —and rejection of— modernization. The other is an articulation of the sublime; it is a sublime characterized by an agentive submission to the grandeur and danger of natural force.

While each of these three aspects —agency claimed, transgressive maritime labor, and the sublime— informs the others, this chapter will offer examples of the laboral and the sublime separately, with Pardo Bazán (“La camarona”) and Espronceda’s “El pescador” on the one side, and Gómez de Avellaneda (“Al mar”) and Carolina Valencia (“En el mar”) on the other, before coming to two poems that tie both vertices inextricably together, Gómez de Avellaneda’s “La pesca en el mar” and Josepa Massanés’s “Elena la pescadora.” Through the image of female entry into the water, in these poems there is a diffraction of a societally gendered system of oppression that disenfranchises the feminine, allowing, on the one hand, for a negotiation of agency even in the face of the unknown and, on the other, for a vibrancy for and in life, even within a structure that does not allow certain limits to be superseded. By creating such space for ambiguity, it does start to break those rules.

The image of diffraction in chapter three is female water suicide, conceptualized both in terms of its figurative use in the mythological tradition and in the century’s shift towards medicalization, in texts by Jorge Isaacs, Juan de Arolas, and Rosalía de Castro. While the woman seeking the water’s safety and embrace (Chapter 2) brings the feminine into the aqueous, water death is the culmination of that expression. This is a particular type of the century’s literary trope of self-annihilation wherein, rather than demonstrating death as the response to an overload of passion or some other powerful feeling, or as the response to *tedio* or *weltschmerz*, suicide — particularly female suicide, and even more particularly female water suicide— can be encoded as the epitome of a claiming of agency.

The first part of the chapter will explore the inscription of this agential water suicide into the nineteenth century retellings of two Greek myths, a “latin-americanized” (Peluffo, “Latin American” 63) Hero and Leander, and a retelling of Galatea, where the ending inverts the power structure of all previous iterations. The second half will read the same agency in a novel where the female protagonist’s two water suicides (indeed) represent both the medicalization of suicide in the century, and the equal and opposite pull of suicide not as mental ill, but as a social one. All three of these women are represented not only as rejecting passivity, but also as rejecting their role as the object of the gaze: there are no contorted nudes here. Instead of being the final expression of passivity in the face of a lost love, the water deaths here are figured as an active choice to no longer engage with the future or with society. What is more, that choice is positively coded.

The fourth chapter continues in this discussion of suicide, but looks at how the century’s female suicide tropes function when applied to a feminized male character, Rosalía de Castro’s Flavio. Not only does the use of this motif add to the psychological and emotional underlayment of Flavio’s character, it also frames his personal narrative as metonymic for the death of romantic idealism in the rise of the modern era. Reading Flavio in terms of the nineteenth century’s Ophelia deepens our understanding of the work’s feminist message. In addition, through affect and the intra-action with the water, it blurs the lines of gender and representation.

The Flower, Wet.

By diffracting the image of the feminine in relation to the water, the overload of cultural meanings that have been inscribed into the water comes clear, and it becomes possible to see their layering and their simultaneity. Getting to that point where one diffraction draws shades of

the others to it in a reading of the water —where sex on the beach is already a lost lover (chapter one), or where the agency that accompanies entering the water bleeds through into suicide, making an agentive, rather than a passive act (chapters 2–3), and where even male characters can hold the weight of this diffract female image (chapter 4)—, the critic is granted a different kind of access to the period than the one allowed by looking at how texts reject or reflect societal values: people, and characters, are complex. The social imaginary is not only what society wants it to be, but also how the negotiation of agency works inside it. As I will demonstrate throughout the project, when the agency of the water is read as part of the scenes in which it participates, the affective score of the work is deepened and nuanced; at the same time it also becomes possible to see its edge as boundary and as border, and as the sadness in a love story, and as the sweetness in a goodbye. It is also female erotic agency in a society that genders the feminine as sexless. This reading that diffracts the image of the feminine in her connection to the water allows us to see the multiple meanings that this image holds, it enables us to see how they layer and shade each other; it reverses the process of eutrophication, and lets the denseness of nutrients —the multiplicity of meanings— be a boon, rather than a symbol so facile as to lose all meaning.

CHAPTER 1. SEX ON THE BEACH: THE FRICTION OF LOVE AND LONGING

Let's think about the space between the water and the shore. Ecologically, it is a barrier, erosion, deposit of trash and sediment, a nesting ground. Socially, it is a delimitation: between countries, between territories, it is a frontier to be crossed, to be navigated, to be exploited. And in the social imaginary of the nineteenth century (and beyond), it is a liminal space for a lifting of social mores, where the affective and physiological elements of love, loss, and longing hold more space. This plurality does not detract from its utility as an element of a study of cultural perception. Rather, water is not, in literature, inert material, but rather, in the words of Serenella Iovino's material ecocriticism, "a site of narrativity, a storied matter, a corporeal palimpsest in which stories are inscribed" (Iovino, "Stories" 451). This means that when we say that water is both birth and death, it is indeed both death and birth. When the edge of water both creates a permissibility for the erotic and is the site of mourning for love lost, those things coexist and interrelate.

Before moving on, and in order to set the ground for the core discussion of this chapter, it is useful to revisit water's cultural significances I briefly broached in the introduction. It is through the mattering of the water *as* a cultural signifier that its interrelation with femininity is illuminative. Material ecocriticism allows us to read the material in text as text (Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction" 6), to see "All matter ... [as] a 'storied matter.' [As] a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are

interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces” (Iovino and Oppermann, “Introduction” 1–2). Complementarily, Karen Barad’s agential realism, with its conception of intra- rather than inter- action, and its diffract methodology of analysis, allows us to access its mattering, something that she defines as “simultaneously a matter of substance and significance” (3). The notion of “intra-action” is a key element of the agential realist framework. Barad’s neologism “*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad 33; her emphasis). In the poems that I will discuss, we do not see the water and its edge as merely the location for, impediment to, or affective mirroring of human agencies, but rather as a participant in the phenomena created through its intra-action with the human.

Reading these intra-actions through a diffractive, rather than a reflective, methodology allows us to see the multiple meanings in that ‘mesh’ of storied matter. While a mirror gives a “reflection of objects held at a distance,” diffraction “mark[s] differences from within and as part of a tangled state.” Where words mirror things, we lean into binaries: the social vs. the natural, nature vs. culture. Through diffraction, agencies come together, creating “intra-acting entangled states of nature cultures” (Barad 89). Diffraction, as a scientific concept, is the process by which a system of waves is spread out as a result of passing through an apparatus: across an edge, or through a narrow aperture. The process of diffraction offers an interference pattern that is a configuration of light and dark bands. You get the same banding of light and dark when you send light around any object; light passing through diffraction gratings is what rainbows a soap bubble or a dragonfly’s wing. At the edge of the water, this kind of reading shows us the liminal space

that allows for amorous congress where there is an absence—to a variety of degrees— of the societal expectations of female purity, the coding of eroticism or sensuality in contact with—or in intra-action with—the water itself, and that affective space in a more sorrowful key, in which love is not enjoyed but lost.

Social Liminality: The Edge of Water and Amorous Congress

The edge of water is set up as a place where lovers can meet to love, or to say goodbye, away from and exterior to societal expectations about gender and sexuality: that is, that girls should be either virgins or wives. Part of the construction of this liminal space, connected to, but outside of society, is born out of gendered labor practices. If there is women's work to be performed at the edge of the water, there is at the same time an allowance for social congress. This space as a confluence of female labor and female leisure is clearly visible for example in Goya's painting *Las lavanderas*, in which one girl is working, while her five friends relax in positions that combine innocence and sensuality. Girls can go to the water, often a fountain or river, to wash clothes or perform other tasks. It is permissible for them to talk to boys because they are still being productive, and this is also a place where they hold the upper hand, often because of strength in numbers (Díaz-Fierros Viqueira 20). The performance of labor allows for a societal permissibility of the meeting, leading the edge of water to be the site for the initiation of romances. In the literary ethos, initiation is so often conflated with the consummation of this type of romance that 'going to the water' becomes code for sex. I will discuss two sets of poems where this supposition takes hold: one instance comes from the *Cartas amatorias* by Juan de Arolas, written around 1830 and published in 1843 (Díaz Larios liii–liv); and the other comes from a series of peasant romances written by Jorge Isaacs in the early 1860s.

Juan de Arolas Bonet (1805–1849) was hugely popular in his lifetime but has since fallen into disregard. Though his work falls outside canon, he wrote extensively in a mode that mixed the sentimental ferocity of the English Romantics with Baroque and Rococó Spanish influences.¹ The *Cartas amatorias*, written while he was an initiate, are a group of poems that form an epistolary story developed only in emotional subtext.² The narrative has to be deduced from situational clues, and the whole of it is never clear. Within this innovative form, the poems are delightful sketches in young love, with all of its torments and joys.³ The “narrative” is split between two groups of friends. In the first part of the series —and among the first set of friends— the liminal space of the shore is concretely distanced from all societal pressures. The

¹A very prolific author, Arolas embodies the cusp between the Neoclassical and the Romantic in Valencia (Arcas Pozo “Los mitos” 15). The son of a comfortable merchant family, Arolas entered the Piarist order at Peralta de la Sar in 1819. It is unclear if he became a priest because of religious calling or under pressure from his family. He started writing around 1830, and by 1840 he was immensely popular both in Spain and in Latin America: “el autor de las *Orientales* escribió casi todo lo que entonces le quitaban de las manos sus lectores, no sólo en su ciudad de adopción sino en el resto de España y hasta en Hispanoamérica, en donde las ediciones piratas de algunas de sus antologías se multiplicaron” (Díaz Larios xi). In spite of this great popularity and the sheer quantity of his work, Arolas has since been all but forgotten, perhaps as an insidious consequence of the onset of mental illness in 1842 that led to his permanent confinement due to erotic delusions. Neither he nor his reputation ever recovered, and he remained in forced seclusion until his death.

²For an overview of the structure, see table 1.

³Díaz Larios had a less charitable opinion of the quality of the *Cartas amatorias*, finding them to be a failure as a traditional narrative, rather than seeing the text as an innovation in form: “Si las doce *Cartas amatorias* pretenden ser una novelita en verso en que la ficción queda reducida a una descripción de los estados de ánimo de los personajes, impulsados a comunicarse por un sentimiento de amistad mutuo, el futuro autor de las *Orientales* demostró su incapacidad para hilvanar un argumento” (lx). The other main critical interrogation has been whether the poems are autobiographical; on the one hand, Lomba y Peraja affirms that the *Cartas* “bajo el punto de vista del arte tienen poco interés, bajo el aspecto biográfico le tienen, en cambio, grande, porque le fueron inspiradas por el primer amor” (7), and on the other hand Díaz Larios offers a backhanded admission of creativity that downplays the autobiographical element: “En mi opinión, parece claro ahora que esa supuesta pasión amorosa que se le ha atribuido tiene poca consistencia, y que en realidad no fue más que el producto de un ambiente literario que sobrevivía como puro entretenimiento” (lv).

focus in the first poems of the sequence is, however, on the establishment of the shore as outside of societal influence: it is freedom and sex. The narrative begins after two young lovers, having been together at the beach, are now separated. Célina has been required to return to civilization, while her lover (known only through the genitive construction “El amante de Célina”) remains behind, in freedom. The first poem is directed from him to her, pleading with her to return and assuage the burning fire of love that is tormenting him.

In the introductory lines of the poem, Arolas establishes the setting of their love affair — “¿Vuelves al mar?”— and connects their emotions to the motion of the ocean: “Hoy se agitan las olas murmurando / Tu ingratitud, sensibles a mi pena” (1), while simultaneously granting emotional intelligence to the waters as they can feel his pain. It is not just that the rains come because he is sad: the water performs in a certain way as an expression of sympathy. This section also establishes the affective, as well as physical, separation between city and country, with the latter coded as the seashore:

Mi Célina, yo evito las ciudades,
Solo el campo mi gusto lisonjea;
.....
Y al declinar las tardes del estío,
Del agitado mar en las riberas,
Cantaré tu hermosura que me tiene
Prisionero de amor en las cadenas. (3)

This separation between shore and city is reinforced in Célina’s response, the second poem of the series. She begins with a remonstrance for his rather cruel letter, but later, when Célina recalls their love and their time on that beach, she equates the edge of water with freedom: both

freedom *from* being physically, socially, and emotionally constrained at home, in society, with her family, and, more importantly, a freedom *to* love. She establishes the city as limiting of her liberty:

Dichosa seré al fin, dejando el techo
Y muros, para mi desagradables,
Que abrigan la maldad de los humanos;
Correré á tu chozuela á refugiarme. (15)

The shore, the *locus amoenos* for their love, is coded as apart from society, as a liminal space where they can be alone with the sea, and where they can enjoy being alone together. In addressing that pleasure, and the physical connection between them, Célina uses an apostrophic address to the sea —though the whole piece is in second person, addressed to her love— establishing the might of the sea, but in the context of its beauty and her pleasure:

Salve, temido mar; puesta a tu orilla
Quiero ver como surcan anchas naves,
Que fueron en la selva verdes pinos,
Al furor de los vientos tus cristales.

When she returns to addressing her lover, she ties the movement, agitation, and the genitive property of the sea to the promises that the lovers exchanged:

Recuerda, caro amigo, que apacibles
Del Julio abrasador fueron las tardes:
¡Que frescura en la playa! ¡cuál rizaban
Del mar la superficie auras fugaces!
Mil bellas en las ondas sumergidas

A un esquadron de ninfas semejantes
Las aguas agitaban, que espumosas
A nuestros pies venían a estrellarse.
Allí me prometías que primero
Que el fuego de tus venas se apagase,
El astro que preside el claro día
Perdería su luz pura y brillante (16–17).

She moves between physical pleasure represented by the hot day, the cool breeze, and establishment of a mythological coding of the world through mythological elements like the nymphs, and then to the mythologically-based sperm of the sea (its foam).⁴ In further describing that promise, she reinforces the sexual aspect of the pleasurable afternoons by linking herself to multiple markers of the kind of sexuality that arises after the loss of virginity: the promise to wear a crown of roses, a very light silk dress and to let her hair down. “Volverán unas horas tan alegres; / Yo misma coronada de fragantes / Y purpurinas rosas” and “...mis cabellos / Libres, y con el céfiro flotantes” (17–18). Those roses are a connotation or embodiment of sexual passion in the visual culture of the time, and in the language of flowers (Ward 311). Coupled with the roses, hair, and loose hair especially, constitutes in itself a sexual exhibition. As examined by Elisabeth Gitter, the volume and wildness of hair displayed correlates to the openness of the sexual invitation that it suggests (938). Following the image, Célina’s free-floating locks are more sexual than even tame hair let down can be.

⁴The conception of sea foam as a fertile, genitive substance is more fully discussed in chapter 3, see pages 156-9.

Celima's lover will use similar referents in connection to her status in poem 4, which directed to her friend Inés. In addressing this female friend, he uses the Romantic (with a very capital "R") trope of the prefiguration of death as a means for emphasizing the seriousness of the effects of passion: "Ella *suelto el cabello*, y enlutada, / *Con muestras de viudez* en sus vestidos" (32; my emphasis).⁵ He refers to her not only as mourning the hypothetical loss of him, but through the coding of a widow, implicating that their relationship fulfills the socio-sexual structure of a marriage. He will use much more erotic language in speaking of their lovemaking with his male friend Victorino, in poem 3, culminating with a narration of their sex on the beach. Before that, however, he returns to the rose as sexual woman image that Célina herself had used: "En las rosas advierto los colores / con que amor sus mejillas inflamará" (23). This reference to the roses is clear in its reference to the sexual connotation of the flower.

Later in the poem, in the narration of the sex on the beach, the poem uses the location and the liminal space of the shore, along with other aqueous language, as the grounding factor in each stage, from the incitement of desire to its completion. It is evening ("Ya de la mayor osa la luz Clara / Se inclinaba al Ocaso, y las estrellas / Al descanso nocturno convidaban"; 27), and the amante de Célina has just sworn vows to her ("Juramentos y promesas tan sagradas, / Que el alto cielo oyó cuando rendido / De una hermosa á los pies los pronunciaba"; 27). The initiation of sensuality—the onset of pleasure—creates a, and is created by, a strong connection to the location: the edge of the water: "Nos vio del mar la orilla embriagados / Apurar del placer copa dorada, / Y con nuestros suspiros confundía / Neptuno el rumor bronco de sus aguas" (27). The fact that these sighs, the manifestation of the nascent desire that is perceptible to others than

⁵This sort of prefigured death as an expression of affect is a main theme in Spain's first Romantic text, Cadalso's *Noches lúgubres* (1789).

themselves, are being confused with the sound of the waves by the ruler of the sea concretizes the physical and affective connection between the lovers and their location. Deepened breaths, the first slight physiological signs of desire, also materialize in the kinesthetic phenomenon related to the sound of the waves: the rise and fall of the waters, the curling under, rising up, and crashing down of entities (waves) that are always and already of the same material, of the same being. This action replicates not only bodies in the act of coitus, but the waves and tense crescendo of an orgasm as well.

This is only the beginning. As the evening breezes alight on the waves, “En la soledad tan dulce a los amantes, / nacían los deseos” (27), and with the influence of Eros, “Al beso de amor los tiernos labios / de mi querida Célina incitaban” (27). The act of defloration also links to the water through tears, which are the internal, affective water of femininity: “En mi amoroso pecho recostada / Lo inundó en largo llanto, más precioso / Que todas las riquezas de un monarca” (28). The value that is applied to these tears, to this cry, signals it as the carnal result of the vows witnessed by the sea. The cry is followed directly by pleasures that overwhelm, and that are too sacred to name directly: “Un deliquio embargaba sus sentidos, / Con languidez sus ojos se cerraban; / Suspiró, y en mis brazos::: una nube / A la luna ocultó delicias gratas” (28).⁶ These triple colons, the elision of the sex act, use the physicality of the punctuation to mark a space. Rather than just ellipses, which mark a pause, or a single colon, which invites a new, enclosed subordinate clause, the merging of the two makes a space that is full but absent, that is present in spite of its elision, reverberating with the waves. In these first poems Arolas builds the shore as a space apart from society, a sense-scape where pleasure and sexuality can exist without stricture.

⁶The term “languidness,” used here, will be further explored later in this chapter.

This is also a solipsistic space, separated from the world through the co-creation of sensory elements with the water itself.⁷

The assumption that the shore is a space for the expression of sexuality apart from society continues through the *Cartas amatorias*, though it is complicated further in the second set of letters, exchanged between different friends. In these later poems, the space for sexuality not only remains, but becomes the assumption on which to establish the danger of that liminality: the space is still coded as a rupture in societal expectation, but there is cognizance of the return to society, and entering that liminal space comes coded with danger, a precarity that is characteristic of liminality. This is a dynamic discussed in Maggie Miller's *Landscapes of Liminality* (2016), an argument drawn from the earliest conception of liminality broached in Van Gennep's study of rites of passage (1992), where the liminal is the symbolic or spatial act of transitioning between one socially sanctioned state to another. Van Gennep also asserts that this liminality is often tied to locations that exist outside or between the purviews of different groups. When a person inhabits that space, they "wave[r] between two worlds" (11, 16).⁸ Here, between Enriqueta and Julia, and through their exchange, the shore is metonymic for the danger that is sex before the

⁷This scene has a strong neoclassical/mythological current alongside the aqueous one, which also charts the deflowering. The passage also connects this writing to the work of the Salmantine school of the Spanish Rococó and the century's mythographic historicizing impulse. The sex act is framed by an invocation of the virgin Diana, as it begins with the verse "La luna era testigo de mis votos" (27), and ends "a la luna ocultó delicias gratas" (28). The nascent experience of desire is tied to Neptune: "Y con nuestros suspiros confundia / Neptuno el rumor bronco de sus aguas" (27). As the passion builds, Eros is invoked: "Nacían los deseos, y sus armas / empleando Cupido, hería entonces / Seguro de triunfar, con más pujanza" (27). The afterglow of the sex, too, comes with a classical allusion: "Yo comparé mi dicha a la que gozan / del Eliseo en la plácida morada" (28).

⁸It could be argued that going to the water, having sex, and returning to society instantiates all three of Van Gennep's categories of rites: rites of separation (going to the water), rites of transition/liminal rites (the sex), and rites of incorporation (returning for the possible consequences) (11). However, that seems to be merely tripling the numbers of things.

security of marriage (that transition), *because of* the way that it allows for sex. In counseling her friend Enriqueta to not sleep with the boy she is in love with, Julia uses the edge of the water in a classical allusion to an unfortunately lost virginity: “Mira cual deja Ariadne el blando lecho / y al verse abandonada, cual lamenta” (87); and then once Enriqueta marries, she uses the edge of water as a euphemism for the fulfillment that she has found in matrimony, mixing the century’s woman/flower trope with the sexuality that is the edge of the water: “No soy la mustia flor, soy la azucena / Que a la márgen nació de estanque fresco, / O do la clara fuente origen toma / corriendo a fecundar el prado ameno” (92). What was the danger of premarital sex, becomes, through the transition of life stages, productive —and sanctioned— fertility.

This danger, and the interrelation of the liminal space of the shore and sexuality, is even more fully explored in Jorge Isaacs’s rural romance poems, all written between 1860 and 1864 —just before he would undertake *María*. Like *María*, these poems are a poignant example of the fecund ground that the author found for his creative work in the Cauca and its floral countryside, something that Sanín Cano has focused on in his work linking Isaacs’s work to his biography (9).⁹ One preeminent Isaacs scholar, Donald McGrady, posits that “Isaacs’ poetry is not profound; it contains no hidden meanings or recondite symbols. Only an occasional image adorns the prosaic narratives and descriptions” and that therefore “the task of the critic is not that of discovering a meaning concealed by complicated or ambiguous technique, but simply consists

⁹Isaacs’s poetry has, as a whole, been substantially less treated than his masterpiece *María*, to the extent that his poetry is seen as “above all, a faithful reflection of his life. Precisely herein resides its chief importance: it throws additional light on the inward thoughts of the man who wrote *María*” (McGrady 33). This assumption of autobiography, so frequently thrown at the work of female authors, denigrates the craft inherent to the writing of emotionally-based poetry, and is intrinsically linked to the tendency to write off the creative work of female authors. Its use here is a feminizing of Isaacs, grouping him with *poetisas*, without going so far as to question his gender. It is the critical inverse of “¡Es mucho hombre esa mujer!,” and none the less problematic for that inversion.

in describing the content of Isaacs' poetry and showing its relationship to his life and to *María*." (33). There is so little written about Isaacs' poetry, that it seems that McGrady's judgement has held. I, however, find it to be a substantial under-valuing of Isaacs, and propose that there are indeed worthwhile cultural messages, symbols, and images in its rolling verses.¹⁰

In each of the five peasant romance poems, young lovers meet by the water (or in one case, attempt to do it). That edge of the water is coded again as a space not only for conversation, but for the expression of sexuality. Yet, in these poems, there is a cognizance within the social and familial structures interior to the poems, that while this space allows for sex—or at the most conservative reading, sexuality—, society does not cease to exist, and there are consequences after-the-fact. As a result of the creation of a socially sanctioned space for this kind of transition, some of our lovers, already engaged, try to move into marriage ahead of schedule. The poems also explore the acceptability or the morality of that type of extra-systemic liminal transition, and while it often does not work out well for them, the water's edge, as a liminal, sexual space, is not only refreshing, but also key in the structure.¹¹ I will lay out the establishment of societal allowance for amorous congress at the water's edge and then the sexuality expressed there in the five poems as a whole; then I will correlate some of what happens in that liminal space to the return to society as coded through the narrative outcomes of the poems.¹²

¹⁰It bears noting that, unlike twentieth-century criticism, Isaacs's verse was thought much of in his own time. "La tertulia de «El Mosaico» se declaró cautivada por aquella lectura, y el entusiasmo fue tan vivo y tan sincero que los tertulios decidieron hacer la edición a sus expensas. De esta manera se enriqueció la literatura hispano-americana con un volumen de versos que dan testimonio muy atendible, por lo que hace a la capital colombiana y al decenio que empieza en 1860, sobre ciertos aspectos de la sensibilidad predominante entre los literatos y sobre el gusto que primaba en punto a formas poéticas" (qtd. in Sanín Cano 20).

¹¹For an overview of the narratives and outcomes, see table 2.

¹²All page numbers from these poems are taken from the Sanín Cano edition, unless otherwise

There are several ways that the societal allowance for lovers' meetings at the river or the water's edge is coded in these poems: ranging from acceptance of the couple's future status by family and the community as a whole, to the performance of gendered labor, to the waterside sojourn related to the rites of courtship —likened to attending social functions with the purpose of finding a mate. In “Amores de Soledad,” for example, both Soledad and her lover go to the edge of the river in the performance of their work. She has gone to the river alone to wash clothes: “De hinojos sobre una peña / camino de Neira, está / lavando ropa en el río / la preciosa Soledad” (140).¹³ Her lover comes, not specifically to meet her, but to water his animals: “Tres bueyes bajan cargados: son los bueyes de Julián, / que ella conoce de lejos; / y el montañés viene atrás” (140). In the example of “Martina y Jacinto,” which will be treated in much greater depth in chapter 3, Martina goes to the river to work as well, though her betrothed does not: “lo esperó lavando / su arroz en el río” (182).

Another main way of coding the acceptability of congress at the river is through powerful (influential or responsible) people having knowledge of the tryst.¹⁴ In “Teresa,” the relationship is acknowledged by her family patriarch:

Ya no va al puente tu perro
a avisarme que me esperas,
ni tu abuelo por las noches
nos cuenta cosas de guerras,

noted.

¹³Page numbers for “Amores de Soledad” come from the complete works edited by María Teresa Cristina, as it does not appear in the Sanín Cano or Montoya y Montoya editions.

¹⁴While it is not included in the ‘peasant romance’ cycle by Montoya y Montoya (23), the poem “Elena” (114–15) also recounts a past riverside coupling which shares several elements with those treated here, as well as some strong parallels to the narration of sex in Arolas.

mientras tu mano en las mías

dejas estrechar risueña... (166; ellipsis in original)

This construction ties the river trysts to the grandfather's knowledge of the relationship, and even of its physical aspect. Not only are the two types of encounters (alone at the river, and in the company of her grandfather) linked within the sentence structure, but intimate physical contact is part of the interaction that he stipulates as having habitually occurred in the presence of her male family member. In "La aldeana infiel," it is not a family member, but another powerful member of society, the priest, who is cited as having sanctioned a riverside sojourn: "A orillas del río / ayer tarde fui, / el cura no ha dicho / que se peca en ir" (190). "Martina and Jacinto" demonstrates a similar case of familiar knowledge, through Martina's uncle, and also stipulates that the relationship is known in the community at large: "como su marido / será en noche-buena, / según los vecinos" (181). They also plan their meeting within the public social space that is the market, subject to the communal gaze. In "La aldeana infiel," the neighbors also know about the relationship that will be betrayed: "De ti los vecinos / por novio me dan" (189). There is a similar societal recognition of the relationship in "La montañera," where Gabriela is the accepted intended of her young man, who dies in the war:

Ayer de tarde

la Frisolera

pasó una recluta

cantando vueltas.

—¿Pablo? Le dijo.

—¡Murió en la guerra!

¡Pobre muchacho!

¡Pobre Gabriela! (162)

His death in the context of Gabriela's social situation leads to pity, rather than blame or ostracism. Gabriela's final meeting with Pablo by the water demonstrates physically the way that the water's edge can exist outside of social restriction. When she goes there to meet him, she doesn't even leave footprints; the culture of the material—the inscription of story into the matter—is so strong that the physical world within the poem does not accept the influence of her passage:

Hace dos meses
que a la ribera
bajó una tarde,
sus pies ni huellas
dejaban leves
sobre la arena. (161)

This not leaving a mark on the ground is equivalent to a not-counting, an instantiation of the identification with the natural; where you would normally see a smear or stain, here there is not even a mark. Even the meter functions to reinforce this point as the *quintillas* make the words trip and dance as though tiptoeing.

The presence of an active sexuality in each of these poems, though it happens in the liminal space of the water's edge, and falls in its action into this acceptability, ties to the denouement of the poem's narrative arc. The only truly happy ending is in the one poem where both lovers come to the river in the course of their work, which happens to be the only poem where a maintenance of virginity is stipulated. In the rest of the poems, the equation of the water's edge with sexuality—that is, where a meeting there means, generally, that sexual

expression will happen— is what allows Isaacs to play through different iterations of morality and outcomes, which range from a planned marriage, to a suicide, to mourning forever as an object of social pity, to the intimation of a life of survival sex work which leaves behind one of the more debilitating markers of syphilis, blindness.

In “La montañera,” the poem where going down to the river left no physical trace, the sexuality that they experienced did in fact leave a definite mark on Gabriela. This sexuality ties into the eighteenth and nineteenth century discourse on hysteria/nymphomania, the over-emotive illness of unfulfilled passion, curable only through copulation. Unlike Soledad’s solid, though sexualized labor, tempered by looking forward to seeing her Julián, when they are at the river, Gabriela is “pálida”, “llorosa”, and her hands tremble between his (in itself a lot of physical contact for Isaacs, as discussed in relation to “Teresa”). The subsequent embraces suggest that her trembling will soon have another cause: “él la contempla; / sus labios mudos / se unen y quemán” (161). Just as we saw in the final example from Arolas, poem 12 of the *Cartas amatorias*, where the water becomes fertility, the potential for a positive, fertile outcome — within a marriage— existed prior to the sex on the beach, and is altered afterward. Before Gabriela’s final meeting with Julián, “Al pueblo iba / todas las fiestas; / flores hermosas / tuvo su huerta” (160). This fertile garden is contrasted with her in the poem’s present, when she is missing him: “en sus sembrados / crece hoy maleza, / no adornan fusias / su cabellera” (161). This unwanted growth, taking the place of cultivation, comes from her final meeting with her lover; it is a lessening of her potential production of valuable life. The fuchsia also merits comment here. In the language of flowers, the fuchsia signals “amor confidente,” or confidence in love (Jazmín 71). It also is a symbol of Latin America in its youth and promise (from a colonial gaze): “Hija de la virgen del mundo, América inocente, la fucsia viste los colores de la

inocencia; fiel a su destino de amor como las beldades americanas” (71). While Gabriela is seen with pity, rather than scorn, and while her passage on the sand at the water’s edge left no trace, her potential for a productive future has disappeared, and her own identification with confidence in love and the youth and promise of national growth is stripped from her.

In “Teresa,” the fate of the titular character is never actually clear, but the lover that she has left to marry some of a higher social standing murders that new husband, and ends up in jail forever.¹⁵ However, their past-tense courtship, carried out both publicly and in private at the edge of the water as discussed above, uses a past-tense intention of marriage, coupled with a habit of past-tense trysts at the water’s edge, to establish that using the liminal space of the water’s edge gave leeway for the expectation of purity upon contraction of matrimony. Pedro, the spurned lover describes the physical elements of their past relationship as being both playful and sensual: “Gustábame verte huir / por la frondosa arboleda, / provocando mis caricias, / desdeñosa y halagüeña” (163), which grants their contact an air of innocence. However, when the contact is situated at the edge of the water, that innocence is rubbed away: “Vuelve a esperarme en el río, / y dime esas cosas tiernas / que en secreto me decías / temblorosa de vergüenza” (164). Their contact at the river was profound, but in addition it is clear that the act of desiring was not only his, but hers also. She is not only the pursued beloved, but she takes an active role in initiating their love. The content of those conversations is further solidified through the floral language that holds such deep meaning in Isaacs. When she wed, she covered up the parts of her body that she had formerly allowed him to see, or allowed him access to. Furthermore, Pedro connects his having had access to her body to the lack of innocence that it implied: “Cubriste para mi mal /

¹⁵While it extends beyond the scope of this project, the lover/murderer character in this piece would be an interesting poem for a study on nineteenth-century lovesickness in the age of the development of concepts of mental health.

tus pies, que las azucenas / humillaban cuando sola / retozabas en las vegas” (165). She used to wear “rosas galanas” in her hair, though he intended to adorn her with *azahares* (orange blossoms), which, though less valuable than the “flores falsas y extranjeras” that she wears now, “son las flores de mi tierra” (165). While their relationship was definitely sexual (as demonstrated with the roses in Arolas),¹⁶ his conception of how their future was going to function avoided the dishonor of that sexual experience. Orange blossoms not only signify chastity, but also “[a]ntiguamente los recién casados adornaban sus sombreros con azahares de naranjo. A una joven deshonrada la privaban de este ornato el día de sus nupcias” (Jazmín 51). Pedro’s intention when he affirms that “yo pensé con azahares / tu frente ceñir” (165), is that he was going to perform a marriage custom that honors and signifies virginity even though they had done things that made “innocence” (the *azucena*; Jazmín 51) bow its head in shame.

In the only “happy” ending in the peasant love cycle, “Amores de Soledad,” both Soledad *and* her beloved come to the river to fulfill their societal roles: she goes to see him and to do her washing, he goes to see her and to water his oxen; they are also the only ones stipulated as not having sex. She has been making time waiting for her beloved while working on beating a piece of percale for such a long time “que celos a las espumas / que van pasando ya da” (144). The scene between Soledad and Julián is as sexualized as the others; however, as she makes her way home, her virginity is stated in the verse. In the denouement, when it comes out that their fathers have already agreed that the two should wed, Soledad’s father signals the riverside as a space that is a danger to her virginity:

¹⁶The nineteenth century Mexican poet Félix Escalante used the idea of gallant or Don Juan roses in his 1856 *Poesías*, in the poem “Himno de la noche” the poetic voice wishes that “Las rosas galanas que el alba colora / Derramen ahora, su aroma en redor; / Corone a las bellas de pecho amoroso / El nardo abundoso, de célico olor” (85).

—En dote llevarás
seis vacas y cuatro bueyes,
que en el hato escogerá.
¿Es poco?
—¡No, padre, mucho!
—*Poco, si sale formal.*
Nunca vuelvas sola al río;
que te busque aquí Julián.
—Sí, señor.
—Con tus hermanas
vete el rosario a rezar,
y encomiéndate a la Virgen,
que buena esposa te hará. (146–47; my emphasis)

While Soledad’s riverside meetings with Julián were, in fact, a method of transition between societally accepted states, in this case the transition into marriage, this poem focuses on the impact that the precocity of the liminal —of jumping the gun on marriage— can have on a life.

In stark contrast with “Amores de Soledad,” “La aldeana infiel” not only firmly establishes the liminal sexuality of the edge of the water, it also introduces a *witness* to that lovemaking, and a riverside coupling that is also an infidelity. While Dolores’s boyfriend thought that he saw her at the river with one other man, she swears that it was none other than the son of the local landowner:

A orillas Del Río
bajo el limonar

te viste, Dolores
ayer con Pascual” [...]”
“Es cierto, Camilo,
que te prometí
lo que me ha pasado
no sé cómo al fin.
Rubores me cuesta
y lágrimas mil,
que derramo a solas
mi suerte infeliz.
El hijo del amo
prendóse de mí,
y hallé por desgracia
¡tan bello a don Luis! (190–91)

The combination of beauty and power that the rich young don Luis had convinced Dolores to go with him to the river. However, the main element that we see here is the danger of that fluvial liminality. Dolores actually suffers the outcome only feared by Enriqueta and Julia, perhaps because she went with someone other than her intended, and perhaps because this kind of outcome is *always* possible, particularly so for someone who hoped to leverage it for a life outcome above her station. In their confrontation, Dolores and her intended Camilo reinforce her probable fate, through a metonymic association with trampled flowers, where he expects her to end up an “esclava sin honra, / sufriendo desdén” (192).¹⁷ Camilo then leaves town. When he

¹⁷In the 2006 version of Isaacs’s complete works edited by María Teresa Cristina, this final line

comes back, that prophecy has come to pass through a reference to the physical manifestation of a prostitute's shame, advanced syphilis:

Ocho años después, un día
cuando iba a ponerse el sol,
un militar la llanura
cruzaba sobre un trotón.
Desde un zarzal del camino
llevó el viento un clamor:
—«Una limosna a esta ciega
dejad por amor de Dios».
Detúvose allí el viajero,
al escuchar esa voz...
Hay algunas cuyo acento
¡nunca olvida el corazón! (193).

That blindness is indicative of the earthly punishment for her intervening prostitution: blindness as a symptom of neurosyphilis. While this reference to venereal disease is a relatively facile method for signaling a potential avenue for degeneration (personal, but also national) through sexual promiscuity, it ties with González Espitia's comments on the function of the social positioning of the disease within the colonial condition. In his discussion of the eighteenth-century Mexican author Fernández de Lizardi, González Espitia connects the portrayed lack of a strongly moral family structure to a young woman's fall into prostitution and death by syphilis

reads as the even more sexualized: "cojín de su harén," rather than "sufriendo desdén" as it appears in Montoya y Montoya and in Sanín Cano (Cristina 64; Montoya y Montoya 146; Sanín Cano 192).

(178–79), a structural lack that is refracted here in the priest’s permissive attitude. However, the critique in Isaacs engages more deeply with a class consciousness and the degeneration of the bourgeoisie than with a failed family support system, visible in Dolores’s shame being redoubled by her mother’s warnings against noble men:

[¿]Qué dan esos nobles

Por una mujer?

—Dinero tan solo,

Por mi mal lo sé;

Mi madre lo dice,

Recuérdolo bien. (191)

The mother’s role is also mirrored when Dolores, having fallen, leaves her parents’ household; her mother becomes deranged from the pain of her loss or from shame, and wanders through the nights until she dies alone and forsaken.¹⁸ In this series of poems, Isaacs charts the different potential outcomes for the initiation of sexual relations as a “rit[e] of separation from an asexual world, followed by [a] rite[s] of incorporation into a sexual world” (Kimball ix), accomplished here through the material liminality of the water’s edge. This poem and “Amores de Soledad,” at the ends of the spectrum of possible outcomes, offer the clearest reference to the sexual use of that liminal space, as their divergent outcomes depend upon an instantiated binary of experience. The texts that fall between them, those offering a more clouded moral situation than either maintained virginity on the one hand, or an economically-motivated infidelity that transgresses social class on the other, still rely on this liminal, sexual function of the water’s edge.¹⁹

¹⁸The other mother in the cycle is Martina’s; who is burdened with having to find out about the death of her daughter.

¹⁹This use of the liminal space at the water’s edge to explore potential socio-moral possibilities

Independent of what happens after the lovers leave the shore, the edge of the water is a space for the expression of sexuality away from and exterior to societal expectations.

Material Agency and the Experience of Sensuality with the Water

Taking the erotic weight present at the edge of water in cases of meetings between lovers as a starting point, let us turn to a different and interconnected context. In this next section, using Barad's conception of material agency that can entangle with the human to create meaning, I study the sensual encounter at the edge of the water, not with a human lover, but with the water itself. Given that an encounter at the edge of the water is always and already erotic, when that encounter is not with another human agency, but with the water itself, that intra-action also comes to hold a weight of eroticism. The construction of this sensual or erotic undertext in women's contact with the edge of the sea is reinforced by the commonality of the ascription to the water itself of an active presence—an agency—and through language used predominantly between lovers.

Take as an example these descriptive phrases from the poems that will be analyzed in this section: “que suspira de amor,” “llegando humilde a besar” (Gómez de Avellaneda 315) “tentadoras me besan y me buscan” and “inquietas lamen de mi planta el borde” (Castro 767). These are all actions that a lover would take. Add then these somatic responses: “Y trémula, agitada, conmovida, / Busca apoyo mi frente / tembló mi corazón, estremecí, / De lívido color mi faz cubrió” and “Flaquearon mis rodillas temblorosas, / Desvanecióse mi cabeza débil”

in terms of eroticism and sexuality connects to both the projective side of the Latin American canon that Doris Sommer explores in *Foundational Fictions*, and its ominous half, articulated in González Espitia's *On the Dark Side of the Archive*. The diffracted image presented by Isaacs enriches both axes by finding the different bands of valorization in an image that could be part of a Romantic, foundational, heteronormative discourse.

(Zambrana 58). All of these symptoms, from trembling, excited agitation, to a deep flush, weak knees, and even fainting are physiological manifestations or reactions of sexual pleasure.

Extracted, these passages could be describing very erotic scenes indeed. They all come, however, from poems that describe an encounter between a woman and the sea. Let us take, then, these interactions in their contexts—one focuses on the somatic response, one on the coding of female identity through the sea, and one on the sea as seducer—and look at the material agency of the sea in its intra-actions with this vertex of the image of femininity at the edge of water.

The first poem that we will treat is “El océano” (1854) by the excellent and under-rated Cuban poet Luisa Pérez de Zambrana (1837–1922), written when she was 17.²⁰ While the poem starts as an homage to “Niágara” (1825) by the first American romantic poet, her countryman José María Heredia, it grows beyond the scope of that piece. The section that we will examine recounts the reaction of the poetic voice on her first encounter with the sea.

We start with the mixture of fear and attraction that is key in an experience of the sublime:

²⁰Luisa Pérez de Zambrana’s work was first published in 1852 in Santiago de Cuba, though she had already begun to gather renown for her writing before that date; her first book was published in 1856 and her second in 1860. She also published broadly in periodicals. Her life and work from 1866–1898 are marked by tragedy, as during these years she lost her husband and all five of their children. Huete considers her “Grandes Elegías Familiares,” written during this period to be her best work (v–xii). While she was a star of the literary scene in her youth, Zambrana died in obscurity, and has, unfortunately, generally remained there. One reason for this consignment of oblivion, apart from systemic disenfranchisement of female voices, is that, while Zambrana lived through the Ten Years War, the Independence War, and the birth of a Republic midwifed by US intervention, her poetry is not strongly engaged with what was a fundamentally revolutionary chain of events. Huete points to the influence of her conservative husband as the rationale for her relative silence (xx). What is clear, in spite of or in addition to this silence, is that Zambrana’s Romantic verse is excellently crafted, uses language like paint, and she “corresponde a la visión clara de un ser que canta y expresa su canto no por lo que el canto es en sí como canto, sino por lo que representa de entrañable entrega humana y palpitante” (xxv), and for that, she deserves recognition.

... ¡Oh! ¡Cuánto al verte
me asusta tu grandeza aterradora
Y trémula, agitada, conmovida,
Busca apoyo mi frente

Por sentirse de horror desfallecida! (Zambrana 58)

This encounter with the sea speaks directly to Kant's aesthetics of the sublime, where "the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, [...] and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness" (261). In his *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art*, Paul Crowther uses this piece of the critique to separate sublime fear from "actual fear", in which cases "we flee from the object that is causing us so much distress" (109). Maria Beville uses the frisson between fear and desire, the "simultaneous experience of terror and exultation, fear and desire" as the basis for a sublime that is not infinite or transcendental, but rather "subjective and self-realizing" (25). In the narration of this experience in and as a poem, there is already the distancing from the experience of fear that allows it to be pleasurable. The writer and the reader are both already in positions of safety, even though the narrative occurs in the present tense. This realization of the self is mirrored in the structure of "El océano," where the poetic voice will continue by contrasting her experience with the sea and her childhood experiences of rivers that is also sexualized, but without the passion that comes with the experience of puberty and a sexual coming of age.

Indeed, as this first fearful encounter is more fully explained, it is her desire for the pulsing, crushing, pounding power of the sea, in contrast to the safety of fresh water and the slow

murmur of rivers that brought her to the shore. And yet there too, there is the construction of a tension between the poetic voice and the water that plays into the century's ideas of the erotic:

Tan sólo contemplaba embelesada
De limpias fuentes los plateados hilos;
Solo escuchaba el lánguido murmullo
De la tersa corriente sosegada (Zambrana 59)

While creating her childhood experiences of water as lesser than a confrontation with the sea, she is still bewitched by its shine, and hears a dark sensuality in its motion. The key to that eroticism is the word “lánguido.” A contronym (that is, it is its own antonym) meaning both that sweet laziness that follows an orgasm, and the last pained moments of life before death, languidness is a concept that is heavily charged with both eroticism and morbidity, and that is near too ubiquitous as a marker of the friction between the two in nineteenth-century erotism and aesthetics. While a full exploration of the use of the term will have to wait for another time, a couple of examples can give it some resonance. Carolina Valencia uses this kind of Janus-like feeling when she focuses on the erotic content of languid sound in “Balada”: “Se escucha a lo lejos fugaz cantilena, / perdidas estrofas de amante cantar, [...] que lánguido y suave sus ámbitos llena / Cruzando sus ecos la playa y el mar” (71). Pardo Bazán's use of the term in her amorous novella *Insolación* is even more openly erotic: “Estas enormidades las murmuró con tono lánguido y quejumbroso, con los ojos mortecinos y un aire de melancolía que daba compasión. Así se quedó de una pieza, así al pronto; que después se le deshizo el nudo de la garganta y las palabras le salieron a borbotones. Ea..., ahí va... Ahora sí que me desato...” (165–66; ellipsis in original). The use of this term connects to a whole node of erotic meaning. Before her arrival at

the sea, the poetic voice in “El océano” had established a strong sensual connection with the sea, and the addition of a sublime fear does not negate its continuance.

Coming from this childhood sensuality, the return to the sublime encounter with the sea is imbued with the echoes of that perception of the world through her faculties, which is built upon by what follows. Continuing the combination of morbidity and eroticism, her desire to see the sea —“Y ansiaba contemplarte, / Y radiante de cándido alborozo / A tus riberas fui” (58)— is met with somatic signs of pleasure that are then combined and mixed with fear:

¡Oh! Cómo entonces
tembló mi corazón, estremecí,
De lívido color mi faz cubrió,
Un frío de muerte circuló en mis venas,
Flaquearon mis rodillas temblorosas,
Desvanecióse mi cabeza débil
Y átomo despreciable conocí
Ante tu augusto y formidable aspecto. (58–59)

What she experiences is that simultaneous experience of terror and exultation, fear and desire, but also the more energetic, more bodily response to pleasure than the sweet languidness of the riverbank. Her responses echo the water; it is the activity of the material that creates the response in her, just as the sea responded to the feelings of the amante de Célina. It is not a reflectivity, but a co-responsiveness. Further coding the sexuality of this intra-action is the sea’s wrath as a symbol of irresistible passion, and also as an embodiment of the feminine. As Zubiaurre explores in erotic imagery of the fin de siècle and the beginning of the twentieth century, though it may have an apparent violence, and in spite of the fact that it may seem a menace, when in relation to

a female subject “the ocean is not really a menace to women [...], for the simple reason that females *are* the ocean, *are* the waves as a stereotypical symbol of irresistible passion” (177). I am not generally one to point to autobiography in the content of verse, as that has been a tactic used to negate or diminish the creative activity of female and sentimental authors. However, it seems relevant to the emotion here that the author is a seventeen-year-old girl, which is a moment in the process of growing and becoming an adult that is full of overwhelming emotions and bodily responses that can provoke both pleasure and fear. In this context, the poem—and the experience of erotic pleasure without a male partner that it narrates— allows for the development of a sexual self-awareness, and an experience of bodily sexual pleasure outside of the double societal expectation of marriage and female sexlessness. The poem performs both a didactic function, with that masculine sea as a stand-in for lover, a preparation for a forthcoming loss of virginity, and also a queer one, insofar as that term is useful in the discussion of sexual practices that do not center a heterosexual and, specifically for women, procreative sexuality. The experience in this poem goes beyond the sublime mixing of fear and desire; it is a reactive desire, coded through the mixing of the agencies of the woman and the water itself, in a context that is culturally coded as a space for the experience of sexuality.

In a further conflation of affect between the human agency of women and the material agency of the sea, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s “Es ¡Oh joven! nuestra vida” uses the sea as a means of discussing female sexual desire. The poem was written for an album, a nineteenth-century fad where young women would solicit signatures and poems from authors they either knew or admired. The praise, advice, exhortations of beauty, and other messages included in any work within such an album would be directed to its owner.²¹ Poems written for such purposes

²¹For a full discussion of the social function of the album, see Acevedo Rivera. It should be

appear in the collected work of the majority of poets (male and female) of the century. In this case, the poem seemingly lays out the inconstancies of life as a woman by using natural similes such as roses with thorns, blue skies that turn to storm, and a sea that goes from calm to tempestuous. However, in that last image, the agency of the sea is used to create a narrative of the sexual pleasure that can/will grow out of the first blush of love. While the contact with the sea is through a literary device, rather than physical touch, it concretely demonstrates the intra-activity of femininity and water in creating a discourse of female sexual pleasure.

At first, the girl's life, the part of life that is passion, is sighs and temerity, though even there it breaks the expectations of gender:

Es como el mar que suspira
De amor, en calma serena,
Su frágil dique de arena
Llegando humilde a besar; (315)

The woman's life, as the water, expresses a kind of *desiring* passion that is not allowed for women. An examination of the construction of the verbs shows that the action of these beginnings of love —sighing, approaching to kiss—, is an expression of the agency of the sea, and by extension, of woman. That soft approach to kissing turns quickly to something violent, uncontrollable:

Mas de repente, agitado
Por huracán poderoso,
Se encrespa, brama, y furioso

noted that the quality of poetry included in albums was not lesser-than that in other types of publications, as established by the study of Leonardo Romero Tobar (see 85–87).

Parece al cielo escalar. (315)

Through the extension of the simile, that calm sea, in all of its sexual wanting, becomes a fury of agitation and choppy howling, while remaining a referent for what a young woman can expect to experience.²² Taken in the layering contexts of the first stanza where the sea's energy is coded through amorousness, and the ascription of eroticism to the material imaginary of the water, this peak of passion, reaching for the sky, is a discussion of female pleasure predicated on climax, rather than on fulfillment of wifely duties.²³ In this relationship constructed between the woman and the sea, even though the contact is through a literary comparison rather than the narration of a physical encounter, the storied matter of the sea is a refraction of the sexuality of the woman.

Coming to this sexuality in the intra-action of the water and the feminine from a different direction, the sea becomes the seducer, as in "Del mar las transparentes olas" by Rosalía de Castro. The poem was published in *En las orillas del Sar* (1884), her final poem book, published the year before her death. Here, the action of the waves is coded in terms of human activities:

Del mar azul las transparentes olas
mientras blandas murmuran
sobre la arena, hasta mis pies rodando,
tentadoras me besan y me buscan.

Inquietas lamen de mi planta el borde,

²²The development presented here goes directly against the phenomenological gendering of water in Bachelard, for whom as soon as calm water becomes rough, it becomes male, because of the passions being, in his view, a male purview (13).

²³Seen through the lens of context, it is also impossible to discuss this hurricane-womanhood without signaling the close connection to Bécquer's "rima xli," where the clash between lovers positions the feminine as "huracán" and "océano" in contest with the phallic "alta torre" and the immovable "roca."

lánzanme airosas su nevada espuma,
y pienso que me llaman, que me atraen
hacia sus salas húmedas. (767)

Each of the actions taken by the sea uses amorous language —from the kisses and caresses to the display of its genitive property: the foam that we also saw with Arolas. Indeed, there are several parallels to be drawn: the affective quality is the same, the sexuality is the same. This space is still amorous. Here, however, that amorous tone exists in the absence of a human partner. There is a definitive invocation of an interlocutor, that being the apostrophic subject, in the sea. This dialogue within the monologue that constitutes the poem is malleable insofar as it is a representation of her perception, but it also suggests the presence of the internal agency of the material. This language imbues the sea with an erotic agency, one that is reciprocated in the poetic voice, who responds as to a lover. That response, however, and the second half of this poem, bring us into the third aspect of the image of femininity in intra-action with the edge of the water.

Loss and Longing: Erotic Echoes at the Edge as the Site of Love Lost

When Castro's female character tries to answer the call of the water, she is left with disillusionment:

Mas cuando ansiosa quiero
seguirlas por la líquida llanura,
se hunde mi pie en la linfa transparente
y ellas de mí se burlan.

Y huyen abandonándome en la playa
a la terrena, inacabable lucha,
como en las tristes playas de la vida
me abandonó inconstante la fortuna” (767).

In this moment, what was an amorous intra-action —building between the woman and the waves twists, embodying instead the disenchantment of loss, entangling the loss of sensual pleasure and emotional closeness with the sufferings of life— it is also now, through the rupture in the co-creation of the phenomenon by the mingling of agencies, a disenchantment: the rupture of the former recognition of material agency. Up to this point, the waves were, in Iovino’s words, the “story-laden mode of re-enchantment” (Cohen x) that is material ecocriticism; but after drawing away, that deeper connection with the natural is stripped from a society found, in deep ways, wanting. This figuration of loss of love at the edge of the water as the center —that is, the pivot point of all ill fate, of all collapsed promise— draws deeply on the affective vibrancy of this liminal space, particularly in a setting marked by emigration and maritime labor. We see this tension in all of the maritime zones in Spain, but with a particular frequency and intensity in Galicia, due to the long history of labor-driven emigration that led to the ‘emigrated lover’ being a cornerstone of Galician cultural history. From Martin Codax on, there is a conflation of love (and often consummation), followed by the loss of that lover, all centering the mix of the erotic with the nostalgic that imbues the edge of the water. This lyrical instantiation is representative of a real cultural, multi-generational trauma, and also of a social system that effectively functioned as a matriarchy within the heavily patriarchal system of Spanish society.

Two elements particular to Galician cultural history make the social subtext here more apparent: the commonality and instantiation of male emigration, and the sexual mores and

systems pursuant to that emigration. The migration of men was so prevalent in Galicia, that by the middle of the eighteenth century, there were regions, particularly in the southern coastal areas, where women outnumbered men two to one (Poska 23, 36). While the emigrée —headed to Andalucía or Castile, and later to the Americas, largely Cuba (34)— has been the center of more stories and cultural production, the women who stayed in Galicia held much more control over their own lives and livelihoods than was common in the rest of the peninsula (23, 35). Unlike many other culturally characteristic migrations, Galician men tended not to send for their families once they left, but rather “either settled easily into their new lives in faraway places, spent the money before it was made, never earned enough for the return voyage, or fell victim to one of the many possible causes of premature mortality” (35). This situation led to female control of lands and economic practices, but also to a cultural acceptance of unwed sexuality, cohabitation, and reproduction that is at odds with the expectation of the peninsula. In Galicia, marriage was not necessarily privileged over cohabitation, and women with illegitimate children were not ostracized (77). While extramarital sex was viewed as a sin, it was not the honor-shattering mortal sin that appears in the critical consciousness of early modern Spain, and was in fact a regular part of rural life (81).²⁴ Galicia’s women held a great deal of authority over their lives and their loves through the early modern period, and it was an authority based in the absence of an intermediary between them and the sea. Women confronted the land, and the sea,

²⁴This pragmatism also translated to the legal situation of ending a non-marital relationship: “Most importantly, when non-marital relationships came to an end, single women in Spain had significant legal rights, which they enthusiastically pursued. If the woman entered into a sexual relationship with a man based on a promise of marriage and he then reneged on that promise, the woman could pursue litigation against him in either the civil or ecclesiastical court. [...] She might demand that the magistrate enforce the marriage promise, or she might insist on financial compensation for her lost virginity and her dowry. If a child had been produced, she could request child support. Women rarely chose the first option. When a betrothal did not work out, most Galegas were content to leave with financially advantageous settlements” (Poska 88).

and the processes of carving out a living from them. In consequence, while the poetic anguish of a lover (and a virginity) lost to the sea is heartbreakingly beautiful, and while the main focus of the present work is about the aesthetic and the images used, the social turmoil that is below the surface should not be set aside completely.²⁵

The emigrated lover bound for the Americas is the core narrative in “Cántiga,” the first composition in Galician by Curros Enríquez.²⁶ He was also seventeen when he wrote this poem, and studying law in Madrid; he wrote “Cántiga” in the margin of lesson ten of Manuel Colmeiro’s *Economía Política*, though it was of course included in his 1880 *Aires d’a miña terra*. At the end of the poem, after one lover cries that she will die without her love and the other wishes to fly from the sea with the swallows returning to shore, the edge of water takes on

²⁵In his prologue to the complete works of Manuel Curros Enríquez, Celso Emilio Ferreiro draws attention to this tendency to focus solely on the beauty of the verse: “Es un error constantemente repetido la afirmación de que la poesía gallega se caracteriza por su lirismo, entendido como un fenómeno subjetivo, ajeno a la realidad objetiva que subsiste en el entorno del poeta. Según esta absurda teoría, los poetas gallegos son unos seres angélicos que tañen su cítara como si su país fuese un territorio edénico y no un *habitat* hostigado constantemente por una historia que, desde hace siglos, sus habitantes no han escrito” (17).

²⁶Manuel Curros Enríquez (1851 Orense–1908 La Habana) was, along with Rosalía de Castro—who he greatly admired and respected—and Eduardo Pondal, one of the leading figures of the *rexurdimento* of written Galician in the second half of the nineteenth century. While Castro is the “definidora do *Volkgeist* galego” (Casares 30), Curros Enríquez focuses on politics in which people see not deep philosophy or a method for understanding the people of Galicia, but instead “un instrumento para transformar o mundo” (30). His poetry also has irreverent, sometime blasphemous tendencies (30). His preoccupation with politics—from a perspective firmly grounded in support for the downtrodden—began early and never stopped, even when it cost him dearly. His political views were already part of his consciousness and identity when he penned “Cántiga” (Ferreiro, *Curros* 32–35). The theme of emigration, also already extant in his mind at the writing of “Cántiga,” would become personal, as he left for Cuba in 1894, possibly due to a toxic relationship with his wife. In Havana, he faced fierce opposition by the Galician community to his *mambí* leanings in the independence movement, which led him to have some complex feelings when that same society held him up as their hero after the war (14–15). For a complete biography, see Ferreiro’s *Curros Enríquez*.

its most fatal affective guise, functioning as a barrier, insofar as the two lovers have not come together there, but have seen the last of each other in that place:

Noites craras, de aromas e lúa,
desde entón ¡que tristeza en vos hai
pr'os que viron chorar unha nena,
pr'os que viron un barco marchar!...

Dun amor celestial, verdadeiro,
quedóu solo, de bágoas á proba,
unha cova
n'un outeiro

Y-on cadavre n'o fondo d'o mar. (102; ellipsis in original)

Here, though it is only referenced in the departure of the ship, the edge of water becomes a demarcation of the uncrossable, of unsurmountable loss. This weight also settles into the social imaginary of the water's edge. Circling back to where we started, just as the eroticism possible in the liminality of the edge of the water is not always safe, but still provided a space for emotion on the shore, under the lens of loss (a corpse resting at the bottom of the sea), this edge is too much an affective space, it is too charged a zone.

While this shoreline that marks distance and impenetrability is already established in Curros Enríquez, in Castro's "Un desengaño," from her first book of verse, *La flor* (1857), we can see it develop. In the beginning of the poem, we see the overwhelm of affect on the beach in the shape of the loss of a lover. Perplexingly, this forfeiture builds up in a locus that is at the same time heavily coded with the sensuality of a space *for lovers*:

En las riberas vagando

de la mar, las verdes olas
mira Argelina y contando
las horas que van pasando
vierte lágrimas a solas.

Argelina's attempts to externalize her lover's disappearance lead her to a recognition of the material agency of the water, but this is an agency coded through loss rather than in the positive key of contact and freedom. The sea, like in Curros Enríquez, becomes, by dint of its crossing, a barrier to the love that its shores can harbor. We have seen before that the sea and the lover inter-respond in their amorousness or in their passion. Here, by becoming that boundary, the sea is co-responsive in the loss while maintaining a verbal activity that may provide an answer, as can be seen in a stanza where she stares at the moving water "por ver si la mar le da / lo que tal vez imposible / para Argelina será." When the affective load of the shore becomes too much, she, like the girl in Curros Enríquez, has to leave it because the water's edge is a place of development, not a forever space. She will either cry on the shore prolongedly (as happens in "La montañera" by Isaacs), or abandon it together with the emotional weight that it carries. By first stating that she will leave her emotional burden on the waterside—"donde mi esperanza dejo"—, and then charging the edge of the water with its safekeeping before leaving—"dile cuánto, / cuánto por él padecí"—, she is adding material intelligence and will to the affective charge and agency of the seashore.

The final text in this chapter demonstrates the layering of the three studied vertices—the shore as a space held for the erotic, the agency of the sea as a refraction and response to the human, and the sexual shading of romantic loss at the edge of the sea. Written by Antonio Ros de

Olano in 1857 (published 1869 en *Revista de España*),²⁷ the climactic moment of “Historia verdadera o cuentos estrambóticos, que da lo mismo”²⁸ involves a post-coital metamorphosis, in which a female lover becomes water, while on the beach, embodying the entangled agencies of the material and the human that become one. The story is a fantastical, radical retelling of the story of the “pez Nicolás,” which appears briefly in the second volume of the *Quijote*, and more extensively in Feijoo’s *Teatro crítico universal*. In this story, a nuptial defloration ends in the

²⁷Antonio Ros de Olano (1808–1886) was born in Caracas Venezuela, but at eleven (Menéndez y Pelayo 400), or at five (Cassany 9), he moved to Spain. He was a major figure of the second rank in the Spanish military, with a career spanning three revolutions, the first civil war and a national war (Menéndez y Pelayo 400). He was never, however, one of the major names of the period’s military. Ros de Olano occupied a similar place in the arts, linked to the brightest stars but never quite among their number, as he “describió siempre una órbita solitaria.” (Menéndez Pelayo 400). And yet that distancing in form was not a physical distance. He was an intimate friend of Espronceda, who dedicated *Diablo mundo* to him, for which he wrote a rather controversial prologue (Menéndez Pelayo 402). His literary career—involving the production of novels, poetry, and short stories both realistic and fantastical—as his military one, was marked by his “cierto carácter personal y excéntrico en cuanto hizo ó intentó” (Menéndez Pelayo 400). Much of his work resists classification in any specific genre, which “deja siempre un espacio abierto a la digresión; es en este espacio, en la disposición a crearlo, donde más directamente el autor quiere proyectar su personalidad humana y buscar su identidad literaria” (Cassany 16). Even in his more mimetic work—in contrast to the story explored in this chapter—when he seems most fascinated by reality, he writes himself as its discoverer and critic (17). Menéndez y Pelayo describes the experience of reading his work in this way: “Podrá agrandar más ó menos, pero es cierto que hace pensar, que interesa por la extrañeza y que no se parece á otro escritor alguno de los nuestros, aunque sí á Richter, á Hoffmann y á Edgar Poe entre los extraños. Su ardiente amor á la naturaleza se trueca en vértigo panteísta; su idealismo, en visión cataléptica; su sensibilidad, en punzante neurosis. En esta literatura dolorosa, pero tentadora, todas las sensaciones se aguzan hasta confinar con el delirio; lo material se evapora; lo ideal se materializa; los contrarios parece que se requieren amorosamente y que se abrazan para producir creaciones disformes; cree uno ir entendiendo, y de súbito pierde el hilo y vuelve á hundirse en una sima más lóbrega, que improvisamente parece aclararse por el rápido tránsito de algún fantasma laminoso” (Menéndez y Pelayo 401).

²⁸The subtitle or epigraphic summary goes as follows: “Noticias incidentales acerca de ‘Pesce Colá’ (Pez Nicolás)—Apuntes hechos a la aguada; Manera propia para tratar sucesos de un peje, su embajada de parte del príncipe Pausanó, y quién esa ésa—Astucias de miss Tintin, y quién era ésta. —Amor, traición, casamiento y muerte del héroe en esta veracísima historia, por donde se deduce claro, como el agua es clara, el origen de la frase con que solemos exclamar: ‘¡Vaya un peje!’”

death of one of the lovers, and the de-composition of the other, as her grief causes her to melt into her tears and become one with the sea.

The legend of “Pesce colá” (as Ros de Olano calls him, and the nomenclature that will be used here) appears as a reference to great human skill in Part II, ch. XVIII of the *Quijote*, where in describing the complicated science of being a knight errant, he claims that “ha de saber nadar como dicen que nadaba el peje Nicolás o Nicolao” (180). Feijoo will offer a much more complete version of the story, as an example of semi-amphibious human life in relation to a recent rumor that he discusses: “La noticia se difundió algunos años ha a varias partes de España debajo de la generalidad, que un Mozo, natural de las Montañas de Burgos, se había arrojado al mar, y vivido en él mucho tiempo, como pez entre los peces” (273) as part of the “Examen filosófico de un peregrino suceso de estos tiempos.”²⁹ As Feijoo relates it, the “Pesce colá” was a subject of the king of Sicily, who was such a good swimmer that he would serve as messenger from one part of the Mediterranean to other, and was so swift that he could even carry messages between ships on the sea. The king of Naples, having heard of the prowess of this fish-man who could spend whole days in the sea, decided to test his skills. This king asked Pesce colá to explore Charybdis, throwing a golden cup into the waters as an incentive. When Pesce colá manages the feat once, the king demands a second exhibition of such a talent, and this second time, “fue para no volver jamás, ni muerto, ni vivo, muerte y sepultura encontró en una de aquellas intrincadas cavernas, quedando dudoso si se metió incautamente en alguna estrechez donde no pudo manejarse; o si habiendo penetrado a algún enredoso seno, no acertó con la salida; o si en fin fue apresado por alguna de las bestias marinas, que él mismo había dicho habitaban aquellas grutas” (282). So much for the traditional story of Pesce colá.

²⁹ Tomo sexto, discurso octavo of the *Teatro crítico universal*.

The action of “Historia verdadera” begins with the arrival of Pesce colá as an emissary from the king of Parnassus to a mythical island. He has come to win the hand of the governor’s sister, miss Tintin —her name is not an anglophone title, as Ros de Olano assures his readers several times. Miss Tintin has other ideas, and as she knows magic, she does magic to make Pesce colá fall in love with her. At the same time, her brother the governor gives up on living and drowns himself in the sea, leaving her to govern in his stead. She and Pesce colá wed in a ceremony full of wonders, like a group of seals that she has taught to sing, accompanying nymphs and gnomes, and a witch who is blown up and played as a flying bagpipe. Their marriage bed is a floating construction of flowers and, once summoned by their desire, it cradles their lovemaking. As they are in the throes of passion, however, Pesce colá either dies or becomes an actual fish, or both. In her grief at being widowed, miss Tintin comes apart, quite literally, into tears. The story ends with Pesce colá’s former master trying to make his own way to the island, but he eats the polar bears who were drawing his boat, and ends up lost near the pole.³⁰ It is in that fatal night of love and death that this story weds all of our layers of the image of the woman at the edge of the water.

Given the rather strange language of the story (not to mention the plot), an analysis of pieces of the text will be more fruitful if framed in a brief discussion of Ros de Olano’s more fantastical modes of writing. According to Andrew Ginger’s comparative study of Ros de Olano’s work, the *cuentos estrambóticos* “go to some lengths to undermine, or at least severely attenuate a direct connection with a credible eternal world, (including a higher dimension). This also means that explanations for the bizarre supernatural elements are avoided” (Ginger 157).

³⁰While these versions of the story are radically different, the link between them is widely accepted. Jaime Pont states that Ros de Olano “sigue en lo esencial” the story as it is related by Feijoo (“Claves expresivas” 73).

Indeed, the use of the term “estrambótico” rather than “fantástico” is a leaning-in to a rejection of conventionality in language and form (Pont “Claves” 64).³¹ Jaume Pont develops this same rejection of standard form in Ros de Olano’s relationship with Romanticism, where much of his style bears the echoes of the Romantic mode, but characterized by a “reescritura y en la radicalidad con que construye un idiolecto narrativo sin parangón entre sus contemporáneos” (“Claves expresivas” 65).³² Ginger sees the *cuentos estrambóticos* as balancing the ridiculous and the sublime in a way that “inspires a sort of exhilaration not entirely at odds with the more mystical pronouncements contained in the works” (164), while “they are confined absolutely to the world of fiction by being utterly incredible, ludicrous” (160). Of all of his tales that twist and distort the real, “Historia verdadera” is “la única de las narraciones íntegramente adscrita a lo maravilloso puro” (Pont, “Mundo” 1403). In his prologue to the *cuentos estrambóticos*, Cassany goes more in depth, characterizing the “Historia verdadera” by its “intención festiva,” which

se advierte en el estilo hiperbólico, que se acerca a menudo al conceptismo, al genio deformador y a la visión grotesca de Quevedo; en los juegos de palabras; en los versos narrativos y líricos; en la expresión de sensaciones, de manera refinada y hasta afectada,

³¹In his prologue to Ros de Olano’s *Poesías*, published in 1886, Pedro Antonio Alarcón asserts that Ros de Olano’s desire to play with language was coupled with a desire to be challenging to read: “A la verdad, todavía no se sabe si él quiere que el lector las entienda. Lo que nosotros tenemos averiguado es que desprecia al que no las entiende, y que se enoja con los que se dan por entendidos” (30–31).

³²In another article, Pont will give a more poetic description of the *estrambótico*, which does an excellent job of capturing the sensation of reading it: “Efectivamente, en la confluencia problemática de la imaginación y la realidad, Ros de Olano intuye su acuñación narrativa de lo estrambótico. El hombre ve reflejada su aparente fisonomía racional en una galería de espejos cóncavos y convexos que se alinean en el territorio del sueño. La deformación acepta tan pronto sutilezas irónicas como extremadas descripciones satíricas, caracterizaciones grotescas o figuraciones visionarias u oníricas. Se trata de conformar un proyecto de prosa no realista que, como el gran-teatro-mundo, muestre el movedizo estatuto en el que se instaura la verosimilitud literaria” (Pont, “Mundo” 402).

buscando efectos musicales; y, en fin, en la calidad de las metáforas que, gracias a la naturaleza maravillosa de la acción, se confunden con los hechos mismos. (28)

It is in the world of this fantastical, twisted, symbolic reality that we will find our final layering of the refracted image of the woman at the edge of the water.

The scene into which we will enter here comes near the end of the story: after the marriage, with its singing seals and bagpipe witches, comes the wedding night. Since the moment the enchantment was cast on *Pesce colá*, the narrative has been leading up to this consummation between him and miss Tintin. We enter as the nuptial bed is about to arrive, steered by their rising passions: “El tálamo indudablemente se aproximaba con el blando susurro de los céfiros que le suspendían en sus alas... llegaba por atracción” (126). That attraction has been made possible by both the marriage itself, and the three elements that form a *locus* for the physical expression of sentiment: “La noche, la soledad y la mujer, forman la trinidad conjunta, la unidad esencial del sentimiento; y son el trino y uno que nos constituye en idólatras” (125). These three elements will be familiar, as they are in conjunction in the most sexual description from the first piece we studied, the *Cartas amatorias* by Arolas. The activity, that is, the physicalizing of passion that attracts the flower-bed, is narrated metonymically through an eroticizing of nature, the beach in particular. Their desire is framed, alluded to, and coded in the movement of the waves as they caress the beach. Like in *Castro*, the actions of the waves are sexual: “En aquella noche, las olas suspiraban al expirar en la playa; y la playa desnuda, húmeda, entumecida, gemía apenas recogiendo suspiros a las olas” (125). It is into this erotic space that the characters are inserted, re-inhabiting their own agency and eroticism: “¡Oh miss Tintin en la noche, la noche en la soledad, y el peje a solas con miss Tintin!” (125). The building of erotic tension cycles between the desiring waves and miss Tintin’s desire. It is in the interstice between

these two elements, in the intra-action of their agencies, in this space coded for sexuality, that the agency to obtain fulfilment becomes action, even if, as we will see, it will also become obliteration.

When the lovers actually have sex, they do it on the floating bed of flowers. But it does not end well: just when they are reaching climax, *Pesce colá* dies (and maybe turns into a fish):

Pero cuando el tálamo aéreo arrebató en sus círculos de ambiente a los amantes para sumergirlos en un piélago sutil, en una mar impalpable de deleites; el peje, el habitante atlético las aguas gruesas y salobres, sintió que se asfixiaba por instantes, y sin más pararse en amores, pegó un recio coletazo, y botó afuera lo mismo como un atún recién pescado. ¡Cuán rústico es el hombre en la defensa!

No sabe morir como las flores, palideciendo inertes hasta deshojarse.

No sabe expirar como las mujeres, desmayándose pálidas, flageladas por el dolor secreto hasta exhalar el postrer aliento. (130)

In other texts, we have seen the shore as a symbolic connection between love, sex, and loss, but that connection is made fully physical here, as sex on the beach ends with a dead lover to be mourned.

The reference to flowers in the gendering of his death resurges in the narrative return to miss Tintin, and to the flower-bed, which is the physical representation of her magical powers: “La noche nupcial se adelgazaba en aquel crepúsculo que iba a manifestar a las flores la viudez de miss Tintin” (132).

This demonstration to the flowers —functioning as the social gaze— of this new widowhood reinforces the rupture in the expected return from the liminal space that is consummation. A change of state was expected: from single to married. The transition from

single to widowed is jarring. The use of floral imagery in the first reference to her social loss (husband) complicates that cognitive dissonance. The use of the word ‘capullo’ in the discussion of the disillusion of her dreams links the social aspect of the nascent relationship to her sexual desire. In the kind of historical-medical jargon that Ros de Olano delighted in using, this word refers to both the bud of a flower and the glans of the male sexual organ:³³ “Ella, que en su mente había forjado con esperanzas en capullo seno de esposo en tálamo de encantos, al verse sola, burlada, abandonada, cuando apenas pasaba los lindes para entrar en el paraíso de la dualidad... ¡ay! Se deshizo en llanto” (130).³⁴ The sharp transition from desire to mourning becomes tied to the expectations of society in relation to matrimony and the “paraíso de la dualidad,” as well as to the power structures implicit in the gendering of power and vivacity, and to her own powerful desire for sexual fulfillment.

Olano’s propensity for wordplay takes miss Tintin’s emotional undoing to the ultimate consequences; the lover that is facing loss doesn’t make it to a grave on a hillside, but actually *becomes the water*; joins the sea, completes a cycle from matter to life, and back to matter, all of these in such a way that it highlights a material agency. In between miss Tintin’s tears starting to fall, and her transformation, the narrator engages in the type of historical science and philosophy that create a metaphysical (mystical, in Ginger’s analysis) current of Ros de Olano’s poetic

³³As an example of the use of ‘capullo’ in this context, the *Vocabulario ecclesiastico* from 1499, uses it in an entry on what it means to be uncircumcised, “cosa no circuncidada o no retajada [...] como en el capullo del miembro viril” (Santaella xci).

³⁴There are a couple of references in this moment to an embedded narrative within “Historia verdadera,” which reinforce the signaling of his death. This story-within-the-story is the tale of a princess who, in love with a pearl diver, becomes a pearl to be with him. The pearl diver then sells her in exchange for a palace under the sea; he then asphyxiates there because he is so accustomed to the water. In this scene, both “habitante de las aguas gruesas y salobres” (130) in reference to Pesce Colá the intertextual simile (“como la princesa al convertirse en perla para que la pescara su enamorado el buzo” (130)) are references to that other, integrated story, and thereby to the transformation (her) and death (him) that it contains.

project. In this case, he turns to the water —invoked by the tears of miss Tintin, and then the tears of the flowers in response, which “se las prende la aurora” (131)— and reads it as the origin and the end of all:

Antes que el mundo fuera, el agua, elemento absoluto, existía sin vaso, según Thales de Mileto: el agua era en sí misma, y es por sí sola, principio y término de todas las cosas.

Los fluidos y los vapores se liquidan volviendo a su origen.

Los líquidos se compactan y surgen de la fuente de vida con formas determinadas.

Las formas retroceden, vuelven y se funden en su fuente original. (132)

Thales of Miletus (c. 620 B.C.E. –c. 546 B.C.E.), the natural philosopher mentioned here, not only held that water was the primary principle, the material that made up everything in the world, he also was one of the first of the natural philosophers to hold to the immortality of the soul (O’Grady). Furthermore, and highly relevant to a discussion grounded in material agency, he saw the presence of a soul not only in man and animals, but “attributed a soul or life even to inanimate objects” (Laertius 24). That soul, then, was the cause of motion and activity throughout the universe (O’Grady). Invoking Thales here, through the material primacy of water in existence and creation, as miss Tintin verges on a truly material turn, will not only wrap that action/dissolution in agency and spirit, but also recalls the will of the waves and the beach, in their “suspiros” and “gemidos” as they foreshadowed the ill-fated union.

The water-soul connection carries into the disintegration of miss Tintin’s physical form into living water, a metamorphosis that is the ultimate expression of the layering of the creation of the shore as a space for sensuality, the co-creation of sensuality by the entangled agencies of the feminine and the water, and the loss inherent in eroticism. Miss Tintin’s metamorphosis calls back to Ovid, in the way that the change is typified by the continuity between the character and

the material that she turns into: a primary feature of Ovidian metamorphosis, according to Joseph Solodow. Rather than defining a metamorphosis as merely a change from one state to another, Solodow sees Ovidian metamorphosis as a process of clarification, by means of which “characteristics of a person, essential or incidental, are given physical embodiments and so are rendered visible and manifest” (174). Metamorphosis is “a change which preserves, an alteration which maintains identity, a change of form by which content becomes represented in form” (174). For Solodow, the constant element can be an attribute of character, of emotion, or of a relationship (180). In the case of miss Tintin, the inciting incident for the transformation is the loss of her lover, and the part of her that is maintained is triple: it is her relationship with the water, her sensuality, and her grief, embodying together the edge of the water from within water itself.

The first stage of the transformation ties miss Tintin’s emotional state to her physiological one, making literal the figurative idea of coming apart with grief: “Ello es que arrastrada miss Tintin por el orgullo insuperable de su amor hacia el peje, sintió que su ser disolvía o, mejor dicho, sintió que se trasformaba, absorbida por su elemento primitivo” (132). The connection between emotion and the body begun here, and the idea of water as not only *the* primordial substance, as discussed above, but also *her* primordial substance, continues as she is described as “Era fuente de lágrimas; se había trocado en río de llanto” (132).³⁵ At this point, there is still a human element left, which would appear to be the point of continuance within the metamorphosis: “y sobre aquellas aguas no se advertían más órganos humanos que las dilatadas

³⁵This philosophical element is complemented by an asserted dualism that links religious and scientific ontologies: “Se derretía materialmente en lágrimas, y su alma sobrenadaba en el descreimiento de su existencia física, asemejando en imagen microscópica al espíritu que según el Génesis armonizaba el caos” (132).

órbital de los ojos de tan hermosa mujer... los ojos anchos, sedientos y sin parpadeo; ojos de enamorada desconfianza; ojos de luz quebrada en lágrimas” (132). And yet, the eyes too will disappear:

¿En dónde se sepultaron tan amantes ojos?

Se sepultaron replegándose en sí mismos.

Y ellos, tan sedientos de su mirada, ¿en dónde se sepultaron? Ellos se sepultaron en su amor; su amor se sepultó en el alma de miss Tintin, y el alma en el agua viva en que se bañaba el peje Nicolao; porque aquella purísima linfa era la sensación, el amor, la vida, el alma; el ser completo de la esposa, como fuente de todo ser.” (132–33)

The thing that remains of her, the continuity in her metamorphosis, is the sensation of the water—somehow both sweet and salty, being a fountain and river that is at the same made of tears, mixing with the sea, and still “purísima linfa” (itself both a clear bodily fluid and figuratively, pure sweet water)—that is both her love and her life. The fluid that she becomes carries the semantic weight of both tears (grief) and her cyprine (sexuality) and is water that runs along the edge of the water.³⁶ This final image, of love and loss coming together at the edge of the water to form the water will echo through the next chapters, where entry into the water is freedom, and becomes a good death.³⁷

At the edge of the water, there is a space for the expression of feminine sexuality, either with a male partner as in the *Cartas amatorias* by Juan de Arolas and the peasant romance cycle by Jorge Isaacs, or in intra-action with the sea itself, as in Rosalía de Castro’s “Del mar las

³⁶For a poetic genealogy of the connection between tears, sweat, and other fluids of arousal, see Gómez-Castellano.

³⁷In chapter three, we will see a very different Ovidian metamorphoses, where the transformation comes from a decision, and the outcome is genitive.

transparentes olas,” Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s “Es, ¡oh joven! nuestra vida,” and Luisa Pérez de Zambrana’s “El Océano.” The edge of the water is also a space for loss and longing, as in Castro’s “Un desengaño” and Curros Enríquez’s “Cántiga,” and, drawing all of these elements together, in Ros de Olano’s “Historia verdadera.” And yet, the shore in the *Cartas amatorias* is also layered with grief, and the sexuality in “Cántiga” is intense without being concretely laid out. This image of the woman at the edge of the water is not just a space for the expression of sexuality, not just a space that holds loss, not just a space for communion with the material. In its diffraction, it is *all* of those things: interrelating and cocreating. It is inscribed with stories of creation, love, and loss, to the extent that it is always and already all of these things. When the agency of the water is read as part of the scenes in which it participates, the affective score of the work is deepened. Furthermore, it becomes possible to see its edge as boundary and as border, but even more deeply it is also revealed as the sadness in a love story, and the sweetness in a goodbye. It allows for the layering of poignant loss over hopeful eroticism, and sensuality in the sound of the waves, by means of the storied matter of the water.

CHAPTER 2: SURRENDER TO THE SEA

While the last chapter explores the female figure at the edge of the water, and the next will see her dead in it, the image treated here is the entry in to the water: the freedom that exists in a surrender to it and existence upon it. The female agency related to sexuality that is claimed in that freedom, as well as the relationship with the water from within it, are informed by —and then in turn informant to— two main elements: the two single-slits in a diffraction apparatus, if you will. One is female maritime labor, in its relationship to patriarchal hegemony and the process —and rejection— of modernization. The other is an articulation of the sublime hinted at in the last chapter, but much more deeply treated in these pages; it is a sublime that is an agentive submission to the grandeur and danger of natural force. While each of these three aspects — agency claimed, transgressive maritime labor, and the sublime— informs the others, this chapter will offer examples of the labor-related and the sublime separately, with “La camarona” by Pardo Bazán (1851–1921) and “El pescador” by José de Espronceda (1808–1842) on the one side, and “Al mar” by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873) and “En el mar” by Carolina Valencia (1860–1892) on the other, before coming to two poems that tie both vertices inextricably together, Gómez de Avellaneda’s “La pesca en el mar” and “Elena la pescadora,” by Josepa Massanés (1811–1887).¹ Through the image of female entry into the water, in these poems there is a diffraction of a societally gendered system of oppression that disenfranchises

¹On the spelling of Josepa Massanés, see Introduction note 9.

the feminine, allowing for a negotiation of agency even in the face of the unknown. In here there is a vibrancy for life, and in life, even within a structure that does not allow certain limits to be superseded. By creating such space for ambiguity, it does start to break those rules.

The Work of the Sea is Hers Also

The first section of this chapter will focus on the labor of the sea as a means of accessing freedoms outside of societal expectation. While maritime labor (largely fishing) will run throughout the chapter, this first section will center in Emilia Pardo Bazán's short story "La Camarona," originally published in *Blanco y Negro* in 1896, and reprinted in the collection *Un destripador de antaño (Historias y cuentos de Galicia)* in 1900.² This and other collections of Pardo Bazán's prolific production of short fiction treat diverse aspects of rural Galician life in the era: people, places, beliefs, superstitions, anxieties, and hopes (Paredes Núñez vol. I: 10–13).³ This story in particular is an investigation of class-consciousness and mobility, female marital agency, and the relationship between a fisherwoman and the sea.⁴

The importance of fishing and other aquaculture in Galicia goes beyond a *cuadro de costumbres*, given the fundamental role that the sea, and harvesting from it, have in Galician

²See the excellent bibliographic work of Paredes Núñez (vol. II, 437).

³While her novels may have garnered mixed reviews in her time, her short stories were not only universally lauded, but are also awe-inspiring in terms of their thematic range, their sheer number, and the narrative skill with which she created them (Osborne 94-5). While she is generally known now for her literary naturalism, with *Los pazos de Ulloa* and *La cuestión palpitante*, she wrote extensively, and in every literary genre, including twenty novels and over five hundred short stories.

⁴Ann K. Hills has briefly treated this story in her discussion of Pardo Bazán's use of feminine archetypes (179), though she states that la Camarona is born in the sea, rather than on the shore: an important distinction for the current investigation. Her article offers a useful approximation to some of the divergent types of femininity that appear in the author's short fiction.

cultural identity and industrial history. The main export of the region through the nineteenth century was preserved fish, largely sardines. Different aspects of the industry are year-round (net-fishing in tidal areas), and some are seasonal (smoking and salting) (Rocha 53).

Additionally, as Heidi Kelley finds in her anthropological investigation of female identity construction in a coastal Galician community, work, rather than sexuality, is the pivot on which reputation hangs. Kelley claims that these characteristic holds true through Galicia and northern Portugal. This focus on work rather than sexuality as the primary ingredient for a woman's reputation is related to a complex of social factors: "dominant roles for women in subsistence labor, female inheritance of productive resources, and an inheritance system that tends to favor daughters as primary heirs" (Kelley 199). This structure, focused on the primacy of work in identity, "emphasizes both the agency of female actors and the symbolic malleability of gender categories" (197). While this anthropological model of gender is predominantly a contemporary one, we can see it echoed in these texts, in relation to the shore as a space that allows for sexuality, where the exertion of female agency to influence life trajectory leads women to devote themselves to maritime toil as a means of finding freedom, even in the face—or the embrace—of danger.

Given that work is key in identity, it cannot be understated that fishing, alongside mining, is the most physically taxing of work both in terms of the length of days and the physical exertion required, and also in the inherent danger of working on the water, with no ability to leave the job site (Rocha 40). Pardo Bazán signals this danger in "La Camarona" in explaining why her protagonist goes to mass though not to school: "porque la gente pescadora ve tan a menudo cerca la muerte, que se acuerda mucho de Dios y la siente mejor que los labriegos y que los señores" (54). A full quarter of piscatory labor ("a empresa do mar") is done by women in

Galicia (mostly in shellfish and netmaking), a number which is without equal in the rest of Europe (Rocha 43). Indeed, in the northern coastal region, up to 90% of women are engaged in the industry, drawing from a centuries-long tradition of female work in fish preservation, so that the industrializing of canneries depended on female labor (Borderías 366).⁵

For discussion of “La Camarona,” and indeed all of the texts treated in this chapter, the gendering of piscatory labor is fundamental. Fishing —actually going out on boats— was *male* labor.⁶ Women did not take to sea. They took the catch to market or to the canneries, they mended nets (Sánchez Fernández 45), and were responsible for 95% of the shellfish trade — work done from the shore, and which never grew past artisanal operations (Rocha 43). In contemporary markers of identity based on a historical division, women are associated with growing food in the ground, and men with either reaping it from the sea, or emigrating to find work (Kelley 202).⁷ In her study, Kelley found that, in terms of maritime labor, “[t]here is the occasional woman whose husband has taken her along fishing once or twice, but most village women have never set foot on a fishing boat” (221n36). In this context, women from fishing

⁵For a complete discussion of the conservation industry in the final decades of the nineteenth century, see Giráldez Rivero. While fishing was a masculine labor, the preservation process was largely an industry staffed by women. Like the cigar workers of A Coruña, the canning plants of Galicia, centered in Vigo starting in 1880, employed women for the majority of their work, though men were hired as solderers, making several times the wages of the women working in the same plants (251). The industrialization of preservation technologies appears tangentially in “La Camarona,” as her rich suitor is the son of the owners of the local cannery.

⁶The conception of fishing as a male occupation is still deeply engrained in Western cultural discourse. See, for example the community project Strength of the Tides with its #hersalso campaign—dedicated to support and visibility for female workers in piscatory trades—based out of Washington, or the “Amar o mar” campaign through the Federación Galega de Confrarías de Pescadores, which runs workshops and visibility campaigns in Galicia.

⁷See chapter 1 for the ‘emigrated lover’ in the Galician cultural context.

cultures who take to sea, either alone or with their men, are, by that action, breaking gender roles and societal expectations of behavior and risk management.

This dichotomy in maritime labor appears in the fiction of the region in our moment of investigation as well. In Pardo Bazán's own *La Tribuna*, for example, the piscatory industry forms a stark contrast to this story of freedom in the sea. The laborers in a particular neighborhood in La Marineda are *cigarreras* (female, and the protagonists of the novel), alongside "pescadores y pescantinas" (212): a division that splits not only by gender, but by the difference between harvest and sale. At the beginning of Rosalía de Castro's *La hija del mar*, treated in terms of its water death(s) in the next chapter, Castro offers a *cuadro* of the work of bringing in the catch with a storm in the offing: a scene that offers a clear gendering of not only the types of labor performed, but that also cultivates bourgeois mannerisms and markers of gender in both groups. The male fishermen are characterized by their strength, and their desire for camaraderie and wine. Their physicality, up to the sound of their voices, is harsh and strong: "—¡Fuerza!, ¡fuerza!, gritaban enronquecidos los marineros en tanto envolvían apresuradamente en sus nervudos brazos las gruesas cuerdas de cáñamo empapadas de agua salada" (33). The female cohort on the beach, in contrast, are characterized by the expected female labor (bringing the catch home and to market in large baskets balanced on the head), as well as vices stipulated as female, even when they are not only characteristic of women: "Las pescadoras [...] posando sus cestos de mimbre en la arena, se sentaban sobre ellos y charlaban juntas, y murmuraban; feo vicio en el que, a pesar de que siempre se achaca a las mujeres, [...] incurren los hombres con demasiada frecuencia" (34). It is in the context of this expectation that not only will la Camarona, but all of the female characters in this chapter, will take to sea, giving themselves over to the water, whether to perform labor or not.

In this context, the story of la Camarona, with her insistence on not only working in the sea trade, but in taking to sea in her family's fishing boat, seriously fractures these gender roles. While she grows up with shells and rope as her playthings, in her adolescence la Camarona does not keep to the feminine aspects of piscatory labor, instead going out on the boat with her father: "A los quince años la Camarona no quería salir de la lancha, donde ayudaba a su padre y hermanos en la ruda faena" (2: 54). There is pushback against this breaking of the rules by both her own brothers, and the more properly feminine girls of the town. In both cases, la Camarona asserts her right to perform this labor through the appropriation of the masculine: through misogyny and physical violence. When her brothers try to push her to more feminine labor roles ("Tú, a remendar las redes, papulita"; 54), "intentando imponerse por la fuerza" and with the goal of embarrassing her (54), la Camarona throws their misogyny right back at them, both in words, depreciating their own masculinity, and through the imposition of physical force: "Eso vosotros, mariquillas", respondía ella, autorizando con un soberano remoquete su alarde de desprecio. Y agachaban la cabeza, por que la Camarona era, ya que no más forzada, más arriscada y batalladora" (54). Her assertion of masculinity overcomes her larger brothers because of her greater willingness to commit violence.

La Camarona's appropriation of masculine violence extends also to her treatment of the other girls in the village. When the girls, similarly to her brothers, attempt to shame her for the work that she does on the boat, her response is again physical aggression:

Cuando otras hijas de pescadores se metían con ella, mofándose porque salía a la mar y remaba y cargaba las velas y agarraba la caña del timón, la Camarona sabía enseñar a aquellas mocosas cuántas son cinco... y a qué saben cinco dedos de una robusta mano, ya encallecida, aplicados con brío a las frescas carnazas de una moza insolente... (54).

In order to assert her own right to do the work to which she is drawn, la Camarona asserts her brothers' femininity, and displays traits of overt masculinity to other girls. And it works. After her brothers have left home, la Camarona is the only one left to work with her father, her vital vibrancy acting as counterpoint to his failing physicality. His incapacity, for its own part, functions as a demonstration of the way that this kind of work, as Rocha discusses, destroys the bodies that undertake it: "la Camarona quedó sola para remar, ayudando al patrón, ya viejo, en la lancha desbaratada por los golpetazos y las 'crujías'" (54). The physical strength and willingness to accept physical risk that la Camarona evinces in her interactions with her peers embody the brash physicality necessary for the work that she undertakes, but by doing so subverts the expected role of a young female character in a piscatory costumbrist narrative.

And yet, the queering of la Camarona's character that comes with her aggressive masculinity does not preclude her from being desired. Her father's apprentice falls head over heels for her: "Hubo que contratar a un marinero dándole parte en lances y ganancias..., y el mozo, que se llamaba Tomás, empezó a suspirar profundo cada vez que miraba a la Camarona inclinada hacia el remo y enarcando el brazo para pujar firme" (54).⁸ The son of the local cannery's owner courts her, trying to wed her in a union that would substantially elevate both her status and her family's.⁹ Her physical description, in contrast to her volatile aggression, makes her out to be the epitome of the hardy beauty of the working class:

⁸One could draw here a clear parallel to Chinto, the familial apprentice in *La Tribuna*, though that pairing—and intergenerational continuance of familial balance and structure—does not come to pass, at least within the confines of the novel's narrative.

⁹This story functions in concert with Caballero's *La Gaviota* in its warning against the transgression of class boundaries. In contrast to la Gaviota (like la Camarona, named for the amount of time she spends in the sea), who leaves the shore to seek wealth, fame, or passion and ultimately fails at all three, la Camarona successfully transgresses gender boundaries by maintaining her socioeconomic status. This anti-mobility narrative is also clear in European Romantic prose, as in Mary Shelley's "The Parvenue" (1836), in which a poor girl marries a rich

Imaginadla, ¡Oh, pintores!, con su cesta de sardinas en equilibrio sobre la cabeza; su saya corta de bayeta verde, que en la cadera forma un rollo; sus ágiles y rectas piernas desnudas: su gran boca bermeja, como una herida en un coral, sus dientes blancos y lisos a manera de guija que las olas rodaron; sus negros ojos pestañudos, francos, luminosos; su tez de ágata bruñida por el sol y la brisa de los mares. La salud y la fuerza rebrillaban en sus facciones y se delataban a cada movimiento de su duro cuerpo virginal. (54)

This kind of description, with its focus on vivacity, strength, and feminine secondary sexual characteristics is typical in a romance where the female character finds the man to whom to devote herself, and fulfills perfectly the societal expectations of marriage, subjugation, and procreation. While la Camarona will perform two of the three, she rejects fully the model of marriage and the transition to adulthood that would stop her from performing the masculine work of the sea.

La Camarona rejects traditional female labor (securing a new lineage after a good marriage), preferring the masculine work of the sea, and—in a direct rejection of the expectation that female decisions are made for sentimental reasons—marries strategically and without passion, and is furthermore happy in that choice.

Tanto persiguieron y apretaron los codiciosos padres a la Camarona para que aceptase la suerte y las riquezas de don Camilito, que la moza, incapaz de resignarse, adoptó un recurso heroico. Ella misma se explicó con el encogido de Tomás, que no le gustaba ni pizca, pero que al fin era cosa de mar, un pescador como ella, empapado en agua salobre y curtido por el aire marino, que trae en sus ondas vida y vigor. Y se casaron, y la pareja

man at the behest of her family—reminiscent of the desire of la Camarona’s family—and brings not only misery to herself, but by trying to raise the status of her family, participates in their ruin as well, as they are incapable of making smart choices with the money that she gives them.

de gaviotas se pasa el día en la lancha, contenta, porque al ave le gusta su pobre nido.

(55)

La Camarona continues the trajectory of refusing heteropatriarchal normativity in terms of societal expectations of work and life choices. At the end of the story, her choices get tacit approval in the form of a fertile relationship. Now she is pregnant, and planning to have her child at sea. We will discuss the story's treatment of maternity as it connects to the relationship between la Camarona and the sea further along, but in this moment, the fact of her fertility manifests the approval of her life choices.

In seemingly stark contrast with this positive denouement of the pubescent narrative of a female character who is definitionally appositional to the expected roles for women, during the period from 1880–1910, colored by the “New Woman” and social pushes for suffrage and other social, political, and legal rights for women, there was a huge perceived societal danger in women entering into traditionally masculine professions (Tolliver 59).¹⁰ What is more, working women were a focal point of debates about the socio-moral problems of the modernization process (Burguera 293), particularly when they were in the public eye, as is the case of female factory workers, who claimed high-paying, publicly visible jobs (300).

Pardo Bazán's own conceptualization of gender, freedom, and politics in her literary work is complicated, both intrinsically, and by the means and locus of her publishing. According to González Martínez, from her earliest writings Pardo Bazán traces gender binaries that then she transgresses, generating “personajes mixtos y peculiares” (9). We could lay this nomenclature at the feet of la Camarona and move on, merely noting her peculiarity. However, the way that she

¹⁰See Tolliver (59–60) for how this pressure played out in Pardo Bazán's own life and publishing career.

decomposes gendered expectations has more value than only gender play. It is a place where Pardo Bazán does not recur to the “mística de la femineidad” where so many of her offered alternatives to a gender binary end up (González Martínez 10). In discussing the ways that women novelists of the *fin-de-siècle* experiment with heroines who “want something more than to be wanted by men,” Lou Charnon-Deutsch lays out two main trajectories: those following Böhl de Faber’s *Gaviota*, and those following Castro’s Countess from the *Caballero de las botas azules* (*Narratives* 144): “the second is the woman who, refusing to play the role of the social leech and primping doll, insists upon being a working, contributing member of society” (145). This is the class that la Camarona falls into, at one of the lowest possible socioeconomic strata, which thereby reinforced class immobility while making it the character’s preference and choice. And yet, even in the re-inscription of class demarcation, there is a solid rejection of what a young girl ‘should’ want. In the face of the expected set of female desires, “money, carriage-rides, and romantic strolls in the park, trays of jewels, a proliferation of obsequious male figures all bowing to her” (Charnon-Deutsch, *Narratives* 159), in the characterization of Pardo Bazán’s Fe (*Memorias de un solterón*), there is a “different vision of what a woman can want, and the contrast is stark. Fe dreams of freedom that she equates with exploring Marineda alone, on foot” (159). This desire *is* a visible rupture in expected behavior—and, particularly in class-based behavior particularly, as this kind of solitary roaming is the favorite activity of another pardobazanian heroine, Amparo. In this case, like the *cigarreras* organizing, like suffragists claiming their rights, the coding of the desire for freedom in a *visible* rupture demarcates it as ultimately impossible.

While Fe’s desired freedom comes from the appropriation of leisure activities that would be “a banal catalogue of activities for the palate of male readers” (Charnon-Deutsch, *Narratives*

160), la Camarona does the same thing through work: the primary identity marker of her class. She is offered the riches and leisure that she is “supposed” to want, but turns them down. But this refusal functions in a way that, by breaking the social order on work —according to Kelley the most important identity marker for rural Galician women, as mentioned before— she maintains the social order on marriage and class immobility, which is the marker that her literate, male authors would be most likely to regard as woman’s role. Useful in teasing out this inversion is the difference between etic (outsider’s) and emic (insider’s) categories of identity markers (Kelley 197). The assumed etic marker is marriage and the social standing that it imbues, while the emic marker is “work rather than sexuality as the primary ingredient for a woman’s reputation” (199). The importance of this difference in what la Camarona would view as her primary identity marker vs. what an outsider would see comes clear in a brief look at the relationship between author, reader, and narrator.

The narrative voice in “La Camarona” is extradiegetic; it speaks to an upper-class audience who would be found sporting on the sea, rather than pulling their living from its guts. (“Vosotros, platónicos aficionados al deporte.” Pardo Bazán, *Cuentos completos 2*: 53). Also, as Tolliver has signaled, in addition to the interlocutor being this wealthy y’all, the fact that the assumed narrator is extradiegetic within the context of publishing in male-centered journals — inherently antifeminist and misogynistic— (Tolliver 65), points to the potential for an assumed masculinity in the narrative voice (79–80). This upper-class, mainly male, audience would definitely view marital status and class association as a woman’s primary identity marker: for them, the story maintains the status quo in that la Camarona does not rise about her station.

Through this difference in valorization, where the assumed reader and the subject of the story hold very different markers of identity as the most important, there is the possibility for a

type of female emancipation that does not infringe on bourgeois privileges, and that complicates the critical conception of binary gendering in Pardo Bazán's literary world. González Martínez reads the gender binary in Pardo Bazán's work as demonstrating to women (within and outside of the text) the space that they lack, as "Emilia internaliza la idea que la mujer no sólo está en un *mal lugar*, sino que en realidad *carece de lugar*, y esta creencia la lleva en primer término a proyectar un *más allá* de la vida, como único espacio posible para lo femenino" (30). This dynamic leads the difference between the sexes to also concretize the difference between liberty and slavery: "[y] el modelo de la libertad lo encarnan los varones" (30). La Camarona finds such a 'mas allá' via an appropriation of that masculinity through labor, which she claims throughout the story as her primary identity trait, but in such a way as to be acceptable by the higher strata of society. She also does it in a way that keeps her aligned with the feminine insofar as there is a connection between gender and biological sex.

In "La educación del hombre y de la mujer," Pardo Bazán precisely lays out the societal constraints that La Camarona will reject:

La mujer se ahoga, presa en las estrechas mallas de una red de moral menuda, menuda. Debercitos; gustar, lucir en un salón. Instruccioncita: música, algo de baile, migajas de historia, nociones superficiales y truncadas. Devocioncilla: prácticas rutinarias, genuflexiones, rezos maquinales, todo enano, raquíptico, como los albaricoqueros chinos. Falta el soplo de lo ideal, la línea grandiosa, la majestad, la dignidad, el brío. (80, cit. in González Martínez 25)

La Camarona tears these strictures asunder. Most prominently, in rejecting the son of the cannery owners—as close to nobility as her village can aspire—she claims that female leisure and being enclosed in a parlor would kill her (2: 55). She is also not subject to any of the 'moral' education

that was the main, if not the sole, element of a girls' learning:¹¹ not only does she not go to school, but her experience with religion is not one of empty prayers, but rather the intimate relationship with religion that comes with knowledge of the immediate proximity of death. Indeed, her indoctrination into the church is marked by her father recognizing that her connection to the sea is already doing much of the work of the christening itself: "al cristianar el señor cura a la recién nacida, el padre refunfuñó: 'Sal no era menester ponérsela, que bastante tiene en el cuerpo.'" (53). She also looks to find that ideal and grandiose world in the fury and the clean salt of the sea, but she does so in such a way that Pardo Bazán can bring her back in line with the biologically reductionist ideal of femininity that she promulgates, one based on the capacity to propagate. She finds the exact kind of freedom that matters to her, in a societally acceptable way, while still maintaining the element that, for Pardo Bazán, is key to femininity.

None of this would be possible, and this text would not be so illuminative for this study as a whole, were it not for the relationship that *la Camarona* has with the sea. In each stage of *la Camarona's* development, her key relationship is with the vast expanse of water. She is born in the shore, "entre sardinas y cangrejos" (53), in a way that makes her a creature of the water, while intentionally negating an invocation of the kind of ethereal or transcendent aqueous nature that we will see in the discussion of *La hija del mar* in the next chapter: "¿Dónde nació *la Camarona*? En el mar, lo mismo que Anfitrite..., pero no de sus candidas espumas, como la diosa griega, sino de su agua verdosa y su arena rubia" (53). In this space construction at the moment of her birth, the shore becomes the physical manifestation of the liminality between not

¹¹Even after 1870, when basic education for women started to become standard (Davies 27), their instruction centered in skills that would be useful in finding a good marriage, like housewifery and deportment. Skills like reading and writing were not standard, and even if these skills were included in the curriculum, their coverage was brief at best (Scanlon 15–17).

being and being. It creates the transition to independent life in the space between sea and land, which in turn makes her a creature *of* that space, rather than one who will come there to transition between stages or states as they are defined within straight society. The situation of her birth connects her to the sea both through location and through process: “salió de su apuro, y vino al mundo una niña como una flor, a quién su padre lavó acto continuo en la charca grande” (53). Her feminine fragility is underscored, by making her a flower, but by being bathed—in fact baptized, the Greek word *baptizein* means to immerse or dip in water—in a tide pool, her first contact with the physical, external world is with the salt water of the sea, rather than human society.

In childhood, both the activities and the construction of home—the space of safety—continue to strengthen her association with the water. Her games and toys are the infantilized version of an apprenticeship, wedding both the masculine and feminine elements of the piscatorial toil, familiarizing her with both the shellfish trade and the workings of the fishing boat: “Los juguetes de la niña fueron ‘navajas’, almejas y ‘berberechos’ [...]; su biberón para el destete, la amarga ‘salsa’; su mayor recreo, que le permitiesen agazaparse en el fondo de la lancha cuando salía a la pesca del ‘Múgil’ o a levantar los ‘palangres’ que sujetan al congrio” (54). Like work on a fishing boat itself, where there is no possibility of removing oneself from the work site while at sea, there is no place in la Camarona’s early childhood that is not impregnated with the salt water. The home that she grows up in is as much on the shore as her birth was: “La pareja de pescadores que trajo al mundo a la *Camarona* habitaba una casucha fundada sobre peñascos, y en las noches de invierno el oleaje subía a salpicar e impregnar de lastre la madera de su desvencijada mancilla” (53). While this description does emphasize the low socioeconomic status of la Camarona’s family, it also reinforces how things that are of the

sea would be comforting to her. Even la Camarona's name makes her explicitly a sea creature.

Not only that, but it links her labor practice to her physical appeal:

¿Que quién le puso el apodo de la Camarona? No se sabe. Tal vez la llamaron así porque a los siete años vendía 'pajes' de camarones, mientras su madre despachaba pesca de más valor; tal vez porque era bien hecha, firme y colorada como estos diminutos crustáceos (después de cocidos; no se figure algún malicioso que considero al camarón, si no el 'cardenal', el 'monaguillo' de los mares). (54)¹²

This conflation of work and desirability reinforces also the idea that her labor is the key element in her identity, discussed above.

Her impregnation with salt, present in all of the aspects of her life from the moment of her birth is key in her decision to marry Tomás, her father's apprentice. Even though she has no particular affect for him (radical, in that she is a woman), it is his being *of the sea* that matters to her. She chooses him because "al fin era cosa de mar" and, in the same way that the salt water is in and of her, "empapado en agua salobre y curtido por el aire marino, que trae en sus ondas vida y vigor" (55). He becomes, through his contact with the sea, worthwhile, and capable of not only joining her in the life that she wants to lead, but also in creating new life that is also of that salt

¹²These positive connotations of the 'camarón' in metaphoric descriptions of humans come in contrast with those in Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera's *Blanca Sol*, where, as discussed by Ana Peluffo, the protagonist's choice in husband is economically motivated: "Al igual que los poetas modernistas, con los que compite el proyecto literario de Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, el personaje de Blanca Sol se deja cautivar por una *imagería* aurífera compuesta de joyas, sedas y piedras preciosas. En el momento de elegir marido Blanca Sol se casa antisentimentalmente con un hombre al que desprecia, porque 'Cupido podía herir mejor con pesadas flechas de oro' (p. 16) y porque este la encandila con los magníficos pendientes y anillos de brillantes que esconde en grandes ramos de rosas rojas. (p. 16) Se dice asimismo que don Serafín era a los ojos de su esposa 'como los camarones: feo, chiquitito, colorado pero rico' (p. 15). En el esquema de valores de esta aspirante a 'cocotte' francesa el dinero ocupa un puesto mas alto que la virtud" (46).

element. In her investigation of material ecocriticism in the blue humanities, Serpil Oppermann signals the salinity of human fluids as our connection to the sea: “our oceanic origins play an important role in living and experiencing the sea, especially through our blood, which is ‘salty like sea water,’ and in the saline tears of our eyes” (“Storied Seas” 445–46). While Oppermann ties this salt connection to contemporary ecological concerns, as it creates “both a concern about our immersed existence (currently epitomized in contaminated fish consumption, plastic pollution, and radioactive waste in the oceans) and an illusion of critical distance to the global economic impulse of overexploitation and destruction of marine life” (Oppermann, “Storied Seas” 446), I would argue that for la Camarona this salt connection is what ties labor to physical and social freedom. The happiness of their marriage, like her decision to wed him, is as much in and of the sea as the rest of her life: “la pareja de gaviotas se pasa el día en la lancha, contenta, porque al ave le gusta su pobre nido” (55). Just as the description of la Camarona’s parents’ house reinforced both her salinity and their poverty, this description, the only description of their wedded life in this story, does the same.

The pragmatism of la Camarona’s decision to wed Tomás in order to stay with the sea merits one other angle of engagement, which, as alluded before, is the sentimentality expected of female characters in this period. Women characters are ruled by desire for love and mystery: “Si las creaciones del entendimiento influyen poco en la mujer, las del corazón la mueven y dominan pronta y enteramente” (González Martínez 13). According to González Martínez, the three elements in a lover most likely to fascinate a female character are being at once mysterious, practical, and sentimental (13). I would argue that, instead of a human lover, for la Camarona it is the agentive materiality of the sea that fulfills this tripartite role of the perfect lover. The sea is infinitely mysterious and sentimental. Its sentimentality was a key point in chapter 1, with the

sea as seducer, and “a contemplación do acuático leva á sensación do líquido, e a auga e as súas manifestacións van ser protagonistas da obra. Nela están símbolos universalmente compartidos, sobranceiramente do amor espiritual e carnal” (Rocha 13). For la Camarona the sea is also eminently practical, as all of her livelihood comes forth from it. The vast expanse of water is also salty: visceral, bawdy, embodied and of the body. Compare la Camarona’s desire for a husband to be “empapado en agua salobre y curtido por el aire marino, que trae en sus ondas vida y vigor” with this description of a woman as fresh water in Pardo Bazán’s “Amores”: “Así era la Casta, cerrado huerto, sellada fuente, llena tan sólo de agua clarísima” (*Cuentos completos* 3: 385). Contrarily, it is not plain pragmatism that dictates la Camarona’s marital decision, but rather a pragmatism related to human, instead of material partners.¹³

The final piece of la Camarona’s relationship with the sea comes after her marriage, with her pregnancy. There is no narration in the story of the wedding, and no embodiment of the sexual relationship between the spouses. Instead, la Camarona’s conception of her relationship to her unborn child only has space for one other: the sea. González Martínez has established Pardo Bazán’s tendency toward a dichotomy in her figuration of mothers: they are either virgin or flesh, with little room for shades of grey (44–45). While la Camarona does marry, the only references to her sexuality are first her virginity, “duro cuerpo virgen,” and her pregnancy: “El hijo que lleva en sus entrañas la Camarona no nacerá en el arenal, como nació su madre, sino a

¹³This form of pragmatism is a counterpoint to what Charnon-Deutsch has noted in the more bourgeois or upper class female characters she studies, who “are mostly housebound and therefore excluded from an appreciation of [the natural world]” (Charnon-Deutsch, *Narratives* 129), a situation that leads them to have a much less affective relationship with the natural, where “natural phenomena often overwhelm them, over-burden their senses, or leave them indifferent” (129). The potential for this kind of disassociation from the natural is another reason for la Camarona’s rejection of a more leisurely, higher class life, as her primary relationship is with the sea, accessed through her work.

bordo” (55). In this finalization of the female, vital side of the life cycle: from birth, to pubescence, to birth, la Camarona cements her decision to reject societal expectations of gendered labor, and to an extent of modernization and society itself. The sea is her element, and her freedom.¹⁴

The laboral transgression that la Camarona embodies is joined to a specifically sexual transgression in Espronceda’s “El pescador,” where the male poetic voice calls to his love, begging her to join him in order to “[su] pecho a consolar” (157). His request, that she come to be with him, is a double transgression: both in the laboral and the sexual realms. The first stanza establishes the three stages of location, with the separation of the shore’s liminality, as we saw in the previous chapter:

Pescadorcita mía,
Desciende a la ribera,
.....
Sentado en su barquilla,
Te canta su cuidado,
Cual nunca enamorado
Tu tierno pescador. (156)

These three locations (her home, the shore, his boat) set up both a trajectory connecting the sea to the water, and a distancing between the worlds of female versus male fisherfolk—a boundary that he asks her to cross. Additionally, though he is not actually asking her to come to the shore, as will become clear, the use of it evokes the sexual license that is part of its socio-material

¹⁴There is a sequel to this story, “La Guija,” in *Cuentos de la tierra*, where the child has been born. For them too, the sea is home: “El mar era su elemento, no la tierra” (3: 300). This continuation shows that la Camarona’s decision was successful.

existence. While he first says that he wants her to come to listen to him sing, his desire is quickly defined as a physical one, predicated on the liminality of the shore. They will be alone there (“aquí apartados, solos, / sin otros pescadores”; 156), and his desire is made material not only by his stating that he will kiss her, but also through the figuring of her lips, breath, and saliva as precious material goods:

Y en esos dulces labios
De rosas y claveles
El ámbar y las mieles
Que vierten libaré. (156)

And yet, this poem goes beyond the sexual liminality of the last chapter, because he wants her not only to come to the shore, but to come cross the boundary of the water; he wants her in his boat, with him, on the sea.

The next stage of his seduction, revealed in the use of the future of the indicative, is to craft or imagine for them the future that la Camarona had to fight against social expectation for: they will go to sea together (“La mar adentro iremos, / En mi batel cantando”; 157), and the plying of their trade, together, will adorn her as with jewels:

Regalarete entonces
Mil varios pececillos
Que al verte, simplecillos,
De ti se harán prender. (157)

This poem, which uses a piscatory costumbrism as the setting for an erotic love poem, instantiates a double transgression, based in but not limited to the implication of sexual congress. The lovers will not only use the liminal space of the shore to love outside of the bubble of social

mores, but if/by joining her fisherman on his boat, by sailing off with him and living freely together from the good will of the ocean itself, they will also be breaking down gendered labor, and inhabiting a space that is not coded as or for the feminine.¹⁵

To the Sea / In the Sea: The Power in Surrender

This second section will offer up the other theoretical vertex or single-slit of the entry into the water: the sublime of surrender. This sublime takes as its starting point the frisson of danger and desire explored briefly in chapter 1, but then it grows beyond its limits. This present exploration will hone in on encounters with grandeur that are marked not by passive overwhelm, nor by an aggressive desire to overcome, but by a giving over of the self. The surrender, the willful decision to submit, of this sublime is a negotiation of agency and a demonstration of a vibrancy for life in the face of overwhelming strength that illuminate a female subjectivity not based on the resistance of oppression, but instead on the exaltation and growth, even within an oppressive system. For a study that looks at female characters, from both male and female authors, and that seeks female agency and subjectivity in their experiences, the kind of sublime that will be investigated in this section both draws on and problematizes traditional, eighteenth century theories of the sublime, and fills a space between extant feminine or feminist conceptualizations of the theory.

The first elephant in the room is whether female people or characters can, in fact, experience the sublime, and why this study needs a sublime that differs more from the traditional

¹⁵The final piece of this fisherman's plea calls back to the relationship with danger in/from the sea in the previous chapter. Zubiaurre's asserts that women are in no danger from the sea, because they are the sea, as he contends that if she were to come to him, she would be heralded queen of the sea and her presence would calm the waves and keep them safe from all danger.

than by expanding the Kantian modality to a ‘universal subject’ that includes the feminine. Both Burke and Kant conceive of the sublime from within frameworks that state an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ that is very specific. Drawing from Christine Battersby’s female sublime, let us lay out those subjectivities:¹⁶ “The concept of personhood is integral to Kant’s moral system and also to his political ideals relating to autonomy and independence; but Kant was (at best) ambivalent about whether women count as moral beings or persons in the same sense as males” (Battersby 51). Women were not the only politically and socially disenfranchised group that Kant described as being either unable, or *under a moral directive not to* experience the sublime. As Battersby notes, in the *Anthropology*, Kant’s conception of the feminine is so rooted in biological essentialism that it pushes women away from the powerful feelings—and relationship to danger— of the sublime to the extent that “their duty is to remain also akin to his instinct-driven ‘animals’” (62), conveniently forgetting that the willingness to undergo labor and birth is in itself a practice in staring death in the face, particularly in the time at which he was writing. In concord with Kant, Burke’s ‘we’ is specific in terms of its position in sex and gender hierarchies, such that the sublime forces the subject to become passive, while the object of love is always and already subordinate to that subject: “Burke never made the adjustments to his vocabulary that would have been necessary had he registered that there could be another ‘we’ (women) who do not simply admire, but also love the sublime” (Battersby 7). Indeed, “[v]ia the framework of the Burkean ‘beautiful’, women [...] found themselves deprived of sisterhood with raw nature” (8). Taken more broadly, Burke’s theoretically universal ‘we’ cannot encompass anyone who is not always and already in a position of sociocultural privilege, exterior to the sublime encounter.

¹⁶I will come to the point at which my concept of the sublime differs from Battersby’s, but not only is her theory excellent in what it does, so too is her analysis of Kant.

This assumption of power in the subject who undergoes a sublime encounter is the main point that I would like to undo, insofar as it leads to the assumption that the will to dominate — or only its inverse: passivity or the incapacity to dominate— is fundamental to the third stage of the mathematical sublime. There are more reactions to “greatness of dimension” (Burke 130), or as Abreu Mendoza defines the mathematical sublime: first the sensation of loss —a horizontal immensity— followed by an experience of vertical immensity (16), then the will to dominate or the inability to act, the passive allowance for the self to be carried away. As Barbara Freeman asserts in her seminal *Feminine Sublime*, “rather than represent the object of rapture as way of incorporating it, as the traditional sublime of domination does, the feminine sublime does not attempt to master its objects of rapture” (3). This idea, that there are alternatives to the desire for mastery and subjugation, is key in understanding a sublime predicated on the agentive decision to surrender, in such a way that said surrendering creates a new vertex of freedom.

Doing the work of pushing against the presumed universal subject of the sublime is crucial, not only because it allows the female subjectivity that this chapter, indeed this whole study, explores. There has been a tendency to push Kant’s sexism and racism aside, to allow it to be an embarrassing footnote, and to extrapolate universals from what he very plainly states is the anthropology of the powerful white man (Battersby 66–67). It is clearly necessary to stop assuming the universality of the powerful. Another part of the necessity of seeking different modalities of the sublime arises from the time period of this study, as the Romantic ethos really only flourishes in spaces not covered by the Kantian system:

There are gaps in the Kantian system: gaps occupied by the ‘unrepresentable’: by emotion; sexual desire; and even by a powerful feminine ‘Isis’ as the construct (and limits) of the imagination. It was in these gaps that Romanticism flowered and in which

women Romantics drew breath. But none of this makes the Kantian universe a space in which I, as a feminist philosopher, can move freely. The ‘feminine’ principle so often advocated by the Romantics is a trap for women, since it treats femininity as ‘other’, and as excessive to an ego that is normalized as male. (Battersby 16)

The sublime that this chapter delves into engages with emotion, with desire —sexual desire and desire for autonomy—, and other markers of the Romantic moment. It also builds a powerful female subjectivity that is not defined by a longing to *be male* or to approximate masculine power.

There are other aspects of the sublime that need to be examined or questioned before we can come to them from within the modality that I use. The first is the idea of fear and danger. For Burke and Kant, the sublime seems definitionally to be related to the fear that is the experience of feeling less than something *when one is accustomed to occupying the position of most baseline privilege*. The first piece of this was already hinted at above, which is Kant’s assertion that because they have children, women should not be exposed to any danger, that they should “be timorous in the face of physical danger. Since the future of the human race is in the hands — or rather the womb— of women, to ensure the continuance of the species women should be concerned with their own physical safety. [...] Kant’s women are thus not incapable of becoming ‘persons’ in the full sense that Kant outlines his *Religion*, but have no duty to do so” and it would be better if they didn’t (Battersby 61–62). And yet, women are more than walking wombs, to be wrapped in cotton and kept in bed from menarche to menopause. Indeed, as we saw in the last chapter with female sexual agency in a context where women are not “supposed” to have any sexual desire at all, human (female) activity often differs from the “ideal” put forward by a patriarchal system, even when it is not a radically political rejection of that system.

What comes of that danger is fear —and fear of pain, specifically— which is the birthplace of the sublime.¹⁷ Kant too emphasizes that violence, the experience of pain, and a peculiar kind of pleasure are each bound up with one another: indeed, the notion of sublimity as an aesthetic category is put forward to explain the “negative pleasure’ that has pain as one of its principal constituents (Freeman 74). And yet, in the conception of pain that Burke puts forth, there is again a stated position of baseline privilege, that comes hand in hand with an unaccustomedness to pain that is not the experience of most humans, particularly female-bodied ones. Burke’s discussion of pain, of the terror that it naturally inspires, and that it is always forced upon the subject, is telling of this crux:

pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, *because we never submit to pain willingly*. So that strength, violence, pain, and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together. Look at a man, or any other animal of prodigious strength, and what is your idea before reflection? Is it that this strength will be subservient to you, to your ease, to your pleasure, to your interest in any sense? No; the emotion you feel is, lest this enormous strength should be employed to the purposes of rapine and destruction. That power derives all its sublimity from the terror with which it is generally accompanied. (Burke 139; my emphasis).

If we never submit to pain willingly, explain to me the breastfeeding of a child with new, pearly, sharp teeth. Explain to me first-time penis in vagina sex that ruptures tissue. Or corsets. Or masochism. Even where there is another power dynamic at play —as one could argue that fashion or the husband are ‘superior’ to the female subject tying her stays or losing her

¹⁷“Of *feeling* little more can be said than that the idea of bodily pain, in all the modes and degrees of labor, pain, anguish, torment, is productive of the sublime; and nothing else in this sense can produce it.” (Burke 165).

virginity— that does not mean that the pain suffered is not done so willingly. This conception of pain as something to always be avoided is definitionally that of the class of people that is at the top of the balance of privilege and oppression: never experiencing inevitable, even willingly suffered pain is a male, white privilege. But I also do not want to equate all willing pain to female-gendered, or biologically-female bodies.¹⁸ In all vulnerability there is the potential for pain; Chatterton certainly went willingly to pain, and I would argue that willingness to emotional intimacy is in itself a willingness to experience pain.¹⁹

With Chatterton, the specter of death rises, and with it another problem in Burke's definitions of fear. While a full exploration of water suicide will come in the next two chapters, the will to death, and/or the willingness to die —appositional to Burke but so present in the Romantic ethos— will appear here. Burke's terror of death, then, needs a moment of consideration. He posits that the fear of pain is only superseded by that of death:

But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible;

¹⁸Indeed, this is where my conception of the sublime distances itself from Battersby's, which is predicated on the em-body-ment of people who can grow new humans and birth them. She marks the problem in a female sublime as the rejection of materiality (in any form) in the history of sublimity, while materiality is intrinsically linked to the female (Battersby 105). Her theory is of the 'female' rather than the 'feminine' sublime, because "'femaleness' is linked to embodiment in a way that 'femininity' is not" (Battersby 102). I admire her work greatly though the sublimity of the water that I proffer is not based on biology. In fact, I see it in male voices and characters as well.

¹⁹Alfonsina Storni and Virginia Woolf of course, also embody the sublime death-wish, but I have used Chatterton as the referent her due to his ubiquity in treatments of the sublime in the context of Romanticism.

but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience. (Burke 111)

While none of the sublime experiences in this chapter culminate in the choice to die, the real possibility of death does hang heavily over them. And there is still delight in that potential, in the possibility that that ‘king of terrors’ will be the outcome. Indeed, as the choice to submit to grandeur (this chapter’s sublime) is an agentic choice, so too will the choice to die be shown to be agentic in “orders of discourse through which women exert agency, even as they confront its limits” (Freeman 6). What is more, the sublime encounters here have no denouement, but rather end with the question of death still open.²⁰

One final point of comparison to Burke and Kant: verticality and horizontality. I have no issue with the first two steps of the mathematical sublime, and Burke’s hierarchy of greatness and dimension. First: the vastness that is horizontal; then the recognition of the vastness that is

²⁰Joann Zylinska’s feminine sublime is also predicated on a nearness to death: “The feminine sublime does not domesticate the object that might be a source of threat but rather accepts the amorous relationship of pleasure and pain, life and death, and the potential dispersal of the self” (31), but the welcoming of death that she proposes comes from the embodiment of a lack of subjectivity, rather than a non-masculine one, so my engagement with her here is slight. Zylinska claims that it is both political and ethical to base femininity on its being always ‘different/deferred’ rather than on actual markers of individual identity: “All this allows me to read [Derrida’s] *Spurs* as an important feminist text, opening up the concept of ‘woman’ to a plurality that is not reduced to the politically visual markers of identity, such as class, sexuality and age. What distinguishes Derrida’s feminism from an essentialist-feminist standpoint, then, is the way in which he thinks about identity. As Alice Jardine puts it, ‘For Derrida, the questions of how women might accede to subject hood, write surviving texts, or acquire a signature of their own, are the wrong questions —eminently phallogocentric questions.’ If, for Derrida, identity ‘comes only from alterity called by the other,’ femininity must be seen as always different/deferred and never reduced to the politically significant markers of presence. This, I believe, is both a political and an ethical way of speaking of ‘woman’” (Zylinska 15). The fundamental difference in our ideations of the importance of female subjectivity has led me not to engage deeply with Zylinska, though she does read the sublime in being overcome. She does so through the inhabiting of the lack of subjectivity that patriarchy sees in women, as she uses the term ‘woman’ “*for the representation of femininity in Western thought*, but also for the potential disruption that is inherent in this figure of representation” (Zylinska 14; my emphasis).

vertical; then the response (for Kant the desire to dominate; for us, the decision to submit). Similar to Kant's progression, Burke has a hierarchy of impact, where a great length is less impactful than a great depth (147). The location of the sublime found in this chapter, the ocean, is both length *and* depth. Understood in the order that Kant suggests, the sea's breadth strikes us before its unknowable depths. Indeed, in her feminine sublime, Barbara Freeman evinces the ocean as the epitome of the sublime (28), and pushes back against other feminist readings that have tried to write the ocean as only fulfilling and freeing (32). It cannot be separated from its danger; its potential for death. It is not a less dangerous sea in her feminine sublime, it is rather an acceptance of that danger and terror as a part of it, and the choice to engage with it in full knowledge of the great potential for pain and death. And yet, the interaction with danger that Freeman posits is a passive one, as opposed to the agentive choice to submit that I proffer. She suggests that the encounter with the sublime sea is "*not self-presence but self-dispersal;*" it invites the soul "to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (15), "and what it instills is the desire for loss" (32). For Freeman, interaction with the sublime sea is commensurate not with subjectivity, but with a loss of self: the "first swim is neither an attempt to appropriate the ocean's power nor a submission to it. It does not represent a struggle for dominance over a force that, as in Homer, has the power to engulf her, but rather, as in Sappho, allows a relation to 'the unlimited' in which she seeks 'to lose herself' (20). In another instance Freeman explains that "swimming offers a way of entering apartness; finding her 'self' is, paradoxically, a matter of entering the water of the Gulf of Mexico and learning how to lose that which she has found" (Freeman 31). While this passive acceptance of being overcome is a reaction to the sublime that I agree with, I also believe that the agentive subjectivity that comes with choice matters.

In theorizing the sublime sea, there is a divergence between its fury and its calm. The shipwreck is ubiquitous in Romantic art of the sublime; the sailors straining to make themselves safe, to ride these wild waves, are having a sublime experience. But so too is a solitary figure, in a tiny boat, on the surface of a calm sea. It has the horizontal vastness (step one), and, by floating over the depths, it holds the vertical too. No need for aggression in the waters, their calmness is just as dangerous. It is a danger that is tied to the call of water death, whether seductive (as we will see in Gómez de Avellaneda) or circumstantial (in Valencia and then Massanés).²¹

Whereas “Kant’s theory of the sublime is a defense against the threat of formlessness, a way of keeping materiality and excessive magnitude at bay” (Freeman 83), my modality of the sublime is not a defense against the material, against the loss of form or self. It is instead a recognition of the presence of danger or the possibility of death concomitant to that excessive magnitude, and instead of defending against it, a decision to lean into it. What we see here is one path of what can happen when that desire to dominate is not of the nature of the subject experiencing the sublime; when they make the decision to ‘dejarse llevar’. It is a sublime that is not predicated on holding the most privileged position. This project explores this vertex of the sublime in female subjectivity, but it is not limited to the female. Nor is it the passive failure to overcome or disintegration of self of Zylinska’s and Freeman’s feminine sublimines. Neither is it rooted in the biological embodiment of the feminine, as in Battersby’s feminine sublime. It sits between them, reveling in the excess that can sweep the subject away, turning the horror of fear

²¹In his dissertation on the sublime in nineteenth-century Latin America, Carlos Abreu Mendoza leans into this seduction, though always with the goal of overcoming the temptation to give in, whether actively or passively: “Al igual que en el sublime propuesto por Schiller, el sujeto masculino construido por los textos modernistas se asocia con Ulises en tanto que siempre está a punto de sucumbir a la tentación de dejarse llevar por la sensualidad de Calypso o Circe, mujeres con poderes mágicos que lo distraen de su alta misión” (106).

of pain, as Burke would have it, into an acceptance of pain, of being smaller and less significant. The key here is that to submit, to give over to something grander than the self, does not have to be a weakness or passivity.²²

A couple of examples of this type of sublime can demonstrate the agency and the will involved in giving oneself over to the sublime and to the danger that it holds. The two poems from which these examples are drawn, Gómez de Avellaneda's "Al mar" and Carolina Valencia's "En el mar" explore sublime experiences from both the edge of the sea, and from within it. Aurora Roselló has signaled the sea as a site that melds the rational and the sentimental in Gómez de Avellaneda's poetry, explaining that "la contemplación del espectáculo grandioso del mar deja en su espíritu la más profunda impresión," which holds space for both "meditación filosófica" and "razonamiento poético" (154).²³ While "Al mar" starts as an apostrophic ode to the sea, the center section is the poetic voice's imaginings of what the waves say to her. The dialogue with the (imagined) spirit of the water reveals an acceptance of the danger of the water, that is, a conscious choice to engage with the danger that is echoed and reinforced at the close of the poem, as the ode resumes a natural interlocutor.

²²A complete exploration of this modality of the sublime would engage not only with feminine subjects, but others who do not occupy the same position as the Western white colonial male subject, from Sufi mystics and indigenous American cultures, to other subaltern groups in Europe, as well as connecting with contemporary discourses such as those on sadomasochism, barebacking and power exchange. And in those identities, experiences of the sublime that are not predicated on the desire to be masculine, or to achieve or adhere to the strictures of toxic masculinity.

²³Roselló also claims that both of Gómez de Avellaneda's poems that will be treated in this chapter, "Al mar" and "La pesca en el mar," are poems where "el tema específico corresponde a la visión de la naturaleza, del paisaje real objetivo apreciado a través del subjetivismo plástico y colorista de la autora" (153). While we will be reading beyond this mimetic reflection, it is valuable to hold in mind that these poems are part of a larger corpus linked by its representation of the natural world.

The first two stanzas of the poem establish both the fear and the enjoyment that make the confrontation with the sea a sublime experience. The poetic voice also marks it explicitly as sublime, which makes this a somewhat facile example, and in doing so reaches toward the Kantian sublime, marked by that urge to recuperate reason in the relationship with the astonishing. In the first stanza she asks the sea to pause in its “eterno movimiento,” to stop the “hórrido bramar” that leaves her full of “espanto,” that it might be possible for reason to measure its grandeur (20). The second stanza reinforces the clash of reason versus grandeur:

Del infinito imagen terrífica y sublime,
concíbete la mente temblando el corazón;
tu inmensidad severa con su poder me oprime,
y comprenderte no osa mi tímida razón. (20).

The fear that she experiences acts as a block for her understanding’s ability to measure and qualify the scope of the material entity with which she is faced.²⁴ Her physical reaction to the immensity brings in, as did Zambrana’s poem in the last chapter, the physiological symptoms often tied to the amorous: here both the trembling of the heart, and the desire in the first stanza to —along with capturing the immensity with reason— “en tu húmeda llanura tranquilo reposar” (20). This last verse, of course, invokes the space of the shore as a languid and erotically charged

²⁴The use of “tímida” here as a modifier of “razón,” beginning the experience of the sublime with a diminution of her reason, demonstrates what Kirkpatrick has observed about the friction in Gómez de Avellaneda’s work between the use of Romantic ideals, her own experience of gender, and her knowledge of societal conceptions of it. From her earliest writings, Gómez de Avellaneda “draws on Romantic literary models while registering acute awareness that these models were antithetical to the cultural pattern of feminine existence” (Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas* 135). Kirkpatrick’s discussion of Gómez de Avellaneda’s early epistolary autobiography, sent to her long-time infatuation, Ignacio de Cepeda, uses the idea of sublimity as one of the markers of the Romantic subjectivity that wars with feminine self-abnegation in this text. See *Las Románticas*, 135–45.

space. The play of emotion: fear, desire, and confounded reason, epitomizes the dual affect of the sublime: “Medrosa si contempla tu indómita pujanza, / Y atónita si admira tu augusta majestad” (20). What we see here is fear and astonishment, with the frisson of awe and desire.

If “Al mar” stayed there, it would not be a very good example for this kind of sublimity, which is not, after all, based on the recuperation of reason and finding the ability to measure and quantify the grandiose. As it continues, however, the poetic voice addresses the spirit that lives in the sea, and recounts what she hears in the waves. It is both a stylistic break from the traditional ode to nature, and a break from this quest for reason in chaos. The poem, through the kind of intra-action and sensuality that we saw in the first chapter, arrives to a surrender to the sea that is freeing for the poetic voice. We first see the build in passion that is a storm and then the break in tension that we saw in “Es, ¡oh joven!, nuestra vida” in chapter 1. The storm is characterized by the verticality of the sublime: “Coloso formidable te he visto en tu osadía, / Para escalar el cielo, montañas levantar” (20), while the calm after the peak of passion again evokes languidness as node of erotic meaning:

Mas luego —quebrantado tu poderoso orgullo—

Atleta ya vencido mirábate rendir

Y en la ribera humilde, con lánguido murmullo,

Rodabas por la arena tus orlas de zafir. (20)

The sexualized sea then becomes the seducer: “Tal vez, cuando en la playa tus olas me seguían, / Mirándolas, y oyendo su plácido rumor” (21), but then this sensual intra-action goes to even more dangerous places. It becomes darker, and more insistent, through her reading of a human —rather than material— will in the sound of the waves:

—«Palacios te guardamos (pensé que me decían)

En antros solitarios, ignotos al dolor.

¡Ven, pues, a nuestros brazos! Apaga en nuestros senos

El fuego que devora tu estéril juventud...

Ven, pues, alma doliente y gozarás al menos

Lejos del mundo loco pacífica quietud!

.....

¡ Ven, pues; a nuestro impulso tranquila te abandona;

Que nuestras hondas simas descanso y paz te den;

De perlas y corales ciñéndote corona,

Que apague los latidos de tu abrasada sien!» (21)

This dialogue, put into words through her desire to decode the material agency of the sea, expresses the allure of the conflation of desire and fear through an invocation of suicide. The poetic voice, in that she is creating this dialogue from the seductive sense-scape of the sea, wants the fear and the danger. And death. What is more, the strength in this mortal seduction comes not from the roar and rage that upset reason, but for the invitation to choose passivity, to choose to give over, clearly delineated in the imperative “abandónate” and the idea that the death will bring “descanso y paz” as well as the quenching of the fire that is her emotion, her poetic self, which it twice offers to sate.

Through this intra-action with the sea, that is, this seduction to give herself over to it, the poetic voice processes the confrontation with its sublimity, and without choosing to die. While the poem begins with a demand for cessation (“Suspende, mar, suspende tu eterno movimiento”; 20), it ends by urging the sea to retain its violence, to continue to cause awe, fear, and desire. The end of her sublime encounter—markedly and intentionally sublime—is neither an attempt to

master, nor an inability to, but rather a choice of the fear, of the danger. The final three stanzas all include imperatives to that effect. The first of these stanzas creates a parallelism between the human and the water in their activity, grandeur, and vivacity:

Prosigue, ¡Mar!, prosigue tu eterno movimiento,
Cual sigue de mi vida la ardiente actividad,
Pues eres noble imagen del móvil pensamiento,
Que es como tú grandioso, con calma o tempestad. (22)

The final two verses connect the experience of pleasure and fear in facing the grandeur and danger of the sea with the experience of God, where surviving the “olas formidables,” and the “furor cruel” of the sea is a means of strengthening faith: “Así la fe se eleva, y en lo interior del alma / —Mil choques resistiendo— conserva su vigor... / ¡Prosigue, Mar, prosigue” (22; ellipsis in original). The continued experience of something indomitable, and the continued experience of it as more powerful than the self is the thing that frees her reason, trapped at the outset of the poem.

The other example that I would offer of this kind of sublime intra-action with the sea is in Carolina Valencia’s “En el mar,” published in her volume *Poesías* (1890).²⁵ The sea is calm in the present experience of it in this poem, but in the recognition of its verticality and its potential for violence, the poetic voice introduces the danger of the sea’s sublimity. Through an apostrophic address and the use of a series of interrogatives, the sea is also set up as an

²⁵Born in Valladolid, Carolina Valencia published poetic work in *El Nacional*, *El Movimiento Católico*, *La Ilustración Española*, *El Universo*, *La Lealtad*, and later the *Revista Castellana*. In 1891, she was awarded the *medalla de oro* by the Real Academia Española for her poem “A San Juan de la Cruz” (Jiménez Faro 321, Vallejo González 157). The book from which this poem is drawn, *Poesías*, was prologued by Emilia Pardo Bazán —known for not speaking out in support of other female authors (Tolliver 43). Pardo Bazán spoke very highly of Valencia’s skill and craft, faulting her only for not breaking into androgyny with her content and poetic voice.

interlocutor —introducing it as an agentive participant in this moment—, similarly to the Castro poem discussed in the last chapter. From the start, where this experience of the sea is established as a first contact, the poem focuses on size (“tu pasmosa grandeza”; (7)) and sensuality. This encounter is differentiated from Gómez de Avellaneda’s “Al mar” by the position of the poetic voice. She is not on the shore, but rather in a small boat on the sea itself, already within its power:

¡Por fin surco tus ondas cristalinas
Mientras con muelle languidez aspiro
La plácida frescura
De tus auras marinas,
Que en incansable y revoltoso giro
Acarician mi frente con dulzura!... (7; ellipsis in original).

While the experience that she describes is a pleasant one, being on the ocean is impossible without a recognition of the verticality of its depth. The size and motion of the ocean, all around her, signal that deep menace.

The description of the sea continues to contrast the small and encompassable (the beautiful) with the huge and uncontrollable. In order to make the sea comprehensible, the water that is described in its smallness is individual drops separated from the mass: “Y el golpe acompasado de los remos / Levante esas esferas cristalinas” (7). These spheres are compared to multiple precious substances (gold, emerald, diamond), before losing both form and substance through contact with the human: “Que cual lluvia de chispas diamantinas / Bajan después á salpicar mi falda.” (7). The fall of the drops onto her skirts is mixes demure femininity with sexuality, as there is no invitation on her part, no overt contact —they do not coat her skin or

hair, she does not reach out to catch them—but, like the flash of an ankle getting into a carriage, the physicality of her skirts, made more eye-catching by the sparkle of the drops, draws attention to her body, to what lies under that skirt that might also, in the experience of pleasure and the heightened sensory state that comes with fear, glisten with moisture. This is the smallness and fragility of the drops that are the sea, but also by being absorbed by her clothing they are encompassable by logic and reason.

In contrast, the horizontal vastness of the sea breaks that capacity to understand and to encompass: “Ni pensé que á mis ojos surgirías / Con esas nacaradas lejanías / Do aparecen inmóviles tus olas...” (8; ellipsis in original). The distance that creates a cognitive dissonance between what the poetic voice can feel (the movement of the waves) and what she can see (this still distance) creates space for sublime fear, even within the context of a calm sea: “¡Que seas tan hermoso y tan temible!...” (8; ellipsis in the original). The mixing of the small and precious with the vastness of the expanse allows for the mixing of desire, pleasure, and fear: fear of the thing that is incomprehensible because of its vastness. Even in the calm sea, the danger that it holds is always and already present, and its calmness signals an even more powerful potential for violence:

¿Quién al verte hoy dijera,
Mirándote tan manso y apacible,
Que si estalla tu saña aterradora
Y tus instintos de indomable fiera,
En el choque violento
De la ruda tormenta asoladora
Harás temblar la tierra con tu aliento? (8–9)

Through this interrogative dialogue with the sea, who is not raging in this moment, she creates a literary sublime for herself. In its stillness, the sea is always and already that potentiality of obliteration. The poem continues in this vein for a time, laying out the deadly danger of the sea, characterized by its “rugido” with which “al mundo estremec[e] / y al nauta dej[a] de pavor transido,” as well as with its “furores,” its “pasos destructores” and its “formidables cataclismos” (9).

The full recognition of the sea’s grandeur also negates the possibility of a Kantian reaction to the sublime, as it posits that only God is able to dominate the fury of the sea: “Sólo aquel Dios que tu soberbia humilla / Domando tus fierezas en la orilla” (10). It is this sea, the *potentially* dangerous sea, that causes the sublime experience and builds an incomprehensibility:

No sé cantarte ¡oh mar!... no tengo aliento

No encuentro voces en mi torpe lira

Para decir lo que al mirarte siento

Y lo que a mi turbado pensamiento

Tu incomprendible majestad inspira. (11).

And yet, that inability to articulate a response within reason through formalized language (song, verse, music) does not cause a will to dominate. Neither has will her been overcome to the point of rendering her passive. The overwhelmingness is pleasurable: “Y ante grandeza tanta / El aliento se hiela en mi garganta / Y mi cantar desmaya y languidece” (11). There is no anger at being less than, no desire to control, but also no loss of self or fading to passivity: the lack of power is experienced as pleasure.

The poetic voice reads this same pleasure mixed with the possibility of death in the fishermen hauling their catch to the shore (placing herself, again, within that sea that could eat

them). The fishing boats are returning, “Con esos bravos hijos que en tí viven, / Á tí confían sin temor su suerte, / De tí el sustento con placer reciben / Y en tí quizás encontrarán la muerte” (11). In responding to this sublimity, the poetic voice expresses a desire for the sea to be calm and reflecting the sky, but even in saying that, she returns to its potential to harm, to fury: the calmness of a calm sea is what provokes the sublime mixing of fear and desire. She asks the sea to be kind to the shipwrecked, to carry them, in its might and power, safely to shore. She too, is at this moment in a boat, within the power of the sea. Through the imagined shipwreck she is also relinquishing her own safety over to the sea. She is trusting in its dominance within its own realm. It is a negotiation of risk, or an acceptance of the danger and the verticality and the power of this things that is so great she cannot even put it properly into words (“no sé cantarte”; 11).

This kind of sublimity represents a negotiation of agency, rather than passivity or a desire to dominate. In the unknown, the potential for harm without the narration of the harm itself, there is space for a fuller experience of life. It allows for a vibrancy for life: even if the superstructure—whether nature or society— does not allow the transgression of certain limits, there is decision making about how to engage with those limits and the space within them. Such space for ambiguity, in and of itself, is a breaking of the rules of order, expectation, and submissive passivity.

Women Workers on Sublime Seas

The first two sections of this chapter looked at maritime labor and the sublime separately. This section will see where they come together, and how these two refractions of the image of the woman in the water—female labor and the agentive power in submission— together negotiate a new space for the feminine within societal structures. The two poems treated in this

section, “La pesca en el mar” by Gómez de Avellaneda and “Elena la pescadora” by Josepa Massanés,²⁶ follow similar structures. Both instances begin with the narration of an entry into the sea, followed by a second half in the form of a song sung by the poetic voice. In both there is a giving over of the self to the sea —related to its latent danger and their labor— that creates a space for freedom in ambiguity.

While it is out of chronology, we’ll start with “La pesca en el mar,” as this poem starts by, and holds tighter to, the shore. Roselló sees this poem as offering “un anochecer en la playa desierta donde el rumor de las olas es murmullo y convida a gozos profundos y ardientes” (154). While this is true, those pleasures are found neither alone, nor on the shore, but with a lover on a boat. Furthermore, the first half of the poem (the narrative) holds a plural subjectivity that both establishes the shore’s erotic liminality and sets the action of the poem within the bounds of maritime labor.

The poetic narrative starts at evening time, with a female poetic voice running to meet the fishermen at the shore. The first part of the poem establishes her work, and also sets the stage of the empty beach at evening, where an encounter can happen. As they arrive, “La playa desierta

²⁶The book *Poesías*, in which this poem appears, was published by Massanés in 1841. It was the first nineteenth century anthology in Spain by a woman (Navas Ruiz 7). Massanés was very well respected in her lifetime and won many awards and much renown, but quickly disappeared from public consciousness and from the canon after her death (7–8). As we saw with Arolas, this erasure is not a marker of the quality of her work. Massanés was born in Catalunya. Her mother died when she was 5, and in raising her, her father taught her to read and write while her grandparents charged themselves with her more feminine education. Her father spent three years in exile in France from 1830, after being condemned to death for liberal politics. During the period, she supported herself by needlework, but when he returned, she turned to the pen. After her marriage in 1843, Massanés spent much of her life moving from place to place in Catalunya and Spain (Navas Ruiz 9). From 1859 onwards, she only wrote in Catalan, and dedicated her work to the *Renaixença*, work which continued to be very popular and to win many awards (11).

parece” (217), inhabited only by the waves and the soft sound that they make as they caress the beach. This solitude and silence are interrupted by the purpose of the arrival at the beach:

¡Corramos!... ¡Quién llega primero!

Ya miro la lancha...

.....

¡Ya escucho la voz del nauclero,

Que el lino despliega

Y al soplo lo entrega

.....

¡Partamos! La plácida hora

Llegó de la pesca,

Y al alma refresca

La bruma del mar. (217–18)

Across the boundary of the line of the water, there is a plural subjectivity that connects both male and female fisherfolk, and that brings the amorous liminality of the shore into the context of performing labor that is not only pleasant, but also identitary in its linking of its participants to a strong relationship with the sea.

This plural subjectivity is replaced with a singular one in the second half of the poem, the song that they sing to accompany labor. In its introduction, the song establishes the liberation inherent in the sea: “Del libre ambiente / La voz ardiente / Del corazón” (218). The song starts immersed in this freedom and immediately after the barrier of the edge of the water is transgressed. The shore is now traded for the sea, and solitude and a plural subjectivity switches to the presence of a lover:

Me enajena al lucir de la luna
Con mi bien estas olas surcar,
Y no encuentro delicia ninguna
Como amar
Y cantar
En el mar. (218)

Being in the sea, with her lover, as a female person involved in piscatory endeavors, is a way to access pleasure that takes her out of quotidian experience, as ‘enajenar’ walks the line between entrancing and driving mad.²⁷ The structure of this first stanza is echoed in all of the song within the poem. We find the three decasyllabic lines followed by three tetrasyllabic lines, each ending in an oxytone. This structure creates metric space at the end of each line through the additional syllable added in the count for this type of word. Ending each of these verses with a closed consonant makes the beat of the rowing song, conjuring the striking of a drum. Additionally, as all of the stanzas of the song end literally and literarily in the sea (“En el mar” —there is only one of these final lines that differs by using a preposition that genders the sea otherwise: “Al bramar / Sin cesar / De la mar”; 218)—, each stanza cements the setting as within the water, rowing, while simultaneously opening out to the infinite at the end of each stanza. In a first step, the actions preceding this repeated setting focus the poem in a labor-based rationale, but then the accompanying repetition steps toward an entry into the sea linked to the enjoyment of sexuality and to the nearness of death.

²⁷For a close reading of a similarly magical night in Gómez de Avellaneda’s poem “La noche de insomnio y el alba,” see Zaldívar (174–76).

The sexuality that is allowed for the two that are alone together on the boat is inscribed in the form of long breaths (“suspiros”), and the literal synching of hearts and lungs:

Los suspiros de amor anhelantes

¿Quién, ¡oh, amigos!, querrá sofocar,

Si es tan grato a los pechos amantes

A la par

Suspirar

En el mar? (219)

The interrogative formation of this description of the erotic renounces the norms that the narrated actions break, making the amorous congress that is possible on the sea as natural and as needful as breathing. This sexuality is followed quickly by a recognition of danger, and an enjoyment of the sublime: “¿No sentís que se encumbra la mente / Esa bóveda inmensa al mirar?” (219). The use of ‘bóveda’ [celestial vault, but also a tomb or crypt] signals both the endless dome of sea/sky and the darker vault that is the resting place of the dead. This exalted observation causes “un goce profundo y ardiente” (219) that comes not with the physical pleasures, but with the cognitive experience of that immensity: “en pensar / y admirar / en el mar” (219). This use of ‘admirar,’ echoing the verbiage used to describe the sublime in “Al mar” at the beginning of this chapter, sets up, within this single stanza, the whole trajectory of the sublime experience: from the recognition of enormity, to approaching it from reason, to the outcome, which is admiration and pleasure from within the immensity.

Being in the boat is also a literal freedom, a freedom from the *litoral*. This distance from the shore establishes a place where the world can not only be set aside (as in the last chapter), but also forgotten entirely:

Ni un recuerdo del mundo aquí llegue

Nuestra paz deliciosa a turbar;

Libre el alma al deleite se entregue

De olvidar

Y gozar

En el mar. (219)

The sea is a place where there is a freedom *to* love, and a freedom *from* society, where one can make the choice to ‘entregarse’ and ‘dejarse llevar.’ It is a sexual liberty, yes. It is also a freedom in labor from societal expectation and stricture. It is physical freedom as well. The second poem that we will read in this section of the chapter takes the relationship between sexual desire and the nearness of death to another level. “Elena la pescadora,” written in October of 1839 by Josepa Massanés, has a similar structure to that used by Gómez de Avellaneda in “La pesca en el mar”: roughly the first half of the poem is a third person narrative, followed by a song sung by the character that was established in that first part. This song, like the one discussed above, is structured with shorter lines at the end of each stanza, culminating in a repeated, though not identical, chorus. Here, rather than being about the sea, the chorus references death.

Massanés, as the first female author to publish a poetry anthology in Spain, sits at a crucial point in terms of the rationalizing of female authorship in the peninsula. Susan Kirkpatrick’s *Las Románticas* gives an excellent analysis of the prologue to Massanés’s *Poesías*, focusing on the way that Massanés framed her peri-text to smooth her entry into the literary world and make her palatable to her readers, saying that her prologue “prefigured the defensive strategies that would characterize most of her generation’s claims on behalf of women” (281). While her rationales for female intellectual liberation were based on Spanish liberal enlightenment ideologies

(Kirkpatrick 281; Scanlon 21), Massanés's push for female emancipation was only partial, focusing on the intellectual, and even there is framed around the female role as mother and wife raising a new generation. As Kirkpatrick puts it, "[h]er representation of women's intellectual aspirations, her arguments in their behalf, are all shaped to reassure and propitiate a readership for whom women's subordinate, domestic role cannot be questioned." (281). And yet, while Kirkpatrick reads Massanés's prologue as "self-protective and therefore conformist" as opposed to Gómez de Avellaneda's "protofeminist" peri-text to *Sab* (182–83), her poetry itself, which Kirkpatrick does not treat, breaks gendered expectations in terms of erotic agency and female will.

Navas Ruiz comments on Massanés's rule-breaking depiction of female erotic agency in his introduction to her *Antología poética*, focusing on the poem "Amor," which he shows as a "diálogo consciente con la erótica vigente: usando el mismo código, Massanés ha afirmado discretamente lo que de alguna manera representaba una revolución: la mujer como sujeto y no como objeto, la búsqueda activa, la capacidad de selección, el goce físico" (26). In this and three other poems, including the one that we will read here, he sees that "la ruptura con la visión de moda de lo femenino se ha consumado decididamente. Emerge en ellos la mujer real con sus deseos, sus juegos eróticos, su pragmatismo" (26). On "Elena la pescadora" he comments the way that she is apart from different standards of femininity, leaving her strong and capable, and also aware of her own sexual allure. He also comments on her freedom: "Pero, sobre todo, es libre: la barca que maneja es el símbolo de su libertad como el barco lo era de la del pirata" (27).²⁸ All of this is true, and does indeed show the rupture of social expectation and the

²⁸The variable gendering of boats that we see in this chapter (barca, barco, barquecillo, barquilla, etc.), like that of the sea itself, could be illuminative if subjected to a quantitative analysis in terms of the boat's relationship with its crew. This relevant work merits attention in a separate

strictures of femininity. However, Navas Ruiz, as his treatment of the poem is by necessity very brief, leaves it at that. By including the relationship between the woman and the sea, in her giving herself over to it, and in the transgression of laboral norms by taking to sea in that ship, this poem does much more in terms of deconstructing traditional femininity than even Navas Ruiz has credited it with.

Like in Gómez de Avellaneda's poem, the first half of "Elena la pescadora" is narrative, examining her character and her entry into the sea, though Elena enters the water itself, rather than coming to the shore, and does so alone, further alienating the action of the poem from the expected role of a young woman in the fishing trade:

Cuando en la tirrena orilla
el sol caldea la arena,
entra la graciosa Elena
dentro de frágil barquilla. (97)

The fragility of the little boat as she gets into it will be redoubled later in the poem. The surface of the sea on which it sits is described as a "tembloroso plano" (97), while the singer exhorts the craft to stay afloat: "Lancha velera /.../ flota, flota" (97), hinting at how easy it would be for the surface tension to give way and send the boat down into the depths that she traverses alone.

The narrative part of the song continues to describe Elena, separating her from such typically female-coded traits as passivity, delicacy, disdainfulness, languidness, and excessive sensitivity. She is instead "alegre decidora" (97) knowing both her sexual appeal and her own mind about it. She is also described physically, fulfilling the vivacious, sexually agentive peasant type that we saw with la Camarona, minus the violence. The song within the poem begins by

project.

laying out her marital prospects and the reasoning for her current state: while she is sought by “un militar,” “un negociante francés,” and “el dómine de la aldea” —all of them representative of upward bourgeois mobility as in Pardo Bazán’s story—, her chosen husband is of the sea: “mas yo por un marinero / me muero...” (97–8). This idea of dying for her love ties the real, physical danger that she is in, in this fragile boat on a big ocean, to the gestures of courtly love where death is the ultimate symptom of arousal and desire.

However, in the repetition of her willingness to die, often coded as an either/or option (either my mariner, or my death), even in its erotic subtext, keeps very strongly the connection between the freedom of being on the sea and the death that can come in the water. The following stanza of the song instantiates this zero-sum mentality, where there are two possible outcomes for the pilgrimage out to sea: total happiness or death:

„Quiero playas, quiero luz,
aire libre, y brisa floja,
y un sol sin nubes ni bruma
y una barca vogadora
y mi amado marinero
o muero...,, (98)

In constructing this ideal future, this prospect toward which she is rowing, there is no space for disappointment and a return to societal constraints. Similarly, in describing her surroundings in this song, she rejects fear of the human dangers to be found on the sea: “Barca, no temo / plomo ni remo / de queche contrabandista” (98). Death is the negotiated risk that is a better option than compromise. And while she sets up death as the way out if her break from society cannot be successful, this is also a poem within a poem: it is the narrative construction of a fictional

character, not a narration from her perspective. Consequently, in the building up of this black and white future there is on the one hand the possibility that she is crafting a wish-fulfillment scenario, or on the other hand that she is talking herself down from fear, or that the “cerúleo plano” (98) that she plans to traverse with him was always and already the one that comes after death.

In the final stanzas of the song, which are also the final stanzas of the poem —there is no denouement, no return to narrative verse after the song— there is a further gesture towards wish-fulfillment, while continuing to emphasize the nearness of death:

„Ya diviso allá a lo lejos
el barquichuelo y la vela
del que tiene el alma mía
en sus amores sujeta:
llega pronto, marinero,
o muero.” (98)

Here, there is still the ‘or’ of death, in the approach of the lover’s boat. At this point, it seems that Elena will achieve her goal, through it is tempered as always by the refrain’s mixing of eroticism and morbidity. And yet, as she claims to see his rustling kerchief while climbing the mast, to hear him calling her, to be in reach, that ‘or’ disappears, and death becomes a statement:

Ya su pañizuelo agita
trepando por el mástil,
oigo su voz que me llama,
ya nos vemos, héle aquí:
por ti, por ti, marinero

me muero.” (99)

Throughout the song, the refrain of “me muero” both signals her erotic intention and accepts the mortal danger in rowing out into the sea by herself. She sets up these either/or propositions, where she chooses either life and freedom and happiness with her mariner, or death. Here at the end, however, by excising that conjunction, by making the final chorus a dedication of her death, there is a deepening of the suggestion that this lover is already dead, or that her singing is her preparation to die, alone, in this fragile boat, on this vast sea.

By making this part of the poem separate from the narration that precedes it, by making it a song that she sings to herself to set the time while rowing, it creates another layer of fiction in the events that occur: the reader cannot know if she does indeed see his sail and then hear his voice, as this song could just as easily be wish-fulfillment. Maybe she dies. Maybe he was killed by the smugglers. Or it is a little death, or a social one. Maybe he does actually come and they sail off into the sunset. But the refrain of this song of freedom is death, and the poem leaves the reader in this *mise-en-abîme* of a poem within a poem. There is no outcome, only the gaze toward the void. The election of the possibility of death in the quest for the boundary-shattering freedom that the sea can bring.

The strength of the freedom in these poems does not come from having the answers, but rather in the negotiation of agency. These female characters are able to decide to put themselves in the power of the sea, to face death willingly, to transgress the norms of maritime labor, in order to attain the freedom that is existence in the water. It is a freedom that goes beyond the liminal space of the shore, but one that does not quite reach the finality of the agentive suicide in the water that we will see in the next chapter. Through a negotiation of risk, these poems enter

into the de- and re-construction of the boundaries set for the feminine, and by making the choice to embrace risk, they create new space within those boundaries.

CHAPTER 3. TO MUDDY DEATH: SUICIDE IN THE WATER

To write a chapter that teases out the agency and fulfillment that is found in female literary suicides, it is necessary to first separate that literary creation from its existence in the real world. While this chapter will read suicide positively, I am in no way advocating for suicide as a real-world practice. For any reader who struggles with suicidal ideation, I hold you in my heart. For any reader whose life has been ripped asunder by suicide, I grieve with you. There is, however, a difference between real world suicide, particularly in an era where mental health care has progressed to seeing it as the fatal symptom of a disease, rather than a disease unto itself, and that which appears in literature. The nineteenth century saw the development of a series of visual tropes of suicide, born in the same way as the Romantic ethos, and mutually supporting with real-world circumstances. For men, the images come from Goethe's *Werther*, Thomas Chatterton and the mixture of *tedio* and the inability to cope with the modernizing world's hectic pace. For women, the trope has been Shakespeare's deflowered and lovesick Ophelia, sinking into the brook, weighed down by her clothing, still singing songs: we will see an Ophelia of that type in the next chapter. There are, however, no Ophelia deaths in this chapter. What we see is quite different in both agency and commentary.

What this chapter will explore is a different facet of female nineteenth century water suicide that, while definitely connected to the Ophelia motif, allows for a more agentive resolution to an untenable societal situation. While the woman seeking the water's safety and embrace (Chapter 2) brings the feminine into the aqueous, water death is the culmination of that

expression. There is a vein of the nineteenth century suicide trope wherein, rather than demonstrating death as the response to an overload of passion or some other powerful feeling, or as the response to *tedio* or *weltschmerz* [world-pain], suicide, particularly female suicide, and more particularly female water suicide, can be encoded as the epitome of a claiming of agency. This chapter will explore this female agentive water death from two different angles. The first part of the chapter will explore the inscription of an agential water suicide into the nineteenth-century retellings of two Greek myths, and the second half will read the same agency in a novel where the female protagonist's two suicides represent both the medicalization of suicide in the century, and the equal and opposite pull of suicide not as mental ill, but as a social malady.

Before entering into the texts that this chapter will treat, it is necessary to lay out briefly the state of suicide in both the societal and literary/artistic spheres during the nineteenth century. In moving from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the idea of suicide as a selfless act in service to a community or often an act of heroism—derived from the Classical mode—gave way to a conception of it as a voluntary death, obeying only the demands of melancholy (Brown 127; González Troyano 111). That death, as it became more unitary, also came under increasing scrutiny by state mechanisms of control during this period, in the same way that state governance of birth and mobility were also tracked more closely (Brown 133). This modernizing process led to not only government interest, but also to scientific scrutiny. Statistics drawn from government collections of suicide data, and the work of scholars like Enrico Morselli and Émile Durkheim brought the study of suicide into the sphere of science, as biology bloomed out of natural science. The interest in these statistical studies was strong enough in Spain that, by the end of the century, there were popular editions of statistical studies of suicide being published in Madrid; such publications evidence the topic as being not only a public health issue, but one that was

present enough in the public consciousness to warrant such publications.¹ Because of, or at least in conjunction with, this increased scientific interest, the conception of suicide would shift radically during the nineteenth century. Starting with the passionate overwhelm of the Romantic, it would move into being considered first a physiological and then a physio-moral degeneration, in line with Naturalism's belief in the hereditary nature of bad behavior. Throughout the century, even with these shifts, there is a focus on coding it, on seeing it as a disease, on taking it as a threat not only to public health, but to the nation.

In the early part of the century, Brière de Boismont (1797–1881), whose work on moral ennui was published in Spanish by the *Boletín del Instituto Médico Valenciano*, articulated suicides in two categories. They were either caused by madness: “consecuencia directa de los delirios y alucinaciones de un sujeto enfermo,” and those caused by an overwhelm of emotion: “consecuencia de la presión excesiva que las pasiones ejercían sobre el yo, un mecanismo patológico que también conducía a los individuos al crimen o a cualquier mala acción” (qtd. in Plumed Domingo 64). This construction pathologizes and criminalizes suicides while creating an internal, emotional cause. That individualism of cause and act would only grow through the century. By the 1830s there is an increased weight given to suicide as a choice: “para el pensamiento de la época el individuo era el responsable último de las decisiones que tomara sobre su vida, y no un mero títere del movimiento social.” (Plumed Domingo 69). Due to the pressure of emotion, these suicides are also split between two causalities, though both are

¹One example of is *Los suicidios en España* (1900) by Ambrosio Tápia y Gil, a quantitative study of suicides in the last three years of the century. While this book was gifted and inscribed to Emilia Pardo Bazán, she never read it (it was *intonso*, that is, the edges of the folded pages had been kept untrimmed); the pages were trimmed for me in the summer of 2019 by the librarian at the Real Academia Galega.

inabilities: *tedio*, that is ‘ennui’ or ‘weltschmerz,’ and the inability to keep up with the pressures of a modernizing world.

Elme-Marie Caro’s *El suicidio y la civilización* lays out these two types of suicide at the time. The first, the Romantic, was the one that Larra talked about, the one that Cadalso wrote about, and the one that María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar has written about in Rosalía de Castro’s *Flavio* (“*Spleen, tedio y ennui*”). This Romantic suicide is the one that grew in the public and literary consciousness fostered by Chatterton’s death in 1779, and the publication four years later of *Werther* (Brown 126). In this kind of melancholic emotional press, “La imaginación se pierde en delicias, la voluntad se anonada. Su existencia no es más que un sueño agitado. Bajo el imperio de esta tristeza soñadora, el alma sufre y goza a la vez” (Caro 77–78). In the other, later form, suicide is the response to being unable to keep up with the charge, the roar, the great movement of modernity and progress (Caro 16–18): “Al término de estas vagas tristezas, sin remedio, puesto que son en común, aparece la idea del suicidio como el único medio de escapar de la fatiga de vivir y de conocer la clase del destino, si es que alguno existe” (Caro 80). Yet this emotional underpinning of the reasons for suicide also ties back to the social discourses of medicine and hygiene of the age, as the etiological model was based not only in the excessive pressure of the passions, but also in any social occurrence that could dampen the reason or incite said passions, as these could promote suicide or other self-destructive tendencies. Because of this causal relationship, suicide became a gauge of the *malestar* in society, which kept it evermore present in the cultural consciousness (Plumed Domingo 69).

One other key piece that grew out of this social perception of Romantic suicide was a systematic gendering of suicide and suicidal death as feminine (Brown 142). Part of this feminizing comes as a reaction against the heroism extant in the act in the eighteenth century.

In efforts to curb suicide, scholars like Vicesimus Knox and Charles Moore did work emphasizing the masculinity of staying alive, trying to code suicide as a failure at being masculine. They worked to inscribe suicide with the semantic baggage of luxury, idleness, and an effeminate nature (134). Knox described suicide as the epitomal “danger of submitting to the warm emotions of the heart in preference to the cool deductions of reason” (Brown 135). If reason had long been the masculine trait, contrasted with emotion as the feminine, “the suicidal propensity of femininity was drawn together with earlier notions of sensibility to make a picture of woman as dead object” (152–53).

This femininity of suicide runs contrary to the population statistics; men are currently four times as likely as women to die by suicide, a paradigm that held true in the nineteenth century as well, as evidenced by Ambrosio Tápia y Gil’s study (Tápia y Gil; American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; Instituto Nacional de Estadística ; World Health Organization). In the context of these statistics, it is perhaps reasonable that recent studies on nineteenth-century suicide as a public health concern focus on male death, but it ignites some cognitive dissonance when the image of suicide in the century is either Chatterton or Ophelia. Furthermore, the focus on perception and cause of male suicides has superseded any analysis of female suicide in science, as opposed to art and literature, which will come hereafter. As an example, while Plumed Domingo’s is a very well written study, and much needed as it stands alone in the Spanish context, it is telling for the study of the history of suicide, and for this present chapter, that the *only* mention made of women is in a footnote citing Madame de Staël, and that the women mentioned are the cause of suicides, rather than those who die (74n55). He does not at all discuss why, or if, or that women also die by suicide.

Before looking at the nineteenth century, and particularly Romantic suicide in art, the strength of the tie between the two at the time cannot be emphasized enough, even though representation was different than instantiation. Part of that perceived connection derives from the importance of the figures mentioned above: Chatterton and Werther (the inclusion of a fictional character in a discussion of history may have given that away). Another piece is that there was a conception that seeing and hearing about suicide would make people more likely to die by suicide. This conception that life would imitate art led to recommendations that the Spanish government ban any play or literary work that depicted suicide “como un acto sublime y como un recurso soberano en los grandes males,” because of the impact that pernicious suggestion could have on young minds and imaginations (Plumed Domingo 73).² It is also true that the trend of the Romantic suicide grew out of the melancholy and *weltschmerz* of the end of the eighteenth century, so it did *respond* to a cultural climate (Caro 80), therefore fictionalizing it and aggrandizing it. Indeed, the myth/fictionalized versions of the historical come to be stronger than their factual bases, which leads to the erasure of the real in favor of the mythic: “la figura del Chatterton real se diluye ante la versatilidad del mito” (González Troyano 110). The Romantic suicide also broke some of the barriers between fact and fiction in concert with the rise of the Romantic authorial ethos, where the authorial figure too became larger than life, became itself a fiction (110).

Rather than looking at this phenomenon as life imitating art or art imitating life, Sebold suggests that it is art that imitates art: “en el terreno del suicidio romántico la ficción imita la ficción” (Sebold, “Introduction” 78), where it is the fictional in the nature of the Romantic that is

²This myth—that talking about or seeing representations of suicide will lead to more deaths by suicide—is something with which contemporary informational and advocacy programs still have to contend, as it is, indeed, false (Mental Health First Aid 106).

then further fictionalized in their writing. There is a great paradox that opens up between suicide, as a real act that is becoming scrutinized and classified by a modernizing society, and its progressive literary mythification: “si la razón ilustrada no pudo menos que aprobarlo teóricamente, mientras pragmáticamente lo reprobaba, el corazón romántico lo condenó moralmente en la práctica a la vez que se complacía en enaltecerlo en la literatura” (González Troyano 109–10). Even the scientific scrutiny of suicide in the era was not free from literary influence. Durkheim, the expert, for example, couldn’t create a typography of suicide without recourse to literary sources. Which is ironic, as those rationales are by definition invented (104). González Troyano calls the co-relationality of the science and literature of suicide in the nineteenth century a ‘perfect storm’ (107).

Of any moment in history, the nineteenth century is the richest in suicide literature (108), and, as we have seen, there has been a lot of conflation between the literary and the societal in reading the past. While the bodies of male suicides might be pictured in abasement and the horrors of the negative social perception of their mode of death, female bodies who died by suicide were constructed in art and literature in a way that would stimulate the gaze. Their bodies were kept whole and offered up on display: “The naked or semi-naked bodies of the pseudo-Cleopatra or Lucretia are, in effect, portraits of dead women re-presented for the male, the ‘ideal’ spectator, and are twice removed from the construct of women in the everyday. On one level, images of female suicides, such as that of Lucretia, fuse *eros* and *thanatos*. On the other, the penalty of exposure and the death act as a ‘chastening’” (Brown 177). This beautiful, cleansed but completely passive, dead woman is what Charnon-Deutsch calls “The Death-Defying Dead” in *Fictions of the Feminine*. These dead women, whether being anatomized, or observed at the scene of suicide, are not morbid, but rather “some appeal to a viewer who would find the totally

passive body translucent face an invitation to erotic pleasure for which no objection or obstacle can be imagined in the context. At the same time, they make death appear natural or sublime, an enviable state in which beauty is enhanced, not erased [...] the lovely, dead women confirm the many popular assumptions about feminine physiology, roles, and behaviors” (241–42). Her body is displayed so that she may be scrutinized by the anatomist, the grieving parent, or the verifying onlookers, but that for the viewer “the artist has spared her for the external focalizer, who is invited to consider the charms of this delectable corpse” (248). Dead, the (usually fallen) woman’s function becomes to fulfill the ‘fondest fantasies of feminine dependency’ (Dijkstra 42). Peluffo sees this tendency in her Latin American Ophelias as well, where “in all instances, the corpse is represented prior to the decomposition of the flesh to preserve the memory of its morbid beauty” (71). Over the course of the century, images of female suicide, often falling, jumping, or floating women, were not an indictment of social illness, but a “voyeuristic discovery of the female form in an attitude of helplessness” (Brown 158). This sexualization is so marked that Brown calls it a “pornography of violence” in the yellow press of the 1860s (158).

The epitome of female suicide is drowning, and it is coded as the most passive, and therefore feminine of all deaths, and the reason assumed or reported for it is almost always “disappointed passion” or the loss of chastity (again, this is not borne out by the actual statistics) (Brown 148). This idea of the fallen or passion-mad woman drowning herself was so pervasive that, as Brown details in an analysis of Spencer Stanhope’s *Thoughts of the Past* (1858/9), a fallen woman near a river is always and already a suicide victim (153). These drowned women, of course, lead us to the most iconic female suicide image/idea of the century: Ophelia.

In the association of suicide with both emotional excess and mental instability, which led to the feminizing of any death by suicide, Ophelia is the ideal image for the representation of female fluidity: “Ophelia, portrayed as problematic, liminal, transient and mutually elusive from man, was the ideal subject for the portrayal of suicide as feminine and as a *leurre*, a trap for the gaze” (Brown 188). The idea of the perfect body to be gazed upon is inherent to her literary appearance, where “the message of a heroic death is lost in the erotic, and the invalidity of woman is implied” (180). As a recurrent and infinitely inscribable image, Ophelia becomes a refraction of the values and preoccupations of the culture that reconstructs her (Peterson and Williams 2). In the parlance of agential realism, the Ophelia image is the diffusion grating that shows the patterns of social concerns. She has frequently been figured as a nexus for collective female subjectivity; Rábade Villar parses her into both character and theme (“O personaxe” 151), Rhodes, in *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture: Representing Body Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, places her at the center of the representation and contestation of the subjugation of the Victorian female body (3). Showalter, looking at the diachronic trajectory of the figure-as-image sees her as more than the sum of her parts, instead being the point of contact for the century between female sexuality and insanity, and between medical theory and the social imaginary (79). Because she is “always-already represented” (Peterson and Williams 2), already dead when her story is told by Gertrude, she becomes the ideal image to represent suicide as the disintegration of self.

The image of Ophelia in the death of a female lover is so present in the century that in her article on modernist representations of a Latin American Ophelia, Ana Peluffo suggests that “[t]he topos of the dead beloved appears with such frequency [...] that by the end of the century it becomes an *idée fixe* bordering on cliché” (Peluffo 63). In each of its categories in the century,

suicide is figured as an inability to cope: whether through a mental break, *tedio*, or an overwhelm in the face of the future. It is with that image that I first approached the research for this chapter. I expected to find rivers flowing with dead Ophelias. That is not, however, what we see. There is a different image common to these suicides, and it is one of choice, and of agency. These women are represented not only as rejecting passivity, but also as rejecting their role as the object of the gaze: no contorted nudes here. Instead of being the final expression of passivity in the face of a lost love, these water deaths are figured as an active choice to no longer engage with the future or with society. What is more, that choice is positively coded.

Too Much of Water Hast Thou, Im/Modest Flower.

The first text that this chapter will treat is the 1864 poem “Martina y Jacinto,” by Jorge Isaacs. It is a peasant version of the Hero and Leander myth referenced widely across the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and told by Ovid, Donne, Schiller, and most popularly in the nineteenth Century, by Marlowe. It is also, to use Peluffo’s terminology, a truly “latinamericanized” version of the myth. Exploring finisecular modernist Ophelias, Peluffo ideates of how anglophone or culturally hegemonic narratives are “latinamericanized,” that is, the hegemonic is rewritten. She sees the Ophelia trope as responding to both the emergence of modern female identities, and to sentimentalize masculinities at a time when sexual arrangements were in flux (63). In both this poem and the next (though it is not from Latin America), this process of re-inscription makes the meaning of the myths anew for the nineteenth century. It is both a retelling of the myths for a new audience, and also the inscription of social and societal values and anxieties into the familiar frameworks. Another of Isaacs’s *costumbrista* narrative poems detailing rural, plebeian love stories —from the same cycle as those treated in

the first chapter— this poem sees its protagonists arrange to meet by the river, with the intimation of a desired amorous outcome. Jacinto, needing to cross the river to his lover, is taken by the water, and drowns. Seeing this, Martina throws herself into the river as well, seeking to die with him. She kisses his dead lips before they both disappear forever in the current, and her dog is left to return her cloth cap to her mother.

In Isaacs's retelling of the Hero and Leander story, the casting of the characters, their physical and social relationship, the directionality of desire, and the structure of the suicide, create it as a wholly nineteenth century work, and one that broadens conceptions of how suicide is depicted in the century. The poem also establishes Martina not only as a flower woman, but as one who chooses to drown instead of becoming the *flor marchita*. The telling of the story constructs an ambiguous virginity in Martina, allowing her death to escape the role of being "necessary" for the maintenance of her familial honor, particularly in the context of Isaacs's other peasant romance poems. It then inverts the century's aestheticizing of the beautiful dead, and the scopophilia associated with the female dead body. While Isaacs follows the traditional contours of the myth, the ways in which he reconfigures it come together to build Martina/Hero's death into an example of female sexual and vital agency, while keeping within the bounds of societal expectation.

Published in 1864, this poem falls squarely in the first of Isaacs's two poetic periods, which responds to "su juventud y en la cual sobresalen el culto a la naturaleza y la intensidad con que se siente ese amor a la madre común" (Jiménez Triana in *El Telegrama*, 1895, qtd. in Montoya y Montoya 12). In his introduction to Isaacs, Montoya y Montoya lays out the range of relationships and outcomes in Isaacs's peasant romances, all written between 1860 and 1864 in *romance* or *romancillo* verse (24). He ties the tragedy of "Martina y Jacinto" to the punishment

of the unfaithful woman in “La aldeana infiel,” the unfortunate love in “Teresa,” and the only happy ending in the cycle, the “Amores de Soledad” (23). In each of Isaacs’s peasant romances, the edge of the water is the scene of the meeting between lovers, fulfilling the half-allowed, half liminal space discussed in chapter two, and the work/pleasure balance of the sojourn is seemingly the balance on which the fate of the characters hangs. “Martina and Jacinto” is the only one of the cycle that leaves both parties dead, but it is still a better outcome than the poems where there is an infidelity between the lovers.

The largest change that Isaacs makes in his retelling, greater even in the historical context than his Hero not being a priestess of Venus, and Neptune having no role at all, is the ambiguity that he writes into the sexual relationship between the lovers. Marlowe’s “Hero and Leander,” the most popular version of the myth in the century, with which Isaacs’s version shares several key characteristics, fixates on the passionate encounters between the lovers, to the point that he never actually gets to the death part. “Hero and Leander are not star-crossed lovers; the poem in its total effect is an unclouded celebration of youthful passion and fullness of physical life” (Miller 125). Marlowe’s Hero embodies the dichotomy inherent to a “virgin” priestess blushing naked before her lover as dawn kisses her freshly-loved curves. Yet Isaacs, across his work, writes his eroticism into passion yet-to-be-felt wherever he wants to maintain the moral value of his heroine.³ *María* is, of course the most obvious example of this, echoing as it does the century’s expectations of female sexual innocence embodied in the understanding, as aggrandized as it may be in retrospect, that a lost virginity meant social death and the idea of the *Ángel del hogar*, whose innocence and childlike obedience carried through into married life.

³For the construction of this kind of powerful eroticism through the exchange of flowers and descriptions of hair in *María*, see Johnson.

While the imagery that characterized Martina points to a defloration and her actions indicate both a willingness and a desire to fulfill her marriage to Jacinto in deed if not in fact, the circumstances of the water-crossing that precipitate the suicide signal that such a deed has not yet been done. To first highlight the sexuality of the piece, the material culture that surrounds Martina, as well as her actions, inscribes a vibrant eroticism into her character, signaling a preparation for marriage, the intersection of blood and first passion, and a pragmatic, rural coquetry, all squarely framed within societal expectations.

The first physical aspect of Martina that is described is the jewelry that she is wearing on the fateful day of her rendezvous with Jacinto: “candongas / con uvas de vidrio, / y una gargantilla de granates finos” (180). Grapes, most frequently depicted in bunches, symbolize both fertility and sacrifice, the latter often connected to the sacrificial lamb —often shown between bunches of grapes (Cirlot 458). In Greco-Roman symbolism, they are signs of happiness and fortune, as well as fertility, and are also used in funerary contexts (Noce n.p.). In themselves, then, these earrings speak of the outcome of a wedding, and also foreshadow the eventual doom of the lamb whose face shines between them. The garnets in her necklace symbolize “el fuego en el corazón; pasión ardiente que consume, si no se satisface pronto” (Castellanos de Losada 258). These garnets also aid in directing Martina’s passion towards Jacinto, through the extended symbolism of the stone, as “un granate ó jacinto regalado en el mes de enero, manifiesta la constancia” (Castellanos de Losada 227). Together, these adornments demonstrate Martina’s ripeness for passion, within the context of a lasting commitment. By their form, both of these decorative elements visually recall drops of blood, a sanguine reference echoed in the other element of her clothing that is detailed in the poem, a *montera*, made for her by her mother, that is “de paño celeste / con grana por vivos” (181). The *montera*, a colored cloth cap was for a time

the fashion among peasants in Antioquia and the Cauca; while this style of headwear may, according to Sanín Cano, already have gone out of fashion in the early 1860s, it was visually reminiscent of biblical femininity (221). These markings, already reminiscent of drops of a maiden's blood, become more violently so in the context of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, where details of clothing are an important aspect of Hero's characterization. As Paul Miller has discussed in regards to that piece, the detailing on Hero's costume in Marlowe's poem visually establishes her connection to Venus, the goddess whose priestess she is (Miller 164). Marlowe's Hero wears a dress of green, with trees embroidered on the sleeves (the color and a symbol of Venus), and a blue kirtle with red stains, as from blood: "Her kirtle blue, whereon was many a stain, / Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain" (I, 15–16). Isaacs's use of both "grana" and "granate," as well as the shape of both the fine stones and the glass grapes, alludes to Persephone, whose marriage to Hades and subsequent journey to Death are marked by the consumption of the arils of a pomegranate. The pomegranate, for its part, is also used to symbolize both the forbidden tree in the garden (Mendoza 219), and is known in lore and mythology as an abortifacient or an aid against fertility (Riddle 41–43). In the context of a beautiful young woman contemplating a marriage forthcoming in a few short months, these vibrant red decorations cannot help but to suggest a different red mark on a different cloth: the blood of defloration.

In counterpoint to this highly eroticized symbolism, the seduction scene, where Jacinto asks Martina to join him at the river for a tryst, is all framed within social acceptability. The earrings, referenced above, were a gift from her uncle, who, as an adult male relative, is a custodian of Martina's virtue, in line with the social system that Catherine Davies describes in *Spanish Women's Writing, 1849–1996* (22). By accompanying Martina to mass and giving her

this gift, the uncle is both acting as her custodian in public, and preparing her for marriage. Jacinto's request that Martina meet with him happens under the eye of this guardian, as he asks her in the market (180). In contrast, Marlowe's Hero and Leander meet in circumstances that immediately signal both her unavailability as a virgin dedicated to a goddess and the ill-fated nature of their meeting: "to Venus' temple, where unhappily, / As after chanc'd, they did each other spy" (I, 133–34) To consolidate the social acceptance of Martina's decision to meet Jacinto, one of her rationales in agreeing to meet him, apart from his beauty and her love for him, is that "como su marido / será en noche-buena, / según los vecinos" (181). Jacinto's name also ameliorates the sensuality of Martina's jewelry. The *jacinto*/hyacinth was dedicated to Persephone's mother and link to the terrestrial world, Demeter. It holds both funerary symbolism and the weight of male glory and innocence (for its use to crown Apollo, and to crown male nymphs in festivities dedicated to Demeter) (Mendoza 229). As mentioned above, it is also, as a gift, a symbol of constancy. In this way, the symbolic semantic fields of these two characters not only tie them together —Demeter and Persephone, constancy— but also demonstrate both the love between them while shading the horizon with death.

One additional ascription of acceptability is the opening and closing of this seduction scene with the Church: Martina was in town, with her uncle, to go to mass, and the rationales for acquiescence culminate with Jacinto's age, figured in terms of his baptism: "y apenas cumplidos / los diez y ocho tiene / su fé de bautismo" (181). Through these images, the first piece of the poem, which introduces both characters, both invokes a powerful sensuality, almost dripping with the blood that will be shed in its completion, as well as a firm system of societal oversight. The nascent relationship between Martina and Jacinto is a planned marriage that is known by the

community, is accepted by a custodial relative, and is linked to religious adherence on the parts of both of the young people involved.⁴

Once separated from her family to go to the river to meet her lover, Martina's physical attributes become even more sexual than her adornments are. She hikes up her skirts, leaving not only feet and ankles exposed, but also glimpses higher up her leg: "ciñóse más alta / la falda en el cinto ... al aire dejando sus dos piececitos, y aún más entre encajes / que blancos tobillos" (181). While peasant dress, because of its need to be functional, often allowed sight of a woman's feet, for the literate class, that demonstration of skin is part of the allure of lower-class women. Additionally, the intentional action in Martina's adjustment of her dress, along with the lace through which her leg peeks, gives it an even more salacious feel. To further the matrimonial and sexual connotations of her clothing, on her way to meet Jacinto, Martina bedecks herself in flowers, the language of which calls back to the symbolism of her earrings, as the "cortó en las moreras / hermosos racimos" (182). Now wearing both grapes and vines, garlanded in flowers, and with her legs bared above the ankle, Martina is fully invested with the weight of an impending marriage. However, even as she is described in this sexualized way, the immediate rationale for that overt show of skin balances the salacious with the pragmatic. Between the lifting of Martina's skirt, and the flashes of her calf through its lace, Isaacs establishes that she does it to avoid damage to the garments: "que así no la rompen / las zarzas y espinos" (180). This reasoning makes the erotic image of this girl with her bare legs flashing under her dress waver back toward innocence and an existence within the rules of her society.

⁴For a study on the impact of the church in the social imaginary of the period, see Valis, *Sacred Realism: Religion and the Imagination in Modern Spanish Narrative*.

Even more closely aligned with social values, Martina's time at the river's edge has a practical purpose to balance her meeting with her lover. Having taken "tres puchas / de arroz bien molido" (180), she can wait for Jacinto while performing part of her domestic duties, bedecked in flowers though she may be: "ansiosa de verlo / cuando eran las cinco, lo esperó lavando / su arroz en el río" (182). This ties into the relationship between women work and freedom, discussed in chapter 2 with "La Camarona," and the liminal space at the edge of the water discussed in chapter 1 with the *Cartas amatorias* by Juan de Arolas. If there is women's work to be performed at the edge of the water, there is also an allowance for social congress. Girls can go to the water, often a fountain or river, to wash clothes or perform other tasks, and it is both permissible for them to talk to boys because they are still being productive, and is also a place where they hold the upper hand (Díaz-Fierros Viqueira 20). The performance of labor allows for a societal permissibility of the meeting, leading the edge of water to be, as discussed in chapter 1, the site for the initiation—and often consummation—of romances.

The actual labor that Martina is performing while she waits for Jacinto is, however, more in line with her jewelry than the mere fulfillment of duty. Rice symbolizes fertility and fecundity (Cirlot 499). What is more, the washing of rice, the act of agitating it with ones hands, has the desired result of releasing swirls of cloudy particles into the water. Once the rice stops disgorging this fertile substance, the job is complete.⁵ So while Martina's occupation as she waits for Jacinto does work towards normalizing their congress within societal bounds, it is also loaded with erotic imagery, just as her walk to the river is.

⁵While there is some geographic and economic variance in the adoption of rice as a staple crop in Colombia, by about 1840 the area around Guacarí in the Cauca Valley, had become an important rice growing center, though the upper classes in the city preferred imported wheat (Spijkers 55–57).

And yet, even in the face of this erotically charged scene, backed up by Martina's pragmatic sexuality and the apparent societal acceptance of the relationship between her and Jacinto—and even in its progression to a physical level—there is the potential for the presumption of a maintained innocence, where innocence is written in the hymen. Unlike in Hero and Leander's tale, where Poseidon's wrath at having been snubbed by Leander is the incitement for the final accident, here it is the logistics of the meeting place itself. Let it be clear that there is no doubt in any Hero and Leander iteration that there is consummation. In the century's favorite version, the *death* never happens, because Marlowe never got there, but there is a copious amount of sex, and Leander crosses the Hellespont multiple times to Hero's tower. Yet in Isaacs, the lovers arrive at different sides of a river, and it is only upon Jacinto's arrival that Martina notes the logistical issue: there is no bridge:

—¡Si viene, quién sabe

Pero él me lo dijo...

No hay puente. ¿Qué haremos?

¡No pases, Jacinto!

Pero él a las aguas

Lanzóse atrevido (182)

The 'oh no, there's no bridge!' is not indicative of this being one of a series of trysts in this place. This detail is important to my interpretation of the scene as suicide. This reasoning for the fatal swim: that this is a first attempt at a crossing, offers a counter narrative to the sexuality present in the characterization of the heroine. It is not a necessary purity, but, by being an ambiguous one, it maintains too the lack of a poetic/societal necessity for Martina's death due to dishonor.

We arrive then to the suicide itself. Martina's choice to die with her beloved comes in an enjambment that transitions the poem from Jacinto's death to her own. Jacinto tries to cross for an extended moment (verses 59–84), before he dies. At his dying, the poem's structure ties Martina's words to his own, and from there to her action:

¡Ya llega, se salva!

–¡Mi amor! Mi Jacinto!

.....

Las aguas ahogaron

Su adiós. Un gemido

Martina exhalando

Que humanos oídos

Jamás escucharon,

Lanzóse en el río;

llevó contra el seno

Los restos queridos

Buscando sus labios,

Los labios ya fríos. (183–84; typographical ellipsis break in the original)

The waters drown both 'mi Jacinto' and 'su adiós,' where the latter is either drowned or 'un gemido.' This moment in the poem is one of the most elastic, allowing for the stretching and bending of time at a moment of trauma and the decision to spend eternity with her love. With the planned wedding established, and Martina in her jewels, the action of pulling Jacinto to her breast and kissing his dead lips transforms it into a marriage. Martina's death, after kissing the

dead lips of Jacinto —his body already ‘restos’— is a willful, suicidal act.⁶ It is also an inversion of the Romantic necrophilia initiated with Cadalso’s *Noches lúgubres* in 1789, and that led to a trend in nineteenth-century visual culture where the body of the dead woman (but not the man) was offered up as an erotic visual talisman. In the art of the sensual dead, “the overwhelming number of women as opposed to male subjects attests to the gendering of death, which supersedes mere artistic conventions with their attendant scopophilic pleasures (Charnon-Deutsch *Fictions* 241–42). By claiming a kiss from the corpse of her dead love, Martina is fulfilling her marriage pact, bearing out the fruit of the passion that she had carried, and inverting the century’s gendering of the quest for eternity. While Cadalso’s Tediato wanted to carry his dead beloved home, so she could die again, immolated at his side after he set the house on fire, Martina enters Jacinto’s first death with him.

The lack of witness to Martina’s death, introduced by no one hearing her cry before she leaps into the water (“Un gemido / Martina exhalando / que humanos oídos / jamás escucharon”; 184), begins the work of separating Martina’s death from the patterns that we expect in nineteenth-century suicide, particularly that of women, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. If a fallen woman kills herself, the death wipes her sin clean, and after death she is offered up to the viewer, contorted to present her breasts for inspection. She is supposed to be offered up for the consumption of the male gaze. Isaacs frees Martina, corporeally, from this “necessary aestheticizing” (71) in a direct contradiction of all of the traditional things about

⁶In addition to the connection to Hero and Leander, there is a strong echo here of the double suicides of Pyramus and Thisbe and of Romeo and Juliet. In all three of these stories, the female lover kills herself after finding her lover dead (though only in the first does that male death happen while in the attempt to reach a hookup). The only critic to mention Martina’s death, Montoya y Montoya, claims that she does not die by suicide, but that rather she dies trying to save Jacinto’s life (23). Isaacs’s use of the word ‘restos’ [remains], and the only intentional activity narrated on her part being to draw her beloved to her, seem to contradict that argument.

female suicide, or female literary death, really. Instead of presenting the body of the suicide for visual assessment, Martina's choice to find eternity with her Jacinto is respected, and they, as one, disappear forever:

Por entre peñascos
Rodaron asidos...
Se vieron... Ya nada
Un último grito...
El bulto lejano
Se hundió en el abismo. (184)

With Martina's kiss of Jacinto's dead lips, they become entangled, and at the end, what was a plural subject, signified in the "rodaron asidos," becomes a singular: "se hundió." The death has sealed the marriage. This is different from any other Hero and Leander, where she always dies for guilt at his death and her knowledge that she is ruined. The shortest telling of the myth, John Donne's couplet "who both one fire burnt / one water drown'd" (210) shows it. They hadn't been burnt. They were in that first blush of love, but without the brashness of Marlowe's sensuousness. Isaacs's language is erotic, but in this case his characters are pure.

The final vertex of this poem that we will explore here is Martina's role as a flower woman, and one who is not only wet, but who chooses destruction in the water over the future that she would have without her promised husband. Martina's connection to flowers appears as she winds her way to the river to meet Jacinto. Singing, she decks her hair with morning glories: "prendió batatillas / de sus negros rizos" (182). These *batatillas*, or morning glories, come up once more in Isaacs, linked to youthful innocence and beauty.⁷ In the poem "La mañana del

⁷It should be noted that contemporary botany lists the "Batatilla" as the species *pes-caprae* of the

abuelo,” their beauty and morning color enrapture a young girl, out with her grandfather, and she dedicates them, and metonymically her own youth and beauty to God:

Gozosa le acompaña
Su nieta preferida,
Llenando sus vestidos
De azules batatillas.
—¡Ay!, ¡Mira, papá, cuántas!
Azules todas, ¡mira!
Para mamá la tuyas
Para el altar las mías. (112)

In her critical edition of Isaacs’s complete works, María Teresa Cristina suggests a relationship here to Gregorio Gutiérrez González (1826–1872)—a Colombian poet famous for his *Memoria sobre el cultivo del maíz* (1866)—, and gives his description of how the flower is blue in the morning, but quickly fades to white when touched by the sun: “Son azules al principio de su corta vida, y se van poniendo pálidas a medida que se acercan a su fin” (qtd. pg. 10). It seems likely that Isaacs uses this flower, or at least this name for it, in response to Gutiérrez González’s 1858 poem “¿Por qué no canto?” In that poem, the poet equates singing, the “canción” whose absence is noted in the title to the bright blaze of passion, and contrasts it to the happiness that can be found in the figurative shade, embodied by the morning glory:

genus *Ipomoea*, rather than the *Ipomoea indica*, or common morning glory that is described here. The *pes-caprae* species, or the beach morning glory, is a hardier vine, with bright pink flowers that do not shrink from the sun (Liogier 78). However, a Colombian synonym for *Ipomoea indica*, *Convolvulus bogotensis* is listed in *Flora de Colombia* (2nd ed. 1896) as “Batatilla” (Cortés 207). It seems that the common name “Campanitas” is now more common in references to the *Ipomoea indica* (Liogier 131).

Sólo en oscuro, retirado asilo
Puede tranquilo el corazón gozar;
Sólo en secreto sus favores presta
Siempre modesta
La que el hombre llamó *felicidad*.
 ¿Conoces tú la flor de batatilla,
La flor sencilla, la modesta flor?
Así es la dicha que mi labio nombra;
Crece a la sombra,
Mas se marchita con la luz del sol. (114–15)

This use of the “modest flower” as a representation of the happiness that comes in tranquility, the type that comes without a fanfare of trumpets or indiscreet words (114), makes sense with the way that Isaacs uses it in “La mañana del abuelo,” where it is the floral counterpart of a good child, who offers up the flowers that bring her joy to the altar. In this sense the *batatilla* also works as a metonymic floral identity for Martina. Her love is, as discussed above, a pragmatic one. It is indeed a joyful love, but it also functions within the bounds of decorum and the sanction of the state.

To further cement the relationship between Martina and the *batatilla*, beyond covering herself in these flowers, Martina herself can be read as a *batatilla*: the only piece of her clothing that is described in its color is her *montera*, which is light blue, like a morning glory. Furthermore, when, at the end of the poem, her dog runs home with that garment in his mouth, its blue dye has run, a process for which Isaacs uses the verb “deseñir,” to fade:

La linda montera

Con grana por vivos
Que a la bella niña
Su madre le hizo,
Llevaba en la boca;
Su azul desteñado,
Cubierta de espumas. (185)⁸

Just as the morning glory fades at the touch of the sun, Martina's color was not fast. It faded with the water that fulfilled the function of the consummation: the fire that *would have* burnt her. Her choice to die is not only a choice to fulfill her promise to herself and to Jacinto to wed him, but also a refusal to *marchitar*, to let the sun, grief, or the fires of passion leave her faded from her youthful riot of color. The flowers and the garment imply a physical *carpe diem* that underlines the agency of the death and takes charge of the societal system that writes the role of women as being loved when young, then fading into inutility.

The connection to the Gutiérrez González poem also underscores the difference between this death and its fulfillment of the social contract, with the overflowing passion and languorous ennui of the Romantic, as evinced by either Cadalso's *Noches lúgubres*, Chatterton, or Goethe's Werther. Cadalso's Tediato also wants to rejoin a dead beloved, and wanted to orchestrate the opportunity for the two of them to die together (a second death for his beloved). That desire echoes the self-destructive desire for a blaze of passion in Gutiérrez González's song, as Tediato wants to be of one flesh with his beloved, and literally burn in one passion as he burns their house around them (Sebold 82). This is the death one can imagine in Marlowe's "Hero and

⁸The foam here, in its own way, also reinforces the water death-as-marriage, a function of its materiality that will be explored with the next poem.

Leander,” if he had arrived at the climax of the story. The fact that Jacinto plays the passive role in their watery wedding, coupled with Martina’s quest for *felicidad* over fire, in accordance with Gutiérrez González’s definitions, allows Martina to have the desire for him, and then be joined to him forever (*à la* Cadalso), without actually having to suffer the fire (Donne). She is allowed the active choice of death, and her body does not become an emblem of the visual imposition of passivity in the way that Charnon-Deutsch discusses, because her choice is within the social order. It is a choice for freedom, but one that does not need to be punished or controlled.

In “Martina and Jacinto,” Isaacs subverts the traditional mythological narrative, while following its general contours, by giving the female character a will and a sexual agency of her own, and allowing her to choose death not from a fire of passion. This agency is also given to her through the ambiguous representation of her virtue, not because of definitely having been sullied. By rewriting the myth into a peasant Latin America, and allowing for an ambiguity in the represented sexuality, Isaacs shifts the narrative to make Hero/Martina’s eventual leap to death a concrete, positive choice. Furthermore, it is a choice that sets itself apart from the Romantic modalities of suicide based in inability: the inability to live without, the *fastidio universal*, and the inability to cope with the century’s ever-faster spin towards modernity. It is a choice that, in itself, fulfills Martina’s social contract, rather than breaking it.

Appropriating Metamorphosis: Galatea in Arolas

The first vertex of female appropriation of power through suicide in a mythologically-based narrative, as developed in “Martina and Jacinto,” demonstrates how this kind of chosen death can instantiate agency inside of the mechanisms of society and its gender roles. The second section of this chapter will read a mythological narrative to demonstrate a female appropriation

of agency outside of societal expectations of gender. “Égloga II” by Juan de Arolas underscores the expected power dynamic by dramatically changing the established narrative of the myth that it retells. Arolas’s female character, the sea nymph Galatea, displays her will to joy and freedom throughout the poem, transgressing the typically female role that her aggressive suitor, the cyclops Polyphemus, wishes her to assume. She chooses metamorphosis over ceding her will to his, and joins her material form to the genitive property of the sea, its foam. This transformation is astonishing, given that in every classical version of the myth: Ovid, Carrillo y Sotomayor, Góngora, and Lope de Vega, it is Galatea’s half-human lover who transforms, after being crushed with a boulder by Polyphemus, and pursuant to Galatea’s intercession with the gods. He then becomes a river (Góngora, Lope de Vega), a river god (Ovid), or a fountain (Carrillo). The exception to this pattern of transformations is Theocritus, where there is no transformation, though the myth is narrated across two of his interludes. In no other version does Galatea transform. Her traditional role is to escape the violence, intercede on behalf of her dead lover, and survive to tell the tale of his transformation.

In terms of structure, “Égloga II” has two narrators over its 327 verses. The vast majority, until line 307, is in the voice of Polyphemus, first in an introspective apostrophic address to Galatea (1–171), and then a song he has written, which is in many ways a refined, increasingly fictionalized retelling of the same story (108–307). The first section is formed of mostly hendecasyllabic lines, but with relatively frequent heptasyllables in a unique mixing of a *silva* and a traditional Italianate verse; the rhyme is varied, a mix of couplet, chained quartets, and other forms—all together, the rhyme helps to give shape to the long and unbroken poetic narrative. The song is of octosyllabic octaves in *ABBCCDDA*, retaining the previous section’s focus on couplets, while increasing the formality of the verse through consistent stanzas, and

simultaneously lowering its register, as octosyllables are used for ‘lower class’ expression, and hendecasyllables and fourteen syllable verses for the noble classes, pursuant to the pervasive influence of Lope de Vega’s *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, the touchstone of Spanish popular meter for many centuries. The remaining twenty lines are in a narrative poetic voice, stipulated as “Poet,” using hendecasyllables with four strategic octosyllables, which metrically unite the first two parts while simultaneously employing a highly unusual metric mixing, as elevens and eights rarely go together. It is in these final lines that a large part of the narrative of the myth occurs: Polyphemus sees the lovers walking on the beach, hurls the boulder, and the transformation occurs. All three of these sections work in tandem to construct Arolas’s messaging about female agency, societal femininity and sexuality, and to form the framing for a positive, agential suicide.

In his retelling of this myth, Arolas leans in to Galatea’s marine nature, and sets her identity in apposition to the fulfillment of a traditionally female gender role, without creating that as a negative attribute. Because of this characterization, Polyphemus’s consistent desire that Galatea should assume such a role highlights the incongruity of the assumption that all female creatures fit the same mold. His protestations that his desire is for her happiness, when taken in the context of his monstrosity and semantic baggage (he is the cruel beast who traps Odysseus, after all), serve to exacerbate that cognitive dissonance. Given that Galatea’s identity is always and already outside the expectation, just as Ophelia is always and already dead, his protestations make the system itself seem suspect. The radical shift that Arolas makes in the narrative then, allowing Galatea to suicide in metamorphosis rather than living on to mourn a murdered lover, constructs that choice as a way to preserve self and identity, her freedom and her power, insofar as her life can be defined by her ability to be true to herself, rather than her link to a physical

body. Each of the pieces of the eclogue that support this argument are also points where Arolas diverges from his forebears: the construction of Galatea's character as wild and free by nature, the foreshadowing of drowning and water death throughout the piece —particularly in its relationship to Polyphemus's own gender identity—, the *carpe diem* equating her youth and freedom with sea foam, and the metamorphosis itself.

Critical consensus on “Égloga II,” not unlike his *Cartas amorias* that were treated in the first chapter, is that it is unoriginally derivative from the previous tradition of the myth, and mediocre at best. Even in presenting the poem to readers, as in the case of Díaz Larios's “Estudio preliminar” to the 1982 *Obras de Juan Arolas*, the mention of “Égloga II” denies any creativity in the narrative, saying “[c]uando el joven escolapio quiso poner manos a la obra de emular a sus antecesores, no había un solo detalle que no estuviera resuelto ya. Poca originalidad podía esperar en el tratamiento del asunto,” and also denigrates the quality of the text: “Quedaba el recurso de componer algo bello, en un estilo original. Pero Arolas no fue nunca un orfebre de la palabra y menos en esta etapa de su formación poética. El resultado fue un paupérrimo esqueleto del asunto, muy lejos de la sensibilidad ovidiana y de la riqueza de dicción de Góngora y Lope” (Díaz Larios lxi). The most important work on Arolas, Lomba y Pedraja's *El P. Arolas: su vida y sus versos*, focuses on Arolas's probable sources of inspiration, and calls the work itself “endeble” [shoddy]: “El P. Arolas se muestra al tratarlos más conforme con Ovidio que con Teócrito, y tal vez más todavía con la *Circe*, de Lope de Vega, que con las *Metamorfosis* (lib. XIII). Algunas variantes que introduce en la disposición de la fábula, creemos (al menos hoy) que son suyas. En cuanto al estilo, que es bien endeble, parece también inspirarse en la fluidez y armonía de Garcilaso” (Lomba y Pedraja 170).

Taking an even stronger critique of Arolas's building on an established tradition, Arcaz Pozo goes so far as to pathologize the poet, finding it fit to write two separate articles on the topic: "La 'Égloga II,' dedicada exclusivamente a cantar los amores de Polifemo y Galatea, supone un vano intento de Arolas por emular la magna composición de Góngora, [...] habida cuenta de su tendencia casi enfermiza a imitar a los poetas que leía, a redactar sin paliativos un poema sobre el mismo asunto" (Arcaz Pozo "Los mitos" 21). In the most extreme case of willful blindness, in his other article that treats the eclogues, "El clasicismo bucólico de las Églogas de Juan Arolas," Arcaz Pozo not only ignores the existence of the third piece of the poem, with its separate narrator "en realidad toda ella es un largo monólogo del cíclope que abunda, de acuerdo a las dos claras partes de que consta el poema" (326), but goes so far as to end his discussion of the poem with a quote that he stipulates as its end: a quote that cuts off the last twelve lines (327).⁹ Those twelve lines are where the entire confrontation and metamorphosis happen. In that same article, Arcaz Pozo states that Acis becomes a river in the eclogue while emphasizing Arolas's indebtedness to Ovid (327). The transformation that he suggests is simply not the case. Even the faint praise for the Arolas's classical interpretations, and particularly the eclogues, is tied to the derivative nature of the poems, and comes in the same text that called his supposed imitation "almost diseased" and "without palliation": "estas composiciones muestran asimismo una característica definitoria del estilo poético de Arolas [...]: se trata de la capacidad metamórfica y mimética de su poesía que no tiene empacho alguno en adoptar los tintes líricos de los autores que le sirven de modelo u fuente, ya sean clásicos latinos o españoles." (Arcaz Pozo, "Los mitos" 19).¹⁰ While my purpose is not to deny that Arolas found influence in his

⁹Arcaz Pozo used the 1982 edition of Arolas as the source for the writing of this article (3n1). The final twelve lines of the poem are neither missing nor occluded in that edition.

¹⁰It should be noted that although Góngora's iteration of the myth shares lexicon and form with

predecessors —after all, literature is a history of influence—, this general (and generally negative) perception of him needs to be disavowed with the aim that future critical work may objectively incorporate the beauty in foreshadowing and materiality that he uses in the construction of image in this poem —each of these pieces being unique in the tradition of Polyphemus and Galatea myths— allowing us to approach the author’s work as a whole with new eyes.

While “Égloga II” is indeed the retelling of a myth that appears in Ovid, Theocritus, Góngora, Carrillo, and Lope de Vega, it is startling that no study has yet engaged with the fact that it presents a different ending when compared to traditional sources or any of the aforementioned Latin or Spanish versions. It would seem that the outcome of a myth, particularly the identity of the transformed character in a metamorphosis myth, would have some bearing on the critical, or at least cultural significance of the text, particularly given that the supposition of derivation, in addition to Arolas’s having been a classics instructor (Arcas Pozo “Los mitos” 16), would seem to signal that such a shift in the core narrative of the myth would not be an accident. In addition to the sociopolitical commentary that this piece makes, and what it illuminates about the social imaginary of the century, I believe that it deserves to be read and seen for the beautiful piece that it is. “Égloga II” is an enrapturing poem that does exciting things with meter, and that sings itself off the page with the images and emotions that it evokes. Like the *Cartas amatorias*, previously treated in this study, this poem seems to have suffered unjustly in the face of criticism that viewed a negative reading of the poem as a foregone conclusion.

earlier versions, there is none of this negative ascription of value by critics; it is rather described as: “an attempt to emulate, rather than imitate, Carrillo, and ... any similarities in phrases, vocabulary, etc., were attributable to a full tradition of Polyphemus-Galatea literature in Renaissance Europe” (Lehrer 37).

The eventual water death in “Égloga II” is foreshadowed from its very first lines and throughout the text in a series of introspections and threats that are integral to the construction of Polyphemus’s gender identity. The eclogue begins with Polyphemus chastising himself for the weakness that is loving a woman. He expresses this shame through his own reaction to seeing himself in the water of the sea, and contemplating drowning himself:

Yo mismo me avergüenzo, que mirando
Mi triste imágen en el cristal frio
Pálido por amor vi mi semblante
Como de débil y celoso amante;
Y en aquel punto mismo
Hundiera mi cabeza en el abismo
Del Ponto airado y fiero
Para exhalar mi aliento postrimero,” (II: 23–24)

From the beginning then, Polyphemus’s experience of love both makes him feel feminized or experiencing a sentimentality that he is uninterested in holding, and is intrinsically tied to both the sea and the idea of a water suicide. This self-hatred, and this negative reaction to seeing his own semblance in the water’s reflection is unique to Arolas. In Theocritus, Polyphemus is startled by his reflection in the water “Faithful guard of the flock, he scampers along where the ripples / Break with a gentle splash, sees his reflection and yelps” (53), but when he suggests throwing himself into the water, it is to learn to swim and be with Galatea there:

Oh, why at birth were gills and fins not mine?
To kiss thy hand I’d leapt (sic) into the brine,
(Thy mouth perchance denied) and brought with me

Red poppy-flowers, or snowdrops white for thee—¹¹

.....

But I will straightaway learn me how to swim;

Haply a sailor here will come; from him

I'll teaching get, and seek what joys may dwell

Down in the deep that please you all so well. (82)

He decides shortly thereafter, however, that he would prefer her to keep his flock with him. In Ovid, Polyphemus does look upon himself in the water “to gaze at your savage face in the water and compose its expression,” but upon doing so, he finds the face of a god, not something to hate or be ashamed of: “Lately, I examined myself, it’s true, and looked at my reflection in the clear water, and, seeing my self, it pleased me. Look how large I am: Jupiter, in the sky, since you are accustomed to saying some Jove or other rules there, has no bigger a body” (XIII: 738–88).

Góngora takes that adulation of self a step farther, focusing the godhead in his own single eye, seen reflected in the water: “Marítimo alción roca eminente / sobre sus huevos coronaba el día / que espejo de zafiro fue luciente / la playa azul de la persona mía / miréme y lucir vi un sol en mi frente / cuando en el cielo un ojo se veía; neutra el agua dudaba a cuál fe preste, o al cielo humano o al cíclope celeste” (172). Carrillo’s Polyphemus goes so far as to see in his reflection a beauty that should be enough to convince Galatea to love him: “No fue naturaleza tan avara, / antes franca conmigo, de sus bienes / ... ; / testigo me es el agua hermosa y clara / del odio injusto que a mi rostro tienes” (20).¹² And yet Arolas’s Polyphemus, on seeing his own face, is

¹¹Lope too has an emphasis on floral motifs, which are replaced by images of marble or gold in Arolas—a much less common symbolic language to use in speaking of lovely women.

¹²Lope does not use the narcissian image, but does use foreshadowing. His Polyphemus threatens to kill Acis, and does so. In the threat, however, Lope mistakes Galatea’s parentage, suggesting that Thetys was her mother (who was in fact her sister): “Más conforme parece mi

filled with a Romantic, passionate, overfilling desire to kill himself. Indeed, in Polyphemus gendered performativity of suicidal ideation through the poem, there is not only a foreshadowing of water death, but an establishment of the norm of literary behavior that Galatea's purpose in suicide breaks.

The only thing that stops him, theoretically, from killing himself because of his shame at feeling love is the object of that love, summoned by a vision of her eyes: "Si no me retratase / La ardiente fantasía / Los ojos dulces de la ingrata mía" (II: 24). This is the first description applied directly to Galatea, 'my thankless one,' though her beauty is explicitly implied, through the fact that Polyphemus fell in love not with a person, but a quality: beauty. As he asks, at the outset of the poem, "¿Quién creyera que un pecho como el mio / Llegase á suspirar por la hermosura" (II: 23). Before Galatea's whole body is even present —only her loveliness and her eyes are— a dichotomy in her nature is established, between her definitional lack of gratitude and his love of an idealized disembodied beauty. This dissonance in characterization will grow throughout the poem, forming one of the bases of its social commentary.

After offering up what he can bring to a marriage and then denigrating each of those aspects about himself, Polyphemus brings up water death again. In a perversion of Plutarchan courtly sentimentality, he adds on to his previous threat of suicide. By saying that, at her word, he will drown himself in front of her, Polyphemus inculpates Galatea directly in his future demise. Separated by a section inviting her to say yes to him, he twice threatens her with a suicide that would supposedly be her fault. First,

¿Qué debo hacer? tú misma que el origen

deseo / con tu valor que el de pastor ninguno, / si eres hija de Tetis y Nereo, / y yo del rey Del Mar, del gran Neptuno. / Mas pues tan firme y áspera te veo / que no me queda ya remedio alguno, / yo mataré tu gusto, Galatea, / aunque te pierda, aunque jamás te vea." (49)

Has sido de esta pena y mi llanto,
Dime si he de vivir, ó si la muerte

Ha de acabar este dolor tan fuerte. (II: 27)

And then, “Dí pues si he de morir, y en tu presencia / Despeñaré mi cuerpo al mar profundo / Para acabar si puedo mi existencia” (II: 27). These two threats realize a drastic increase in the level of potential violence intimated, as well as in the psychological damage that they propose doing to Galatea. The first, while it inculpates her, filters the realia of the death that it proposes. The focus is on the overwhelming passion, not on the corpse-to-be. While this idea, overwhelming passion, is primary in the construction of suicide in the early part of the century, as we have discussed, the actual mortality in this description is veiled by its coding as a cessation of pain, rather than an end of life. The second threat does no such favors; its focus is on the mode and action of dying. Further, rather than blaming Galatea for the sentiment behind his action, the second threat is double: not only will he throw himself into the sea, he will make her watch.

Given the manipulation and the power play inherent in these two threats, it is surprising, perhaps, that between them Polyphemus affirms again that the power in their relationship lies, not with him, but with her. He says that if she comes to him, “dictarás la ley á tu cautivo: / Sabes cruel cuán disgustado vivo” (II: 27). So she holds all the power, but he will force her to watch him die. She dictates the rules of their relationship, but her ‘no’ holds no value. Indeed, directly after the second suicide threat mentioned above, Polyphemus likens Galatea to stone for the second time. The first, coming at the beginning of the poem, will be addressed later. Here, he attributes to her “la dureza del diamante” and likens her to “peñasco duro” (II: 27), affirming her strength after blatantly riding over her will, and negating any capacity in her to change his actions except through acquiescence. This cognitive dissonance both illustrates the character of

Polyphemus —his quixotic, violent nature— and will also echo in the way that Arolas’s Galatea breaks from the myth and reclaims her power.

Turning back to threats, Polyphemus turns his planned violence on Acis. His comparison of himself and Acis, covering nearly a hundred lines, is useful in the ways that it develops the play of gender and strength in the poem, particularly as Polyphemus eventually ties it back to the sea. The beginning of the description of Acis (II: 28) focuses on the actions that he and Galatea perform on one another, rather than on his person or character. He is “el insolente” (II: 28), where Galatea was “la ingrata,” and he is characterized by the hugs and kisses that he gives her. Like Galatea’s eyes at the beginning of the poem, Acis too has only one physical characteristic, and it is the one that could most cleanly differentiate him from Polyphemus, based on the physical description of himself that he gave. Polyphemus is crowned by an uncombed mass; in contrast, Acis, still disembodied, is described as the one “cuyo sutil cabello / Tú peinas cariñosa, / Y ciñes con jazmines y con rosas” (II: 28). This comparison feminizes Acis and sets him as counterpoint to the first negative aspect that the cyclops would own about himself (II: 26).

In continuing to compare himself to Acis, he is presented as stronger at every turn, and in ways that concretely feminize Acis. He goes so far as to make Acis a flower that will wither under his gaze: “¿Ignora el necio que mi vista sola / Le abrasará como á la flor mezquina[?]” (II: 29). This invocation of floral imagery ties Acis to the Romantic feminine. Lope too likens Acis to the *flor marchita*, but at the end of the story. In death, Lope’s Acis is characterized as a flower: “Rompióse por el ayre la gran peña, / y alcançóle de tantas una parte, / aunque a sus manos y furor pequeña, / tal que las sienas le penetra y parte. / Cayó como la blanca flor de alheña / al sol ardiente...” (49). Arolas’s Polyphemus further feminizes Acis through other elements of appearance (e.g. “debil frente”; II: 29) as well as dandified action (“Puede danzar major”; II: 30).

In this lengthy comparison, the most telling line in terms of demonstrating Polyphemus's cognitive dissonance—which in turn illuminates for the reader the contradiction between his desire and Galatea's will—is that he uses a negative coding in ascribing to Acis the same attribute that he claims is representative of the future relationship between himself and Galatea. Although Polyphemus swore that “dictarás la ley á tu cautivo” (II: 27), and that this would cure his sadness and “cuan disgustado vivo” (II: 27), when Acis is ruled by Galatea, that is, when she chooses to be with him, he is “Ese esclavo infeliz de tu hermosura” (II: 29). So even though he promises fealty and service in the context of acquiescence, the state that he so yearns for—being intimate with Galatea—is the cause of unhappy slavery for her current lover.

Two final pieces of his comparison of himself and Acis will allow us to see how this section circles back to the beginning in image and material, before moving into Polyphemus's song. From the beginning of the poem, when Polyphemus saw his love-stricken face and first contemplated suicide, his solution has been to throw himself into the sea, an eventuality repeated several times in the first section of the text. And yet, near the culmination of his aggrandizing comparison of himself to Galatea's chosen lover, he makes that eventuality near to impossible, saying that Acis is so small as to fade into the brush, while he is so great that “Cuando no llega el mar á mi cintura / En sus mas hondos senos” (II: 30). The great and terrible sea that has been the representation of self-murder loses here all the danger that it could pose to Polyphemus. The sea, like Galatea, is alternately powerful and strong, and completely powerless against him, each according to what serves him at any given moment. This vacillation in agency is demonstrative of the gender and power play of the poem, and further serves to bind the characterization of Galatea to the sea.

Polyphemus's song repeats many of his previously-expressed sentiments, but removes the existence of Acis entirely. In that absence, it ties the materiality of the water into the poem's construction of Galatea. In transitioning from his narration to the song that will form the next 135 verses (172–307), Polyphemus draws his listener back to the edge of the sea: "Estos versos cantaba yo á mis solas, / Que quiero repetir ora que el cielo / Se muestra claro y en quietud las olas" (II: 31). The end of the first section, then, returns to the reflectivity of the sea, present at its outset, structurally preparing the poem to begin the narrative again, in a tighter curve of the spiral. However, as this second section of the greater poem is Polyphemus's fictionalizing of already fictional events, there is an added layer of figurative meaning in the language; rather than raging at his rival, Polyphemus sets up the sea itself as a danger that threatens Galatea, and suggests that her choice to interact with it is dangerous. As we shall see, the song creates, as the first section did, a cognitive dissonance between the happiness that Polyphemus wants for Galatea, and her own will toward joy and self-identification.

Before throwing ourselves into the song, it is necessary to examine how Galatea has been characterized in the first section of the poem, as the construction of her character is key in understanding her death. In the construction of Galatea's character, the most important element of her being is her identification with the sea, a freedom and wildness that will come into direct contrast with the desired life—with its pertinent social expectations of housewifery—that Polyphemus imagines her as occupying. To explore the ways in which Galatea is characterized within Arolas as antithetical to the societal framework for appropriate female behavior, without penalizing her for that difference, her place in the mythological canon must be established. While Galatea is most frequently depicted as a shepherdess or a milkmaid in the postclassical tradition—growing from her treatment in Theocritus—, she is historically very much of the sea (J. March

“Galatea”). Galatea is one of the nereids, the daughters of Nereo and Dóride, granddaughters of the ocean, who are themselves ocean divinities. They perhaps personify the innumerable waves of the sea. Most of the nereids do not have large roles to play themselves, but a few, like Galatea and Tetis —mother of Achilles— do.¹³ The nereids are generally conceived of as unspeakably beautiful female figures who live in their father’s palace in the heart of the sea, where they would pass their time seated on golden thrones, or swaying with the waves, hair blowing with the wind or floating in the current, swimming amongst tritons and dolphins (Grimal 377).

Galatea appears in the poem predominantly through apostrophic address from Polyphemus. In contrast to the anterior renditions of the myth, Arolas’s Galatea is not a secondary, ex-post-facto frame narrator. She can’t be, since Arolas kills her. Once dead, she cannot be there to recount her woes to Scylla. Galatea’s first appearance grants her great power, and at the same time masculinizes her refusal of Polyphemus’s advances. Both the supposed level of her power, and the ascription of gendered traits will continue to be foci of Polyphemus’s attempts at persuasion. Here, he compares her refusal to Neptune’s wrath when he causes the sea to rage. “Pon fin á tus furores, / Que hasta Neptuno insano / No siempre agita las temidas olas” (II: 24). This comparison, entreating her, like Neptune, to lay down her trident and accept the tender embraces of her lover, links her emotions to the sea’s might: to its calm and to the squalls and storms that cause its danger. After using this metaphor to make Galatea into the sea, Polyphemus makes her immovable and impenetrable: “Mármol al llanto, bronce á los gemidos” (II: 24). The comparison of Galatea to stone will continue throughout, including the marble and

¹³It is slightly problematic for this analysis that the Spanish name ‘Tetis’ is used for two different mythological characters, who are related to each other. One is the English ‘Thetys,’ an oceanide. The other is ‘Thetis,’ another of the nereids, and thereby the granddaughter of Thetys. Neither Thetis nor Thetys is Neptune’s wife, however, that is Anfitrite.

rocky crag referenced above, and later, in the song, stripped of the metaphor, “duro corazón” (II: 33) and “pecho endurecido” (II: 38). From the outset, Galatea is figured as powerful, strong, and unaffected by his obsession. It would seem that she holds all the cards, in a mythological aggrandizement of a Plutarchan courtly love—a particularly nineteenth-century Plutarchan love, where instead of a passive succumbing to passion, the foiling of a physical connection leads to an active suicide.

Yet, this ascription of power to the object of desire cannot last. The very next sentence (verses 32–40), completely inverts the power structure, as her ‘desdenes’ come not from a place of marble strength, but rather embody her mortal frailty:

Y ví como corrias
Por no escuchar mi canto,
En la carrera el paso fatigabas,
Y mientras que tus blancos pies herías
Mi corazón amante maltratabas. (II: 25)

The first point that this sentence illuminates is that the reader is carried straight from her being an ungrateful statue with whose beauty Polyphemus found himself enraptured, to her wearing herself down and injuring herself in her struggle to escape from him. Whether the “herías” is actual injury or mere *activity*, which Polyphemus will later explain as anathema to female happiness, in spite of Galatea’s clear and apparent desires to the contrary is open for interpretation, and yet, in its context within the poem, this verb conjures the pain of flesh torn in flight over unforgiving stones. The other thing is that though the prey here is Galatea, and the (physically) injured party is also Galatea, the victim, in Polyphemus’s eyes, is himself. His experience frames the sentence; he sets himself up to sing and is ‘maltreated’ by her flight from

him. He defines her fleeing from him as a violence that she perpetrates on him, even though that flight is physically damaging to her, causing exhaustion and injury. She holds no power to stop him but is still cast as the oppressor. While Polyphemus cannot, or will not, see the power structure, Arolas's audience surely can.

This contradictory characterization of Galatea, where she is both powerful and powerless in the same instance, is supported in its inherent critique of Polyphemus by the extended comparison of Acis and Polyphemus. That comparison creates Acis's privileged position in Galatea's favors as simultaneously Polyphemus's goal and a prison for Acis. In the traditional narrative of the myth, Acis is characterized through his emotive weakness, while Polyphemus is linked to his brutish strength. The narrative trajectory grows out of this binary. The expectation is that Galatea's function will be to elevate Acis (emotion, sensibility) after the violence that he will suffer at the hands of Polyphemus (being crushed by a stone). This is the narrative that the reader of this eclogue, versed in the classics or merely living in a milieu that valorized them, would expect from Arolas. If that is the expected narrative and message, what then is the difference when Acis does not die, and Galatea does not sacrifice herself for anyone's future but her own? The outcome is that it recreates the whole lengthy comparison to become now the demonstration of Galatea's choices and character, albeit through the guise of macho posturing. She makes her choices in the face of opposition and obstacle. She runs to the point of injury to hold firm with her ideals, or, if that harm is the activity itself, she exerts herself against the constraints of gender roles that are appositional to her nature. She chooses to love and to carry on a relationship with the object of her affection (Acis), in the face of pressure from a powerful and violent suitor. Furthermore, the repeated comparisons that liken her to stone, while they are for

Polyphemus a measure of her cold heart, are equally indicative of strength of character, and of unwavering conviction in living her authentic life, true to her basic markers of identity.

Polyphemus's song allows for an analysis of Galatea's character that is not based in the comparison of her two suitors. Because of the absence of competition, there is space in Polyphemus's song for him to base his narrative on how Galatea *should* behave, in contrast to how she *does* behave. Through Polyphemus's defining of how Galatea's life and identity should be, there is a more deep exploration of her own desires, through her interactions with the sea, that gives Arolas's explanation for the eventual outcome of the piece. Sung, as established above, from the edge of a serene, reflective sea, and to/about a sea nymph, the song begins its repetition and magnification of the narrative of passion by creating the sea as a danger, not to Polyphemus, but to Galatea herself. The song begins by suggesting that Polyphemus sees Galatea's frolicking on the shore as an imminent risk to her safety:

No juegues libre y serena
Con el mar terrible y fiero,
Ni con ese pie ligero
Pises la mojada arena;
Mira que me causa pena
Verte jugar con el mar
Cuando puede maltratar
Lo que tanto me enagena. (II: 31–32)

Though the risk to her is implied by the qualification of the sea as terrible and fierce, the suffering that the danger causes is his. While Polyphemus sees this pain as caused by the potential harm that the sea could do to the object of his affection, this desire for Galatea to

refrain from “dangerous” activity comes from the same source that pursued her to the point of her injuring herself in her flight, and sets up as the danger the same element that he used as a description of her power at the beginning of the first section of the poem.

Furthermore, the activities that he proceeds to set forth as a “loco atrevimiento” (II: 32) from which she “tendrá que arrepentir” (II: 32) are typical, pleasant beach pastimes, rather than anything audacious or that could be construed as flirting with danger: collecting stones, running along the shore, and the existence of seals (remember that Galatea and the Nereids are often depicted swimming with sea mammals):

No cojas piedras pintadas
Ni corras por la ribera,
Que alguna marina fiera
Puede sentir tus pisadas:
Las focas están armadas
De dientes, y son feroces.
Huye que no las conoces,
Y suelen matar airadas (II: 32)

The dangers posed here: that some sea monster might be drawn to the vibration of her footfalls, and furious, bloodthirsty seals would be hard pressed to make less sense as threats to the safety of a sea nymph, particularly one whose whims command the tempests. Although in the first pass through the story (before the song began a second cycle), Polyphemus had asserted that if she agreed to be with him, he would be her slave, here, it is Galatea’s own happiness that Polyphemus purports to offer. That happiness, however, like his conception of danger, is completely blind to her character and actual desires. After warning her off from diverting herself

with her own native element, the water, he promises unbroken happiness at his side: “Tendrás en mi choza abrigo, / Sin que falte a tu contento / El menor divertimento” (II: 35). There is also a shift in the comparisons of Galatea to the aquatic pantheon. Her anger had been compared to Neptune, who sometimes lays down his trident and “entretiene sus plácidos amores / De Tetis en los brazos cariñosos” (II: 24).¹⁴ Now, she is linked to this same sea goddess, instead of the masculine energy of Neptune. This lover of Neptune’s becomes the measure of Galatea’s hypothetical happiness in Polyphemus’s song:

El sueño conciliarás
A mi lado muy segura,
Y el aura mas fresca y pura
Del vergel disfrutarás;
Tu dicha no cambiarás
Con la diosa de los mares. (II: 36)

The use of this particular point of comparison seems, in a way, to speak to Galatea’s nature, as it compares her future happiness to the goddess of the water, which is her element. However, because of the conditions for that happiness, it is also a willful misunderstanding of her character. To find this happiness, Galatea would have to stop acting as herself and neither approach nor play in/with the sea. To carry to its conclusion the twisting of her identity in his vision of a happy future, what Polyphemus plans in this future is to turn a sea nymph into a fountain: contained, safe, useful, and sweet. In describing the world that will be hers upon her acceptance of him as a lover, he offers her a fountain, instead of the sea.

¿No ves esta fresca fuente?

¹⁴See footnote 13

¿No ves este hermoso prado?

¿Mi numeroso ganado

Que apenas hay quien los cuente? (II: 36)

While the beginning of what he offers to her is still water, and in that way in line with her nature, the fountain, unlike the sea, is a symbol of utility and controlled purity. According to Bachelard, while all water is the symbol of purity and can clean anything (133), its purity is like the idea of virginity: once it is tainted, it can never be free of that taint (139). However, the water of a fountain is the least likely to ever be tainted (140). Indeed, the idea of the fountain as intrinsically possessed of a cleansing, healing power will be key in the unfinished suicides later in this chapter.¹⁵ This constriction of the role that she should play: not roving the shore and sporting with the waves, but drawing the clean water of a fountain to perform a useful function, demonstrates the way that Polyphemus codes female happiness as embodied only in the fulfillment of societal gender roles.¹⁶ We will return to this idea with Galatea's transformation.

Before moving to the suicide scene itself, there is one final piece of Polyphemus's song that is as crucial for its reading as the multiple foreshadowings of water death in the first section:

¹⁵As contemporaneous examples of the idea of a fountain embodying literal purity, take these lines from poem 4 of *Las orillas del Sar* by Rosalía de Castro: "Tras de inútil fatiga, que mis fuerzas agota, / caigo en la senda amiga, donde una fuente brota, / siempre serena y pura," (740). And for the mixing of literal purity and figurative purity (virginity), this description from "Los quince años" by Carolina Coronado: "Virgen, tu bella juventud al mundo / muéstrase alegre, candorosa y pura. / Tal entre rocas cristalina fuente / brota en la sierra" (100).

¹⁶In Theocritus too, Polyphemus sees and tries to construct Galatea not as she is, but as he wishes her to be. Yet that shaping is different. It is, by design, a first experience of woman, and so he makes her up of the things that he knows. Her skin, rather than pearl, azucena, or snow, is whiter than curd, for instance. "The Cyclops indicates to us that he is not shaping his view of the woman as she 'really' appears; he tries to make sense of the way that she comes into his consciousness. The woman is as if a dream and when he awakens, she is gone" (Likosky 51). Marilyn Likosky establishes idyll XI as "the management of an erotic dilemma," which is tonally different from a battle of wills unto the death, as we see in Arolas.

a *carpe diem* in the song that builds Galatea's youth and beauty in an element from the natural world, though not the coral and lilies that could be expected. Her youth and beauty are figured as sea foam.

Esa espuma pasajera
que las olas van formando,
Ninfa, te va ejemplo dando
de tu hermosa primavera;
pasa como flor ligera
la risueña juventud,
y llega la senectud
con su rápida carrera.
¿Por qué pues dejas pasar
el abril de tus amores
en desdenes y dolores
que mi vida han de acabar?
Sepas una vez amar,
antes que pasen los días
de las dulces alegrías
que jamás han de tornar. (II: 33–34)

In everything that I have found, the use of sea foam to indicate the ephemeral nature of beauty and youth in a *carpe diem* is unique. Connections between women and the natural world are common. The use of a *carpe diem* to press for amorous contact with the beloved is common. Arolas's "Égloga II," nevertheless, is the only iteration of Polyphemus's song in the Spanish-

trajectory canon of Polyphemus/Galatea myths to have a *carpe diem* of any kind. Both Góngora and Lope use the tradition of comparing female beauty to the natural world, which is often the basis for a *carpe*, but in both of their tellings of the myth, these comparisons are without the threat of oncoming senectitude. While the function of the *carpe diem* in Arolas is to pressure Galatea to be with Polyphemus sexually, it is also a final distillation of much of the foregone characterization and foreshadowing of death in the piece. She is as beautiful as a flower, but in a beauty coded through the genitive property of the sea. Her lack of acquiescence is coded as signaling a death that is about to occur, a death that was coded as a water death from the beginning of the poem. Furthermore, in assuming that Galatea has never known love, it is a final instance of the construction of a desired set of character traits that ignores the facts.

The element of this *carpe diem* that is most useful in the reading of agency and eroticism in Arolas's myth is the sea foam itself.¹⁷ In the mythological tradition, sea foam is the genitive property of the sea, as it is thought to be the semen that flows out of the severed genitals of Uranus, cut off by his son Cronus and thrown into the sea (J. March "Dione"). Sea foam is further related to the creation of life, and the creation of beauty in that Aphrodite grew out of the white foam that rose "round the immortal flesh" (J. March "Aphrodite"). It is also, more literally, the most active part of the water, being produced as it is from the element's most violent motions. The use of sea foam as the natural referent for Galatea's youth and beauty, working in tandem with and amplified (or its meaning clarified by) the pursuant floral reference ties her

¹⁷Two earlier versions of the myth mention sea foam, but neither use it as a descriptor of Galatea, youth, or beauty: Góngora uses it to represent the activity of the Sicilian sea: "Donde espumoso el mar siciliano" (v. 25 p. 156), and Carrillo in his dedication to the Conde de Niebla: "mientras la espuma en su color no imprime / a turco o holandés rostro" (11). In a contrary attribution, it seems that Góngora used the sea foam as a means of signaling age, in speaking of the sun's course, that the foam was the sun's white hair as it set over the Atlantic (verses 410 and 705 of *Soledades*).

beauty to Aphrodite's, links her again to the sea, and sets up the materiality of the transformation that will come. Galatea's youth and beauty are embodied by sea foam in this metaphor, so too is her existence in a life without Polyphemus: her freedom and her identity as a creature of the sea are as linked to that imagery as her physical appearance.

When the metamorphosis comes, it is this image of marine forever-youth that is its outcome. At the end of the poem, in the coda, with its third-person narrator named 'poeta,' Galatea throws herself into the sea, and makes herself into its foam. This transformation comes rapid-fire after the expected hurling of the great stone on Polyphemus's finding Acis and Galatea together:

cuando a lo lejos en la playa hermosa
vio a Galatea, ninfa desdeñosa,
con Acis caminar por la ribera,
y herido de furor y pena fiera,
desgajando un peñasco ponderoso
lo arrojó con tal furia y osadía
que retumbando el monte cavernoso
en sus ecos el golpe repetía: (II: 38)

It is with these echoes that Arolas leaves the traditional narrative entirely. Rapidly dispatching his Acis ("Acis huyó"; II: 39), Galatea returns to the water and decides to exist *as* its genitive property, because man and the world do not deserve to live with or near her when they cannot do so without trying to control her or dictate the role she should play in society:

Acis huyó: la ninfa conmovida,
temiendo por su vida,

con llanto y pena suma,
arrojándose al mar formó su espuma. (II: 39)

This ending is startling in the way that it shifts the established narrative of the myth, and before its impact can be fully felt, three elements from the older versions need to be unpacked: the agency behind the transformation, the transformation itself, and what happens to Galatea. In the immortal words of Lin Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*: "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" In Theocritus alone, there is no transformation, as there is no rival. Instead, Polyphemus decides, at the end of his song (interlude XI) to seek a different girl. This hopeful ending underscores the youth and pre-monstrosity of Theocritus's Polyphemus. In Ovid, Galatea, whose survival is known from the outset, as she is a frame narrator for the whole interlude, escapes alive, in nymph form, into the water. She then, of her own volition—as opposed to through the use of a more powerful intermediary—, transforms Acis into a river god.¹⁸ In Góngora, the final two stanzas see Acis's transformation affected. Galatea intercedes with the "deidades del mar" (175), and *they* transform Acis into a river. That transformation occurs in the last stanza, bringing the work to a definitive end, and yet there is no denouement for Galatea. What happens to her?

¹⁸"'I see you,' he cried, 'and I'll make this the last celebration of your love.' His voice was as loud as an angry Cyclops's voice must be: Aetna shook with the noise. And I, terrified, plunged into the nearby waters. My hero, son of Symaethis, had turned his back, and ran, crying: 'Help me, I beg you, Galatea! Forefathers, help me, admit me to your kingdom or I die!' Cyclops followed him and hurled a rock wrenched from the mountain, and though only the farthest corner of the stone reached him, it still completely buried Acis. Then I, doing the only thing that fate allowed me, caused Acis to assume his ancestral powers. From the rock, crimson blood seeped out, and in a little while its redness began to fade, became the colour of a river at first swollen by rain, gradually clearing. Then the rock, that Polyphemus had hurled, cracked open, and a tall green reed sprang from the fissure, and the mouth of a chamber in the rock echoed with leaping waters, and (a marvel) suddenly a youth stood, waist-deep in the water, his fresh horns wreathed with rushes. It was Acis, except that he was larger, and his face dark blue: yet it was still Acis, changed to a river-god, and his waters still retain his former name." (XIII: 870–97)

No one knows. Women don't matter.¹⁹ In Carrillo, Atis becomes not a river, but a fountain, and Galatea ends up in the sea, but alive. Again, she does not have agency over the transformation, even to the point that she does not intercede: the fates take action to make him a fountain (stanzas 22 and 23).²⁰ Galatea ends up alive to cry over her lover, but how she deals with Polyphemus moving forward is unclear here, as it is in Ovid and Góngora. Lope gives his Galatea the most narrative conclusion, as she returns to the sea to live far away in a forever mourning, as “Acis, contigo se acabó mi vida / aunque soy inmortal” (50).

In Lope's *Circe*, the transformation is seemingly automatic, again taking the agency from Galatea; Acis is crushed, then, starting a new stanza: “Boluióse luego en líquido rocío / y poco a poco fueron sus despojos / formando arroyos” (50). When Polyphemus pursues her after the transformation, Galatea runs, and goes back to the sea to get away from him, but corporeally, and temporarily. Lope's Galatea can live easily in the sea: “que apenas llego a verte quando airada, / desde la blanca playa al mar te arrojas, / de círculos de plata coronada.” (47). Yet Polyphemus's rage and anxiety follow her into the water. The denouement of each of these earlier versions has focused on the outcome for one or the other of the male characters (with Theocritus being the obvious exception to focus on Acis), even though Galatea is eponymous to the story. It is *her*

¹⁹“Con violencia desgajó infinita / la mayor punta de la excelsa roca, / que al joven, sobre quien precipita, / urna es mucha, pirámide no poca. / Con lágrimas la ninfa solicita / las deidades del mar, que Acis invoca: / concurren todas y el pennasco duro / la sangre que exprimió cristal fue puro” (LXII, 175). And then the transformation: “Sus miembros lastimosamente opresos / del escollo fatal fueron apenas, / que los pies de los árboles más gruesos / calzó el líquido aljófara de sus venas. / Corriente plata al fin sus blancos huesos, / lamiendo flores y argentando arenas, / a Doris llega, que, con llanto pío, / yerno lo saludó, lo aclamó río.” (LXIII)

²⁰Polyphemus, upon seeing the lovers, says: “—‘Será la vez postrera que abrazado / mire mi bien mi mal’— dijo y el viento / la voz trajo, y la piedra, y en un punto / me vi en la mar y vi mi bien difunto.” (22) And the transformation: “Lo que los hados permitir quisieron, / de mi divino amante los despojos / en esta clara fuente los volvieron, / que cada día aumenta mis enojos; / apueste el lugar fue donde le vieron, / para no verle más, mis tristes ojos, / y ésta la fuente hermosa y cristal frío, / amarga siembre por el llanto mío” (23).

struggle for freedom from a stalker, and yet the ending is about how male jealous rage affected another man.²¹

Arolas inverts that expected narrative, by sending Acis off to an undefined fate as expeditiously as possible; four syllables and he is gone. For Arolas, this is Galatea's story, and it is her desire to escape from the unwanted attentions and control of a violent pursuer that deserves pride of place in the denouement. She, not Acis, suffers beneath the tyranny of Polyphemus and his desire to shape her future in a way that negates her core identity. The entire structure of the poem leads up to this moment, and hints at its resolution. There has been a foreshadowing of water death, then her youth—and by extension her freedom—were likened to sea foam. Then, with the pain and grief that accompany suicide, the “*llanto y pena suma*,” she loses her material self and makes herself into that same foam. The agency is hers, and she uses it to become the element that is representative of her freedom: a freedom and marine alignment that are more important to her than her physical life. This, in complement with this ending being a radical shift in the historical trajectory of the story, is both intentional, and a powerful commentary on the politics of identity and sexuality that the piece evinces.

Galatea's transformative suicide demonstrates a female appropriation of agency that denies the legitimacy of societal expectations of gender, and that is presented without reproach. There is no recrimination of Galatea, both because of the mythological setting, and because the choice that she makes is set up throughout the piece: it is only by damaging herself that Galatea can escape Polyphemus: whether that damage is tearing her feet upon the rocks or giving up her life to maintain her freedom. Furthermore, the foreshadowing of a traditionally Romantic,

²¹From a contemporary standpoint, in their dictionaries of mythology, March and Grimal both give Galatea, rather than her intercession, agency over the transformation (J. March “Galatea”; Grimal 209).

lovelorn water suicide creates an environment where her choice to die is all the more rational in comparison. Her story demonstrates a break with expectation where singular identity or nature is appositional to the fulfillment of traditional gender roles. While identity is always and already outside the expectation, the choice to die becomes an assertion of the power to be true to the self, which by extension points that gendered social roles cannot be universally applied to women. By allowing Galatea to reject being a fountain, there is an acceptance, albeit through a mythological veil, that it is unreasonable to expect women to change their identities to fit within the role of safe, contained, sweet caregiver.

Just as Martina's body was never subject to the gaze in "Martina and Jacinto," Galatea's transformation does the same for her. Both of these mythological poems deny the scopophilia associated with the presentation of the dead female body to the reader's view, where "the subject seems still tantalizingly alive. [...] Once dead, convention allows the woman's body to reveal some of its secrets with impunity" (Charnon-Deutsch, *Fictions* 240). Neither of these women are offered up to be gazed at and controlled in death, as their deaths are demonstrative of an appropriation of power.

In her study of modernista Ophelias, Ana Peluffo finds much the same thing: "In all instances, the corpse is represented prior to the decomposition of the flesh to preserve the memory of its morbid beauty. This necessity of aestheticizing death explains why the pre-Raphaelite painters preferred to depict Ophelia's death by drowning rather than the death of Juliet, another Shakespearean character who dies out of love, but in a bloody and violent fashion." (71). Since Ophelia is the main image of nineteenth-century female suicide, she is what we expect, as critics and readers, to see in our dead women. We want their hands full of flowers, their hearts broken, their deaths the outcome of a loss of reason. The images of death that present

themselves in these nineteenth-century-ized myths, disassociating themselves from that dear idea that we love to hold, allows these deaths to be an *out* from a social system that hems the female in with expectation, whether that exit is through the fulfillment of a social role, or a complete rejection of the constraints of society.

A Double Immersion: Healing and Death in *La hija del mar*

Moving from the discussion of the use of literary female water suicide in the context of reinterpretations of myth in the first part of this chapter, this second part will look at a triple case of female water suicide to explore its interaction with madness, shifting conceptions about medicine, and its place as a symptom of social ills. The text on which this section will focus is *La hija del mar* (1859), Rosalía de Castro's first novel. In this text, the linked female protagonists, Teresa and Esperanza, either intend or enact death in the water three times. Born of the sea and, like her adoptive mother, exceptionalized from the start, Esperanza's final return to the sea at the end of the novel closes a cycle. However, taken in the context of her other water suicide, which cures her of madness, the second suicide takes on societal, rather than emotional underpinnings. Her mother's intended death in the sea, preceding both of these immersions, plays off of both sides of that emotional/social dichotomy. These suicides interact with the century's conceptions of and fixation on suicide as it is figured within society, denying passivity and emotion as the soul of the feminine. Neither *tedio* nor any other inability to cope that will figure in the death of Esperanza.

In their seminal books *De musa a literata. El feminismo en la narrativa de Rosalía de Castro* and *Narratives of Desire: Nineteenth Century Spanish Fiction by Women*, Kathleen

March and Lou Charnon-Deutsch have respectively explored the function and expression of female experience in the work. March does it in terms of “su potencial y los obstáculos que impiden su desarrollo psicológico, obstáculos que al fin son vencidos por la reafirmación de solidaridad entre las mujeres de la obra” (77–78), while Charnon-Deutsch approaches it with the goal of examining how the private and social existence of the female characters demonstrate Castro’s “sustained interest” in what she perceived to be a “*sick society*,” even though she did not turn to the essay form to express her views on women’s role in society (*Narratives* 79). However, like many texts presented in this study, this novel too has been seen by the critical canon, both at the time of its writing and later on, as “lacking much,” perhaps because of the youth of its author, almost definitely influenced by if not because of her gender. March suggests this gendering of the depreciation of youth through a comparison to Manuel Murguía, as he also wrote his first novel very young, and was seen as an artistic genius, though the sentimentalism of his work (the trait that caused the negative reaction to hers) was just as heavy (51). This judgement of the work, that denigrates it for its forefronting of the emotional, has led to a dearth of critical treatments of Castro based in formal analysis “tal vez porque significaría admitir que la autora tenía una mayor comprensión de las técnicas literarias de la que tradicionalmente se les atribuía a las escritoras de su tiempo” (K. March 52). Though March coded this frustration in terms of formal analysis, Leigh Mercer’s excellent 2012 study on the use of the Gothic in this novel and *La sombra* by Galdós, finds the problem to be more general: “of the remarkably few critical works dedicated to *La hija del mar*, fewer still examine this text positively or constructively” (35). Let us then build on the work of those who do see talent, skill, and value in this text: March, Charnon-Deutsch, Kirkpatrick, Mercer, and Rábade Villar.

Indeed, María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar has taken the paradox of this assumed literary innocence as the outset of her exploration of the poetics of tears in the novel, where she lays out that the structure, as well as the content of the novel creates a “protagonismo innegable del mundo emocional” (“Lágrimas” 139), an ontology that defies intellectualization, and that leads the actions of the story to be deeply rooted in their entanglement with emotion (139). Just as Rábade Villar lays out a lachrymose epistemology in the physical manifestation of emotion, there is a whole world in the way that the women in the work relate to the sea, and to water in general. In her article “Fantasy, Seduction, and the Woman Reader: Rosalía de Castro’s Novels,” Susan Kirkpatrick untangles the seduction fantasies that spin around the main male character, the novel’s antagonist, Albert, to demonstrate how the novel “registers the extent to which such fantasies make women victims in the politics of gender relations,” and builds the co-protagonists in such a way that they “exemplify alternative trajectories for feminine subjectivity in relation to patriarchally inscribed desire” (78). She lays out how the novel “treats as tyranny both the political and the psychological power of pulp fiction’s seductive father-figures; it debunks the myth of female power to redeem through passivity; and it presents the mother as an alternative object of women’s desire” (79). Mercer takes that critique one step further, demonstrating how the novel problematizes the *folletín* trope of idealizing inter-class marriage through the massive harm that it does to Teresa and its coding as luxurious slavery, much inferior to working-class freedom within the social coding of the novel (Mercer 37). Taking as her primary thrust the development of how the novel codes abuse as well as the domestic sphere in terms of the natural world (35), Mercer ties the tempestuous home lives of Castro’s female characters to the novel’s setting on the Costa da More through the Gothic ideation of the sea (38).

Mercer, Kirkpatrick, and March see the sea, and Esperanza's return to it, as the culmination of the social struggles that the novel illustrates: "El mar será origen y meta final de la lucha que tal defensa supone" (K. March 53), "This struggle to transform the meanings of the given narrative materials is very clearly an unresolved process within the text. Esperanza, the 'hope' on an un-Oedipalized feminine subjectivity, can find no place in the social world and throws herself from a cliff into the sea. Her story exposes the painful dilemma of the female reader—and the feminine subject—within modern patriarchal society" (Kirkpatrick, "Fantasy" 79), and "ending her novel with a pitch-perfect mix of the language of the domestic with the organic, Castro once again defies the patriarchal norms of space. Yet by closing the novel with Esperanza's suicide, Castro reminds the reader that in this era, women can be free only in death." (Mercer 39).²² Yet none of these critics actually talk about the suicide (definitely not the suicides plural) in terms of how suicide was theorized during the century, nor how Esperanza's death(s) relate to the visual patterns of that kind of death. That then, will be part of the work of the current discussion, to deepen the feminist messaging about the novel through its interactions with the time's patterns of suicidal demonstration, as well as continuing the work of laying out a framework for how water suicide is a diffraction of the point of contact between femininity and water.

²²This kind of freedom, based on a psychoanalytic model, is the power that Elisabeth Bronfen finds in female literary suicide in her *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, where she asserts that "[b]ecause culture so inextricably connects femininity with the body, and with objectification, because culture makes the feminine body such a privileged trope or stake in aesthetic and social normative debates, a woman can gain a subject positionally by denying her body" (Bronfen 143). This kind of denial through death is complicated by the aestheticized display of the female corpse, but it shatters the "cultural construction of the feminine as 'dead' image ruled and violated by others" (143).

A discussion of the relationship to water in the piece must begin at its outset, where Esperanza is born of the sea and Teresa gains one child, losing another. The village has gathered at the shore, where the men pull in a net and the women talk, ready to bring the catch home. Teresa arrives after the others, with her toddler son. As a storm brews, a girl baby is found and rescued from the sea. As her loveliness is marveled at and her fantastical origins imagined, it is decided that, though everyone wants her, she should go to Teresa. As soon as this decision is made, a wave carries away her son. She faints at the grief of his loss, and then takes her new daughter home. This scene, beginning as a *cuadro de costumbres* of fishing culture, establishes the exceptionalism of both of the co-protagonists and the baseline of the relationship that they will have with the sea throughout the novel.

The waters of Galicia, and of the Costa da Morte in particular, are hungry, and must be appeased. While rivers may demand a yearly tax in lives, tribute against their rising out of their banks (Miranda and Reigosa 12), the sea is yet darker (Otero Pedrayo 274). The sea is where even water goes to die: “Nos ríos a auga faise adulta, o seu curso é coma a súa vida ata morreren no mar” (Miranda and Reigosa 12). The life of the river is like a human life. Born in the spring, it dies in the sea. The sea is also where souls go when they die, through doorways called “cabos do mundo;” the sea, like some wells and fountains, is also the entrance to the afterlife and the home of a whole host of mythological and fantastical creatures (Miranda and Reigosa 12). This sea, with its tax in lives, and its preexisting association with death is seemingly Esperanza’s womb. Though it will be revealed that she is the child of Teresa’s husband by another woman that he has cast off, she starts off not only potentially supernatural in her own origin, but in the trade that the sea makes for her.

Esperanza is pulled from a rock by the men from their boat as they struggle against the oncoming storm, her first cry: “El quejido de una criatura recién nacida, lánguido, dulce y suave como una melodía, se dejó oír al mismo tiempo que el zumbido del trueno que resonó cercano, así como la luz fosfórica del relámpago iluminara antes la imagen de la inocencia reposando en brazos de la fuerza” (36). She is then described as an angel (37), and subsequently as potentially supernatural: “—¿De dónde diablos traéis esa criatura? —preguntaron algunos a un mismo tiempo —¿La ha dejado alguna meiga en vuestro regazo?” (37). This supernaturalism is part of her identification with the sea, particularly given the physical locus of her finding, a location that continues to conjure supernatural creatures, within the context of the scene:

a nuestra vista se apareció una niña, recostada sobre el musgo húmedo, la más hermosa que he visto en mi vida, y tiritaba de frío, la pobrecita [...] La cogí entonces para acercarla a mi pecho y darle el calor que su madre le había negado...

—¿Su madre!..., prorrumpieron todas las que allí había. ¿Es posible que esa pobre criatura tenga madre?

—Pues qué, ¿pensáis acaso —repuso el marinero con ciertas pretensiones de sabiduría— que ha nacido por obra y gracia de la roca negra?

—¿Quién sabe! ¡Quién sabe! Es demasiada hermosa para ser de este mundo... (37)

Esperanza is tied to the cultural anthropology of the sea from her very introduction: the associations with the supernatural and the otherworldly, in the context of her being found on a barren mossy rock out beyond the surf, and her first cries mixing with the roar of the storm, cement that connection.

It should not be assumed that it is only in a Galician context that a child pulled from the sea would have an air of the supernatural. The association between water and a final death is

strong enough that it is common across many cultures that children who returned from water — whether lost there by accident or on purpose— easily become miraculous beings: having crossed the water, they have crossed over death, and having done that, they can perform other miracles (Bachelard 74). Esperanza is far from the only such child, born of the sea and destined to return to it.

Because of this connection with traditional powers of the water that are both universal and culturally particular, when her finding is accompanied by the death in the storm of Teresa's toddler son —Teresa “acababa de ver a su hijo arrastrado por aquel torbellino de agua, fiera implacable que no devuelve nunca lo que una vez se ha sepultado en su fondo de arena” (39)—, it is not just narrative balance, but a deep cultural expectation or traditional meaning of the water. March notes this exchange of children as that the sea “parece reclamar un sacrificio, en forma de una víctima masculina, a fin de compensar la separación de Esperanza de sus aguas maternas” (80), but taken one step further, this sacrifice is only to be expected in a sea that is as agentive as the Galician one is.

As Esperanza grows, her association with the sea-as-mother, her identitary connection to its material and thereby her substantive connection to its imaginary, remains a key element of her character:

Esa niña ligera y airosa, que alegra las áridas riberas que os he descrito como un rayo de sol ardiente el desnudo y aterrado cuerpo del mendigo, ésa es Esperanza, la hija del mar, la que arrojada sobre una pelada roca, no sabemos si es aborto de las blancas espumas que sin cesar arrojan allí las olas, o un ángel caído que vaga tristemente por el lugar de su destierro. (45)

These paired images: the fallen angel wandering alone and the spirit product of the sea's own agitas connect also to Esperanza's struggle against abuse in a system that is built appositionally to her protection. March ties this idea to the loss of the mother, and, in turn, that maternity to the sea: "Esperanza, la esperanza en general, ha de sufrir, situación que vincula el concepto de una madre de carne y hueso, con el da la madre natural que es el mar" (K. March 109). As a maternal relationship is reciprocal, so is Esperanza's link with the ocean. Not only is she of the sea, but the sea is also of and in her:

al verla aspirar con ansia loca el viento que rueda sobre la superficie de las aguas, cual si él consistiera su vida, no podría menos de decirse:

—¡Ésta es la hija del mar, la esencia de sus bellezas, su más rico tesoro!...

El mar es su elemento, su felicidad, el sueño de sus sueños, y la ilusión que embellece las horas de su infancia. (56; ellipsis in the original)

Given that this tie to the sea has some basis in a cultural universal for a predominantly maritime region, her connection to the sea goes beyond the bounds of gender construction. In addition to acting as though the sea breeze were all the sustenance that she needs, she has no fear of surf or tempest in the way that others do. Watching a huge storm from a cave in the cliff, she is filled with excitement and joy, while her young companion, who is besotted with her, literally feints (Cap. vii). Though the narrative will later reveal Esperanza's mortal parentage, her character is not coded in terms of the abandoned human child; she is native to the materiality of the wind and the water.

In addition to being the title character, Esperanza's lack of fear when facing the dangers of the natural world are a piece of what constructs her co-protagonism with her adoptive mother, Teresa. A little more connected to the world than her adoptive daughter, Teresa watches the

storms with “una extraña mezcla de miedo y de curiosidad” (35). Indeed, her whole character is composed of contradictions that balance her between the emotive and the societal in her struggle. There is the beginning of the interconnectedness of the struggle and passion of the two women in the way that Rábade Villar has laid out tears as a “metáfora de la disolución de la normatividad subjetiva característica de la racionalidad moderna” that destroys the possibility for singular narratives for each character (“Lágrimas” 150). In concert with that dissolution, March figured their relationship symbolically, allowing that it is through Esperanza’s figurative identification with the sea that “la niña entonces sería el símbolo arquetípico del mundo marino que con tanta fuerza atrae a su madre adoptiva” (83). This symbolic association heightens the intimacy of the relationship between them, “como si Esperanza fuera parte del mismo ser de Teresa, su fe en el futuro y quizás el regreso del marido ausente. O en una palabra: la esencia del ser femenino en su capacidad de amar” (83). Extracting that identification from narrative causality, in the relationship between the two women, and in their relationship with the sea, there is a profound connection, which indeed may be likened to the idea that Esperanza is a part of Teresa’s being, rather than a separate character. In a similar vein, Mercer says: “Their salvation, the novel suggests, will come through a denunciation of masculine abuse and the cultivation of a poetic union with the natural world” (Mercer 38); I argue that it is not a poetic union, but a *physical*, mortal union with the natural world that is set up as the escape: ideated by Teresa, and then brought to fruition by Esperanza, through their joint and co-responsive protagonism.

To demonstrate briefly just how intra-active the relationship between Teresa, Esperanza, and the sea is in the instantiation of water death, let us consider the note on suicide in Castro’s poetry from María Xosé Queizán’s *Rosalía de Castro e o poder sexual*. What is telling in this text is not necessarily the poems analyzed (drawn from *Follas novas* and *En las Orillas del Sar*),

but in the agency that she establishes in the language that she uses to talk about Castro's water suicides; though she never comments on it, she applies a marked agency to Castro's drowning water that is not present in the other authors and philosophers that she uses as counterpoint. Following the decision *by* Storni and Woolf to die in the waters "Elixiron as augas como elemento onde sumirse." (Queizán 76), water death in Castro is an immediate shift from choice (above) to seduction: "as penas non lle deixan resistir *a chamada das augas*" [my emphasis] (77), and "O río Sar é a corrente *tentadora* nalgún poema rosaliana" [my emphasis] (76). This shift in the language builds the agency of the material body, creating the suicide as a phenomenon jointly created by the sea and the woman, in the same vein as the aqueous seductions that we saw with Zambrana and Gómez de Avellaneda in chapter 1. Castro's sea, her water, is as much a character and as an active participant in these deaths as the co-protagonists.

Further cementing that intra-active, sensual relationship, the first suicide in the novel, where Teresa decides to die, begins with a similar intra-active seduction as we saw in "Del mar las transparentes olas." While Teresa does not, in fact, die here, the decision that she makes is in itself a literary, Romantic suicide. In talking about Cadalso's *Noches lúgubres*, Sebold establishes that the completeness of the suicide attempt is not a measure of its strength, neither in the level of romanticism nor in the treatment of suicide as a theme. "De hecho el suicidio que nunca llega a ejecutarse en la carne pero sigue contemplándose es una más dolorosa por más lenta muerte voluntaria y brinda al escritor romántico infinitas más posibilidades líricas que el brusco e irrevocable desenlace sangriento" (Sebold, "Introduction" 78). Alone on the shore, feeling an emotional identification with the surge and pulse of the sea, "[l]os rugidos del mar, la cólera de las olas es la única que puede estar en consonancia con los tormentos de un alma

fuerte, con los sentimientos de un corazón generoso que se desespera de las mezquindades de la tierra” (54), what will become a decision to die begins as a caress:

Arrodillóse a orillas del mar y posó su frente abrasada sobre la arena para que se estrellasen débilmente en ella las olas frescas que corrían hacia aquel punto.

Después besó la arena con profundo recogimiento y, sacudiendo su negra cabellera en la que brillaban como diamantes de un rico tocado las mil gotas de agua que esparcía en torno suyo. (55)

With this kiss, this kneeling supplication, and the image of the water’s drops —like diamonds, not like tears— shining in her hair and in the air around her, Teresa decides to die, saying “con acento claro y penetrante:”

—Yo debo morir porque también mi hijo ha muerto! Mi marido me ha abandonado y no soy ya en la tierra más que un frío despojo de quien nadie se acuerda... ¡Yo debo morir!... ¡Lorenzo cuidará de Esperanza!

Guardó silencio algunos instantes, sus ojos derramaron un torrente de lágrimas que rodaban rápidamente por sus pálidas mejillas y, después, dirigiendo en torno suyo una mirada de tristeza, exclamó con acento conmovido.

—¡Voy a darle el último beso! ¡Pobre Esperanza! (55)

This is an over-feeling suicide: the incapacity to cope with emotional turmoil and loss; it is a morally coded death of its type, as it is the son, rather than a lost lover who is to be mourned, but the idea remains the same. Of any, this suicide is most tied to the Romantic ideal. It is borne of the sublime pain of the loss of her son and the abandonment of her husband. And yet, in the characterization of Teresa, another element becomes clear, a second vertex that is as strong as the first. She is not only overwhelmed by her emotions, she is also suffocating in a society that

does not allow her to live fully, that holds her to a set of behavioral and work strictures for women.

The description of Teresa just before this decision to die continues a mode of characterization-by-juxtaposition that was initiated at the beginning of the novel. From her first appearance, she was composed of contradictions. Now, those same contradictions, that same duality arise in her, prompting this suicide. She is both “loco de amor,” and an “espíritu fuerte,” her heart “inocente y lleno sin embargo de amargura,” her self a “genio indómito sin alas para volar al azulado firmamento” (55). Though several critics have pointed to this genius in Teresa as an element of autobiography, or as a way of writing another writer into Castro’s work (alongside Mara, whose poetry is at least written down), what is important here for the suicide is the fact of the dichotomy of her character: “era una joya perdida en un ignorado rincón de la tierra, un tesoro desconocido que iba a perderse y morir por demasiada vida y por falta de luz y de espacio” (55). The reason for her death is as twofold as the rest of her character; she will die because of emotion and a broken heart (“demasiada vida”), *and* because she exists within a societal system that smothers her (“por falta de luz y espacio”). These two vertices, then, are what is explored in the two later suicides in the piece.

This first suicide, foreshadowing the oppositional pair that will follow it, establishes the tension between the overwhelm of emotion —the mad lovelorn Ophelia— and the response to a societal system that fails those who live within it. Both of those paths are charted here, as Teresa vacillates between her unbounded personal grief and her profound frustration at a social system that gives her no options. Each of these suicides will be performed by Esperanza as she moves through her conflictive and abusive relationship with her father and society; the outcomes there continue the sociopolitical discourse on female societal roles, and on the emotive mandate in

female characterization, where emotion rules over reason: the same rule of emotion over reason that Brown establishes as a large piece of the nineteenth-century conception of suicide:

“Vicesimos Knox described suicide as exemplifying the ‘danger of submitting to the warm emotions of the heart in preference to the cool deductions of reason’” (135). In the analysis of suicide that is apparent in the juxtaposition of reasons, Castro develops a literary counterpoint to this theory.

The first of Esperanza’s suicides is definitely based in those warm emotions. It is also the only suicide that we will treat that is directly tied to madness or to mental illness, though that concept was still developing at the time. Having been held captive with Teresa by her (Teresa’s) husband—who unbeknownst to all of them, is Esperanza’s father—, having been mercilessly sexually pursued by that husband/father, having escaped over a wall in true Gothic fashion from the oppressive incestuous patriarch, and then having seen her childhood companion Faustus die and be consigned to the waves instead of receiving a Christian burial because he was bewitched, Esperanza has gone mad. When we pick back up, she is insensible and raving, and being cared for by a doctor and a man who is first introduced by a different name, but turns out to be her father. Esperanza will be returned to her right mind by the enactment of an ophelian suicide in the pond of the garden and woods where she is being kept.

This suicide needs to be read in the context of the image of Ophelia, both because that image is the archetype of female suicide in the nineteenth century, but also because each element of that death—the deep connection with the natural world, a childlike pursuit perverted by madness, the fall, floating in the water unaware of the danger, and finally succumbing to its pull—, feed each other to create the pathetic (as in pathos, not as in weak) death-for-love that we expect of heroines. It is the same image that Espronceda twisted by having his Elvira come back

from the world of the dead to haunt her lover, the same image that we will see in a genderbent construction in the next chapter. To set the scene then, and establish that connection with the natural world, “el rocío de la noche andaba en todas las flores y en todas las hojas, [...] la hierba exhalaba, como todas las plantas, en vapor fresco y aromático a propósito para disipar las pesadas visiones que el sueño aglomera en torno del pensamiento” (114). The introduction of Esperanza into the scene begins with the aerial, focused on the interaction of these same exhalations, and becoming corporeal through the touch of flowers: “La loca respiró todos aquellos perfumes; las brisas matinales pasaron rozando su frente y acariciando sus lívidas mejillas y las flores dejaron caer sobre su manto azul algunas de sus más hermosas hojas” (114). While Esperanza’s fall into the pond does not have to do directly with flowers, this opening to the scene conjures their image and brings them to the fore of her construction.

The first key element of the staging of this suicide is Esperanza’s madness, which is coded as an emotional overwhelm that has made its sufferer unable to really feel. This instantiation of madness could be read productively through contemporary theories of trauma and its physical manifestations in the body, but that analysis will have to wait for a different project. Instead, let this suffice: “¡Ay de aquella pobre alma sobre la cual tantas tormentas habían pasado, dejándola sólo sensible para el dolor!” (115). Her surfeit of tragic experiences has left her unable to properly feel. In contrast to Ophelia, who goes too near the water while imitating the adornment of a wedding ceremony (“There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds / clamb’ring to hang”; 1177), signaling her madness as being caused by her lost virginity followed by an abandonment, Esperanza is chasing birds (uncaged, and singing for the joy of it, symbolizing lost freedom and the ability to appreciate beauty): “La paloma cruzaba la azul y serena atmósfera, las aguas reflejaban su sombra, y la loca quiso perseguir a su enemiga entre los

fríos pliegues de las ondas” (115). Both of these activities, making garlands of flowers and chasing birds, are also innocent youthful diversions, which connects the madness of their actors to the subordinated childishness attributed to women in general.

Ophelia falls into the brook surrounded by her flowers because of leaning on an unsound branch; Esperanza is so intent on chasing the birds that she doesn't register the pond as other than ground. As she tries to pursue her quarry 'among the cold pleats of the waves,' her madness is reflected in the water, which then, seizing its own agency, swallows her: “Reflejó en éstas [ondas] un rostro hermoso animado por una amarga y salvaje alegría, se abrieron con estrépito, volvieron a cerrarse y escondieron bajo su húmeda y rizada túnica un cuerpo hermoso que se vio flotar sobre la superficie envuelta en los anchos pliegues de su manto” (115). In this moment of submersion, not only does the water take the agency in swallowing her, but there is a confusion in the language of material and clothing that brings them together, as well as again signaling Ophelia. The same word, 'pliegues' is used to describe the surface of the water (before immersion) and Esperanza's mantle (once she is submerged); furthermore, the surface of the water is described using lexical reference to clothing: it is the water's 'tunic' rather than its 'surface' or 'waves' (as before) that show the presence of the submerged girl. This focus on clothing also ties to Ophelia, who, upon falling is first held up by her clothing, and then dragged to the depths by it.²³ This death closely parallels the century's archetype and is based in the madness that comes with a surfeit of emotion, of grief at love lost. Following Teresa's ideation

²³“Her clothes spread wide / and, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up; / which time she chanted snatches of old lauds, / as one incapable of her own distress, / or like a creature native and indued / unto that element; but long it could not be / till that her garments, heavy with their drink, / pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay / to muddy death” (1177).

of suicide, this death follows only one half of the dichotomy: the ‘demasiada vida,’ an overwhelm of feeling and experience of trauma that has stripped her of her ability to reason.

Or that is where the death would lead us if she had died. Almost immediately pulled from the waters, Esperanza “viose libre de la muerte que aquellas aguas, tan tranquilas al parecer, guardaban en su seno de espuma” (115). Not only does Esperanza survive this ophelian fall, it returns her lost wits to her. She had been unseeing, insensible, not interacting with the world around her, but following this immersion:

Ella [...] volvió a la vida como quien despierta de un sueño pesado y congojoso. Notóse entonces en sus ojos una tristeza profunda, observó con extrañeza cuanto le rodeaba, y apareciendo ajena a cuanto le había sucedido hasta entonces, exclamó con melancólico acento:

—¿En dónde estoy? No conozco a nadie aquí. (115–16)

The fall into the pond becomes the inciting incident for a return to reason, and a return to feeling. The doctor who had been attending her posited that a return of deep sadness would be the indicator that her mind had begun to work again, and the tears that follow this awakening figure prominently in Rábade Villar’s poetics of the lachrymose in the work.

The relationship between this recuperation of her wits and her submersion in the water is more than chance, though it has so far gone unnoted in the criticism of the work.²⁴ In the same way that the loss of Teresa’s son to the waves was a demonstration of the traditional role of the waters, this cleansing is as well, both in its universal symbology and in the particular roles and powers attributed to it by Galician tradition. While Bachelard established the water as the

²⁴ However, Kathleen March gives an excellent treatment of this scene focused on the role of mirrors and reflectivity in the Esperanza’s development of self-knowledge (110–13); Mercer links the return to reason to Esperanza’s coming into knowledge about her birth mother (39).

ultimate cleanser, and fresh water as stronger in that capacity (133–42), the Galician tradition goes farther. Submersion in water is a traditional means of breaking enchantments (Otero Pedrayo 275); if madness is an unnatural rupture in the function of the mind, it makes sense that submersion in water would help to cure it. The waters of Galicia do more than break enchantments though. They hold both cathartic and soteriological (relating to a religious salvation) powers of purification and regeneration (Taboada Chivite 104). Furthermore, there is a proliferation of mineral springs throughout the region that have led to a long-standing *balneario* or spa tradition around the healing properties of the waters (88; Martos Núñez 35). It is not circumstantial that Esperanza's fall into the pond quits her of her madness. It is the usage of traditional properties of the water to effect the rejection of a death of sentiment. By using the waters to both fulfill the suicide and destroy its cause (the madness), Castro rejects the archetypal mode of female suicide: the lovelorn madwoman surrendering to passivity, a death of circumstance and reaction, rather than choice.

In the third and final suicide in this novel, Esperanza does actually die. Charmon-Deutsch sees the death (though she does not stipulate it as a suicide) as the culmination of Teresa and Esperanza's fight against the sick society that Ansot represents: "Unable to walk the fine line dividing what *La hija* construes as the shores of male influence and power and the sea of feminine expansiveness and unbounded love, Teresa and Esperanza wash up on the shore as so much flotsam of a wasteful society" (*Narratives* 82). Mercer reads it as the ultimate crash between the natural and the constructed/patriarchal: "Ending her novel with a pitch-perfect mix of the language of the domestic with the organic, Castro once again defies the patriarchal norms of space. Yet by closing the novel with Esperanza's suicide, Castro reminds the reader that in this era, women can be free only in death." (39). For Kirkpatrick too, this death represents the

hopelessness of the struggle against patriarchy: “This struggle to transform the meanings of the given narrative materials is very clearly an unresolved process within the text. Esperanza, the ‘hope’ on an un-Oedipalized feminine subjectivity, can find no place in the social world and throws herself from a cliff into the sea. Her story exposes the painful dilemma of the female reader—and the feminine subject— within modern patriarchal society.” (“Fantasy” 79). And yet, within the trajectory of suicides in the novel, and through the intra-action of character and sea, this death does more: it finishes the cycle that is begun with Esperanza’s rescue from Galicia’s waters, and by doing so creates a more complex, and potentially more optimistic commentary on societal expectation, gender roles, and agency.

There are a few key pieces to hold at the outset of my analysis of this scene. Firstly, the sea is more than a passive setting in its interactions with Esperanza. This coast holds the doors to the other world, the doors through which the spirits of the dead always and already go. Death and the sea hold each other close (Miranda and Reigosa 12). In going into the sea, Esperanza is doing physically what the soul will do anyway. The other piece is Esperanza’s particular relationship with the sea. While the Gothic mandates the untangling of any presumed supernatural elements, and as Mercer has so skillfully laid out, this is indeed a Gothic story, Esperanza still holds the characterization that built her as a creature not quite of this world, whose material identification is more with sea than man. Because of this, in dying in the sea, she is, similarly to Galatea, returning to and materially joining with her element, setting her spirit off into the clamor and great heaving life of the ocean that she loves, not just ending a mortal life. By returning to the sea, she completes the cycle that began when she emerged from it, and by dying in it she both fully embodies the human and is also imbued again with supernaturality by fusing with the water, to end up in a realm totally apart from the human.

Unlike at her first suicide, Esperanza decides to die not overcome by emotion, but because there is no place in society that she can fully express her life, prefers to no longer play the game, not even to watch it from the outside. She asks if she should return to society and live out her life: “¿me volveré sola a ese mundo de seres que bullen y se agitan como abejas en su colmena, para disputarles y que me disputen riquezas que son mentira y placeres que no quiero brindarles?” (126). And then she sees the sea as the answer to that, better even than trying to continue to live on land and not interact with that society:

Mas ¿por qué he de alejarme de este valle? ¿No es cierto que nadie existe en este mundo que haya de llorarme?

El mar que ruga a mis pies me muestra su blanca espuma, semejando lecho de descoloridas flores azotadas por el vendaval en donde duerme el último sueño la virgen melancólica de pesares...; ¿para qué sufrir, pues, esta fatiga de todas las horas y esta soledad que me rodea y me ahoga? (126; ellipsis in original)

The thing that is drowning her is the solitude of living outside the system, which she also cannot see herself fitting within; it is not emotion, frustrated passion, or grief; not even the water at her feet has that power. Furthermore, the “¡Ay!” that she gives on dying also is not about emotion, in any kind of ophelian sense: “último acento que lanza el moribundo al despedirse de este mundo, un ¡ay! desgarrador nacido de las esencias más amargas y de los pesares más intensos” (126).

This is not the “¡Ay!” of the Romantic heroine, swooning after being abandoned. It is not Ophelia, deflowered and mad. It is a bitter choice, but the best one available.

It is not just that the only freedom for women is death. It is that it is a (perhaps better) option to not play. To not participate in a society that is nothing but struggle. In the poetic language of the diegetic world, that means dying, indeed. But the message is not one that states

“so kill yourselves;” it is rather that the problems are not personal failings, but systemic issues that need to be addressed. It is symptomatic of a glaring problem in the structure of society, not a personal failing on the part of Esperanza, even though it is her who decides to die. It is, in a sense, like wealth inequality: the problem is not that the poor don’t work hard enough. She is pointing out something of the same sort: something that is both obvious and not at all clear to a lot of people. But by having not one but two unfulfilled suicides that counterpoint this one in reason, Castro creates such social messaging. The inability to exist in the system —when the cause of death is that, and not madness or the overwhelm of grief— shows that the system does not work. You cannot put a child of the sea in a *colmena*; you cannot expect women to thrive under patriarchy.

The final moment of the text concludes the co-protagonism of Teresa and Esperanza, as the former bids the latter farewell in the waves. Even though the physics don’t make sense —in a way that Castro would know intimately (a body falling from a cliff and then washing up on the shore would not immediately be washed back out; maybe at turn of tide, not at once)— this final moment between the two women cements their solidarity while denying the co-opting of the body for display in all of its passive beauty. Indeed, before her death and while mourning her lost biological mother, Esperanza determines that the dead ought not be the visual or physical property of the living: “las cosas de los vivos no deben llegar nunca al sitio en donde reposan para siempre los que ya no son del mundo” (126). The syntactic structure of this final meeting reinforces the mutual pull of their relationship: “A la dulce claridad de la luna vióse adelantar hacia la ribera a una mujer enlutada: las olas arrojaron a la playa un cadáver” (127). It is even more demonstrative of the escape that Esperanza’s body, in particular, is not offered up for the gaze of society, given that, as a Gothic heroine, much of her struggle was in the avoidance of the

incestuous lechery of her father. This meeting, in the water, amongst the waves, allows for connection, rather than voyeurism and control.²⁵

This final meeting is also moment where the reader finds out who has died: “Y luego besó con transporte el cadáver más frío que las olas... Era Teresa que besaba por última vez las hermosas mejillas de Esperanza” (127; ellipsis in original). The final chapter is the final lamentations of the three women: the biological mother Cándora, Esperanza, and then Teresa, who appears to witness Esperanza’s return to the sea and little else. She is the only witness to the death, and, appropriately, the only one to see Esperanza’s beautiful corpse, as the waters quickly carry her away again to “su lecho de algas una tumba que el humano pie no huella jamás” (127). While there is no further conclusion for Teresa and Cándora, that lack in itself speaks to the novel’s message on the systemic impossibility of living while female: Teresa is in mourning for a hanged husband, still living and suffering on the outskirts of a society that cannot embrace her, and Cándora continues to wander, mostly mad, overcome by the emotional trauma inflicted on her. Like Martina amongst Isaacs’s peasant lyrics, Esperanza’s fate is substantially better than those of the other women around her, though for her, that difference is because Esperanza rejected, rather than fulfilling, the role that society wished her to play.

These texts are but a few of a canon that demonstrate a different image of nineteenth-century water suicide than exists in critical consciousness. It is not tedium or the inability to function in the face of modernity. Instead, it is the agentive choice to die, as positively coded out from a patriarchal system that leaves few options. This image, of the choice to die, does not

²⁵This positive coding of a post-mortem encounter in line with what Queizán sees in the types of deaths common in Castro’s work: “Unha morte libre, autónoma, non relacionada nin dependente do *destino*, unha morte coherente, en ocasións desexada” (71), and “Noutros casos a morte é atracción e é luz en lugar de sombra” (71).

negate the *tedio* or rush-of-progress models, nor does it deny the existence of Hispanic Ophelias, but it does shade the outline of what female suicide is in the nineteenth century, largely because female and male experiences of the century were so divergent. Whereas for men death was a loss of power, for women it could be a refusal to remain subject to a system that either was not built for them, as in the myths, or that functioned in such a way as to cause harm. It is not a passive nor an active failure, but a choice not to play. I in no way wish to glorifying suicide, but cannot allow that these water deaths be subsumed into the extant tropes. It is an abject and yet agentive total rejection of the system, not an imposition of a positive onto suicide.

Chapter 4: When the Tropes Bend: Flavio and a Male Ophelia Death

An infatuated youth loses faith in a lover, walks down to the river, and loses that love forever. Such is the narrative of the lady Ophelia, so popular in the nineteenth century's literary imagination. It is also the narrative of Rosalía de Castro's nominal hero, Flavio, whose eponymous story was published serially in 1861. This novel, which follows the life and failed love story of its young protagonist as he enters into modernizing, urbanizing Galician society following the death of his parents, plays with the tropes of the sentimental novel and delves into the psychological makeup of its main characters. It uses the tropes of female water death with a male character, which allows a deep interrogation of gender and sentiment. Kathleen March explores the novel in terms of gender politics, reading Flavio's love interest, Mara, as the true protagonist, and examines her relationships with society and authorship to mine the novel's feminism. María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar excellently charts the novel's valorization of emotion in Flavio's descent from idealism to cynicism, in parallel to the century's shifting mores. Rosario Medina and Lucía García Vega explore the novel's geography, while Deanna Johnson-Hoffman and Ignacio Infante investigate its interaction with the genre of the sentimental romantic novel and Romanticism.¹

One aspect of the novel that has not been treated, however, is its gender-swapped

¹To broaden the scope of this chapter and an excellent treatment of Castro's poetics in relation to the Romanticism of the continent, see Infante's deconstruction of the ascription to "Iberian Romanticism a sense of marginality, exoticism, and generally a lack of relevance" (232).

embodiment of the Ophelia motif. While study of the Ophelia trope in nineteenth-century Spain is lacking, the kind of gender inversion that takes place in Castro's novel has gone entirely unnoted.² Not only does the use of this motif add to the psychological and emotional underlayment of Flavio's character, it frames his personal narrative as metonymic for the death of romantic idealism in the rise of the modern era. Reading Flavio in terms of Ophelia deepens the understanding of the divide between the urban and the rural in the novel, and complicates its gender construction, intensifying the feminist potential of the text. In Rosalía de Castro's Flavio, through a gendered inversion of the Ophelia trope, a riverside suicide becomes not a physical death, but the death of a Romantic nature, a death of sentiment. This gendering of character and suicide then adds new shades to the work's feminist message, as well as to the interplay of gender and water-death discussed in the last chapter.

While Flavio bears all of the signature characteristics of the love-wracked Romantic hero, so much so, indeed, that they rise to the level of caricature (Rábade Villar, "Spleen" 485), the sentimentality in his characterization codes him as a nineteenth-century *heroine* as well. Flavio "tiene los rasgos de la clásica heroína decimonónica: la espiritualidad, su entrega completa al amor, la imposibilidad de realizar ese amor, el sufrimiento paciente y una sensibilidad tan extrema que llega a poner en peligro su propia vida" (K. March 51). The most telling in the feminization of his character is the degree to which sentimentality reigns. Flavio does not merely feel the world deeply, rather his feelings overwhelm him. From the very first chapter, which sets

²The study that comes closest to dealing with a Spanish Ophelia in this period is María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar's excellent piece of scholarship "The Ophelia Motif in the Work of Iberian Galician Writers," which links the twentieth century Galician poets Cunqueiro, Torres, and Pato to both the French nineteenth Century (Rimbaud, Thomas, and Berlioz) and the twentieth century icon Marilyn Monroe, through Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the rhizomatic.

the scene as following close on the heels of the death of Flavio's parents, his desire to leave his ancestral home and see the world is not predicated on a virile desire to conquer, but rather on the overwhelming sadness and fear that overcome him:

tan dulce tranquilidad me causaba entonces profunda tristeza, y me sentía conmovido como si presintiese una cercana tormenta. Aquel estado de temor que se había apoderado de mi espíritu llegó a causarme una inquietud extraña [...] mas en aquel instante mis oídos zumbaron, mi corazón dejó de latir y, flaqueando mis rodillas, caí sobre el pavimento. (132)

It is this “temor invencible” (132) that causes his departure on what is, in theory, the Great Tour that could be expected of one of his station. His description of his departure, however, though he will later cloak it in the more virile rationales that are more appropriate, grows out of his desire to run away: “Despavorido, reuní mis fuerzas y me puse en pie para huir” (132). Growing out of this initial excess of focus on the emotional in Flavio's character is a feminized quasi-hero whose reactions to love and its loss appropriate the hyperromantic feminine.

Harmonizing with this initial desire to run from a fearful place in a dark night is another tool that Castro uses in the queering of Flavio's gender expression: the structure of the gothic heroine. The gothic mode, existing at the point of frisson between desire and fear, creates heroines by making them face terrifying and often supernatural foes, over whom they have no power, thus their tendency toward precipitate flight.³ The locations of this flight are traditionally labyrinthine ruins and unfriendly landscapes, where storms lash and fogs obscure the helpful

³The novel also uses the gothic mode to characterize both Flavio's childhood home upon his leaving it (157), and the urban atmosphere (197): “Esta atmósfera espectral, tan querida a Rosalía de Castro, viene a reforzar a su vez el carácter fantasmático de las relaciones en la ciudad moderna” (Rábade Villar, “Spleen” 484). For Castro's use of the Gothic in her earlier *La hija del mar*, see Mercer.

light of the moon. Such is often Flavio's relationship with the settings through which he moves, particularly at night, and at those times when his overly emotive nature exerts itself fully.

Given that this situationally induced flight is perhaps the most identifying factor of the Gothic heroine and is "the most classic Gothic circumstance" (Hogle 9), let us look at how Flavio ends his first night out of his parents' house, begun, as seen above, in the wind, the night, and the desire to flee. After chancing upon a country dance in the woods, Flavio meets Mara, for whom he feels an instant and overpowering desire. So strong is his emotion that he immediately breaks into a frenzy of tears, which, upon being perceived by her friends and compatriots, lead them to ridicule the stranger sobbing in their midst. Frustrated by this, angry and still afraid, his response, as any true Gothic heroine, is to run away:

Su mirada, extraviada, no alcanzaba a distinguir entre los densos vapores si caminaba por la ancha y fácil carretera, o si su carruaje rodaba a orillas de un precipicio, y su convulsa mano no podía detener ya los desbocados caballos. [...] ¡Cuan horrible aquella huida, marchando al azar envueltos por las nieblas negras e insondables como el caos! (155)

This flight continues only briefly—describing Flavio as 'loco,' 'delirante,' 'extraviado,' and 'conturbado'—before it is ended abruptly by an accident, directly following Flavio ruminating on the speed with which life leads to death: "Temía la muerte, no quería abandonar tan pronto la vida; pero el fantasma de negras alas y enjutas mejillas parecía sonreír entre la niebla y atraerle hacia sí con sus miradas tristes y sin brillo" (156). This maundering, Gothic contemplation of death and its inexorable draw begins the trajectory that will lead Flavio to the riverbank where he tries to kill himself. Flavio is, like Ophelia, a creature born to die in water, if a character's birth comes with their story's first page; in the first scene of the novel, Flavio's present tense first person singular verb is 'ahogarse': "Yo me ahogo en las blancas paredes de tus habitaciones

mudas” (131).

Another element of the Gothic mode that, via his identification with the Gothic heroine, aids in the feminizing of the hero in *Flavio* is the elusive boundary between the real and the imagined. The Gothic mode is in itself structured around a vacillation between “earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural” (2), and such a vacillation is predicated on the strength of a character’s emotions, fear most particularly. This shifting of the bounds of reality comes to the fore in *Flavio* with the connections that the hero makes between the supernatural and water. His innocence and femininity are underscored by his seeing supernatural elements and folkloric magic in nature: particularly in water and other fluid compositions—notably a stream of female dancers that he likens to the sea. His perception of the supernatural in nature is introduced at the outset of Flavio’s journey at the beginning of the novel, with a confusion of time and space that conjures magic:

La luna se presentaba tan clara y brillante [...], y sus rayos pálidos iluminando de lleno el río prestaban tal transparencia y encanto al paisaje, que Flavio pensó no era tan difícil creer que las sílfides y ondinas moraban en el fondo de las aguas o vagaban en la apacible sombra que reinaba en la espesura. (138)

Flavio’s departure from the walls of his childhood home as a young, well-brought-up gentleman immediately turns into a gothic flight imbued with an expectation of the mythologically supernatural, his inhabiting of the social role of the bourgeoisie landed gentleman is swiftly made impossible.⁴ Furthering this distance between character and societal expectation is Flavio’s deep

⁴In *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, William Reddy examines similar interactions between the wild or ‘savage’ aristocrat and cultured or bourgeoisie society, particularly in George Sand’s *Indiana*. While the narrative of that work differs almost entirely from that of *Flavio*, there is an interesting correlation in the characterization of male emotion at the outset of a journey from the rural to the urban (249).

desire to follow those things that make his passions —the subsuming of one soul to another in love, and the facile construction of a perfect future— burn and overtake him. When he starts to see nymphs in the stream, he does not pull himself back to reality, but pushes himself to pursue “aquellos armoniosos ecos que le enloquecían” (138). Later, the sensuality of the ocean’s waves become a supernatural dance: “sordo y manso ruido de las olas juguetonas que corren unas tras otras en la arena como ninfas envueltas en túnicas transparentes...” (157; ellipsis in the original). In both of these examples, the water is not only key in the admission of supernatural elements to the world, but creates a material sensuality in the water itself, whether sweet or salt. In that water is coded, through the Gothic, as the locus of magic, that magic becomes representational of the hero’s sentimentality and Romantic idealism. Taken a step further, that magic in the water connects his sentimentality and idealism to the rural side of the rural/urban divide that was key in the modernizing impetus of the century.

The same water that invokes the supernatural through the Gothic allows deeper understanding of Flavio’s gender construction, when read in terms of the feminine sublime. Encountering a group of female dancers in the woods, Flavio sees in them the dangers of the dark ocean, the figure that Burke uses as the epitome of sublime danger (qtd. in Freeman 28): “De nuevo, los sonidos de la música, llenando el bosque, [...] y la multitud, agitándose como un mar que se agolpa y que ruge, pareció responder al llamamiento de los armoniosos acordes. Todo fue confusión y algazara en aquellos momentos” (142). Flavio’s reaction to this roaring, shifting mass is not that typical of a Romantic male in the face of Burke’s sublime; he does not confront it or reassert his self in the face of it. He gives himself over to the movement, to these turgid “waters,” embracing the danger, and, as Barbara Freeman describes, seeking loss of the self and of assertive control in the face of danger (32). “Tan sólo Flavio, [...] se dejaba arrastrar sin

voluntad por aquellas oleadas, que, insensiblemente, le fueron conduciendo al lugar del baile” (142). Freeman’s sublime here serves a similar function to Kristeva’s Abject, in that it is by letting the object of fear pass over and through that one can control or understand it (11). It is not the culmination of fear that comes with a surrender to it, to the sublime or the abject, but a means of accessing the beauty, “the sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us” (Kristeva 210). This invocation of the sea allows for an entry into the sublime and the abject in the face of social situations, it exacerbates the sexuality indicated by later instances of contact with water, and presages the river suicide that Flavio will later attempt, where he will allow himself to be dragged off by a current.

In bridging this sublime, Gothic femininity to the Ophelia trope that is the focus of this essay, phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard’s constructed “Ophelia Complex” in *Water and Dreams* is useful, namely through its articulation of the tripartite symbolic weight in the materiality of water, where it brings together life, eroticism, and death in the water. He holds that a contemplation of water “symbolize[s] a meditation on our last voyage and on our final dissolution” (Bachelard 12), and that Ophelia “is a fundamental image in reverie about waters” (86). After all, “[w]ater, the land of living nymphs, is also the land of dead nymphs. It is the true matter for a very feminine death” (81). In this way, Ophelia first presents herself in the conflation of water with the female supernatural creatures that Flavio sees in it. Without even the suicide that he attempts, Flavio summons Ophelia when he contemplates the water. And that summoning, for its part, brings water death into being. Ophelia, as a type and as a character, is one whose existence is predicated on a future death; she is the symbol of female suicide, and is “truly a creature born to die in water. [...] Water is the profound organic symbol of woman who can only weep about her pain and whose eyes are easily ‘drowned in tears’” (Bachelard 82).

Bachelard claims that men can only understand these deaths by becoming feminine, that is, by crying. What then of our Flavio, who, rather than simply learning to understand this most feminine, sentimental, and flowery of deaths, seeks it for himself? Let us turn briefly to the nineteenth-century's construction of Ophelia, as it relates to the overly sentimental Flavio, whose eyes are drowned in tears throughout the novel, up to his attempted river death (132, 137, 144, et al.).

The nineteenth century's love for Ophelia is well documented in the United Kingdom and France, though as yet not so concretely in Spain. Some extrapolation is reasonable, given the cultural porosity of the continent, a porosity that Rábade Villar will use in her treatment of the Ophelia trope in the Galician twentieth Century ("O personaxe" 146). As the ubiquitous imagistic trope that she is, Ophelia becomes, like the Gothic mode, a mirror for the values and preoccupations of the culture that reconstructs her (Peterson and Williams 2). Ophelia's presence in the century is not a diachronic trajectory, but rather a cluster of elements that evoke her. Rábade Villar names her a collective identity for the historical female subject, and underlines her multiplicity of literary utility, functioning not only as a character, but also a theme (151). According to Kimberly Rhodes in *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture: Representing Body Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, these elements "revea[l] the character to be at the nexus of the power struggle over the somatic and representational subjugation of the female body during the Victorian period" (Rhodes 3).⁵ Using the Ophelia trope in this century plays with and interrogates the gendering spheres of activity and the naturalization of femininity: "One might claim, too, that Ophelia's multiplicity lends her the power to defy a fixed identity, and therefore

⁵Rhodes looks at the fracturing of Ophelia's character in its utility in nineteenth-century representation; for a forward-looking analysis that shows her as more than a sum of her parts, see Showalter.

positions her both inside and outside of feminine stereotypes” (Rhodes 3). What better use of this questioning and problematizing of separate spheres and the permeability of gender stereotypes than to employ it in the emotional narrative trajectory of a male character.

In addition to providing access to questions of gender and society, Ophelia demonstrates a nineteenth-century social perception of suicide. According to Ron Brown’s *The Art of Suicide*, in the nineteenth century, and particularly in Millais’s iconic *Ophelia*, suicide, “once a sign of female heroism [better dead than deflowered], is substituted for a sign of femininity in itself, though even in Shakespeare’s text ambiguity surrounds Ophelia’s emblematic death” (Brown 180). “Ophelia’s story appears to anticipate modern psychiatry and the concept of suicide as sickness or the dissolution of self. Ophelia’s imaging [...] becomes popular in the nineteenth century when the medicalized view becomes prevalent” (Brown 105-6). Shakespeare’s absent and elided female suicide “always-already represented” (Peterson and Williams 2) by dint of its textual mediation as a narrative told ex-post-facto by Gertrude, becomes the perfect metaphor for suicide as the disintegration of self. For Flavio, it will be the death of the feminine, the death of his sentimental nature —his strongest character trait— though societal intervention precludes a physical death.

One final necessary point for reading Flavio is that the nineteenth-century Ophelia does not yet have to have entered the water to die figuratively, or to fully embody the trope. According to Bachelard, “to contemplate water is to slip away, dissolve, and die” (47). Brown underscores the strength of the connection between lovesick or distraught women and rivers, suggesting that the presence of a river in a painting of an abandoned woman is enough to suggest “her liquidity and signifies the probability of her suicide in the river” (153). The place where Flavio’s relationship with the water becomes inescapably tied to the Ophelia trope is in chapter

27, shortly after he finds Mara's country home. Given Flavio's sentimentality and feminine coding, therefore, a scene where he, heartsick, flings flowers into the current of a stream allows the Ophelia trope to penetrate his character and foreshadows the river drowning.

After discovering her home, Flavio spies on Mara in the middle of the night: watching her write and destroy her poetry through her bedroom window. Between late night sojourns to wish he were a glove upon her hand, that he might touch her cheek, our hero wanders aimlessly, consumed by frustrated passion. The scene of this wandering that Castro offers up to her readers is Flavio in the role of Espronceda's Elvira, at the moment when her connection with Ophelia also becomes apparent. Reading Flavio in parallel to Espronceda's heroine in particular is begged by the text of *Flavio* itself, where Mara rejects the idea of being an Elvira, referencing Espronceda's poem directly, speaking to her friend Ricardo about the wrongs done to women by the patriarchal system:

¿A qué declamáis siempre con fatuidad que la mujer que olvida sus primores amores no tiene corazón? [...] Pues queráis ver en mí una Graciela o una Elvira, que muere bendiciendo al amante que la ha abandonado [...] Pues bien: ahora os irritáis conmigo porque, en vez de hallar una víctima, habéis hallado un espíritu rebelde. (215)

This rejection by Mara is frequently referenced in critical treatments of the novel (Rivero 687, Martelli 402, et al.), and is indicative of Mara's gender inversion, parallel to Flavio's own.

By openly rejecting the feminine mode in this way, her character is opened to readings that code her in masculine terms, in much the same way that Flavio is coded as feminine. Indeed, March calls Mara "demasiado masculina" to exist within a society with particularly delimiting strictures on feminine behavior (172). García Negro also points to Mara's masculine coding in her discussion of the character's clandestine writing, signaling the activity of writing not only as

“anti-femenina” (76). Castro’s discussion of her heroine’s writing also plays with the gender divide, as she compares her to Byron, rather than a female romantic poet (223). While not the main focus of this essay, Mara’s gender deviance throws Flavio’s feminine coding into yet sharper relief against the backdrop of the modernizing society that he attempts to join.

And yet, the identification between Castro’s overly sentimental *hero* and Espronceda’s heroine has never been suggested.⁶ Given the inversion of the sentimentality of lovers in Mara and Flavio, this other gender inversion, of victim and rebellious spirit, seems only too appropriate. Reading Mara’s rejection of the Elvira role as an assertion that Flavio inhabits that role is made all the more reasonable by his unending desire to commit immediately to a monogamous and eternal relationship with Mara. Flavio then, “o inocente, apaixonado e virxinal Flavio” (García Negro 78)⁷ is for this novel “the romantic Ophelia is a girl who *feels* too much, who drowns in feeling” (Showalter 83), contrasted to Mara in the way that Showalter constructs the bifurcation of character between Hamlet and Ophelia as the divide between reason and emotion. His overly emotive nature is, like Elvira’s, contrasted with his beloved’s worldliness, defined as the ability to function within society.

Other critics also base their readings of the problems in the Flavio/Mara relationship in the former’s inability to function in a social system (García Negro 78, Martelli 402, Rivero 686).

⁶Further distancing Mara from the traditional Romantic heroine is the usage of that role’s nomenclature highlighting the abusive nature of the relationship—at odds with it being a potential perfect passion, unfulfilled. While *desdichada* is applied normally to the abandoned (i.e. Elvira), for Mara, it is used when she has to suffer the emotionally abusive courtship of Flavio: “El pobre viajero se tornaba cada vez más celoso, y hacía de este modo más insoportable su tiranía [...] sus celos imprudentes se despertaban y martirizaban incesantemente a *aquella desdichada*” (251; my emphasis).

⁷Flavio’s virginity, noted by García Negro, is further feminizing. He lives his romance like a Romantic female lead, longing for consummation as a mark of eternity. As will become apparent, loss of virginity is the final nail in the coffin filled by his suicide attempt.

The desire for control in Flavio, and his insistence that his lover should be as a possession to him, present from his very introduction, negate that possibility in my reading. Mara's ability to see society as a navigable system demonstrates a realism of representation that, through its oppositional nature to that of Flavio, throws his overwhelming sentimentality into yet sharper relief. There is an inherent conflict between Flavio's assumed goal: incorporation into urban society and a stable union with Mara, and what his emotional expressions evince as his desired outcome.⁸ The latter, characterized by violent outbursts and controlling behaviors, suggests that his vision for the future is not a stable coexistence, but rather an unending passionate flame, a singular fixation, and an emotional ouroboros, with each participants expressions of desire feeding the other to the exclusion of all other considerations. Mara too can be characterized by an emotional confusion, with on the one side her Romantic desire for love and passion, in conjunction with her hidden identity as a poet,⁹ and on the other, her primary goal of functioning within the social system and thriving within society. This prioritizing of the rational is clearly seen in her treatment of her own identity as a writer, where she destroys her manuscripts rather than allowing this Romantic part of her become common knowledge.

To return to the potential relationship between Elvira and Flavio, let us wend toward the bank of the river, and the first true Ophelia moment of the novel. Elvira, "en medio de su dulce desvarío / triste recuerdo el alma le importuna / y al margen va del argentado río, / y allí las flores echa de una en una // Y las sigue su vista en la corriente, / una tras otras rápidas pasar" (Espronceda vv. 319–24). Flavio, for his part, "sentado al pie de algún matorral [...] Cogía flores

⁸See Reddy chapter 3: "Emotional Expression as a Type of Speech Act" for discussion on the import of emotional expressions in the establishment of character and intention.

⁹Reddy has established the relationship between Romantic literary identity, emotive acts, and the closed world of salons or writers' groups (240).

silvestres, analizaba sus colores, contaba sus pétalos, y después las arrojaba al río para ver a través de la transparencia de las aguas cómo iban descendiendo hasta el fondo de su blanca arena” (Castro 174). While some of the characterization looks towards the rational and the masculine—he is not merely contemplating the flowers, but analyzing them—the series of actions is directly mirrored: distraught at not having his stalking noted or reciprocated, Flavio takes himself in his sadness to the water’s edge, lets flowers fall into the current and watches as they are carried away.¹⁰

In that lovesickness instantiated at the edge of water is enough to evoke Ophelia, this piece of the scene, by itself should suffice. And yet the continuance too mirrors Elvira’s riverside sojourn, and evinces the madness that brings Ophelia singing before the king, and to distribute abortifacients and references to male sexual organs (rue and long purples, respectively). While Elvira’s madness is coded through her emotions and the affective physicality of tears, it centers the bifurcation of experience and reason: “y confusos sus ojos y su mente / se siente con sus lágrimas ahogar” (Espronceda vv. 325–26). Castro too uses the departure of the visual from reality as a means of entering into a fugue-state or mad reverie, brought on by a narcissan observation in the water of the river: “El cielo, retratado en su superficie clara y lisa, se enturbiaba algunos segundos, se estremecía; después, todo volvía a quedar tranquilo, y Flavio veía entonces su rostro en aquel espejo cristalino, y sonreía melancólicamente” (174). When the

¹⁰Scholars have signaled a connection between Flavio and Goethe’s Werther in regards to the suicide, and thereby to the male bildungsroman (Martelli 400, Varela Jácome 388, et al.) Martelli bases this reading in the *tedio* that Rábade Villar discusses (“Spleen”), which is indeed related to Werther’s mindset. However, more telling is the suicide itself. Werther kills himself indoors, with a gun. Flavio’s suicide is not only the most female of deaths, but also has a feminine motivation: it is not his *tedio* that pushes him to the water, but rather the overwhelming emotions that accompany his desire for Mara. For Flavio’s love as a desire for possession and control, see García Negro (78).

love object, Mara, appears in the vision, Castro goes a step further towards Ophelia than even Espronceda did, using the psychology rather than the sentiment of that confusion of mind and eye as a way of suggesting a future death for the melancholy lover. The image of Mara that appears to him is not a steady one; it shifts through the phases and facets of his nascent desire for both a lady and a lover, and for both to be beyond the material world: “La imagen de Mara se le aparecía allí más alegre y brillante, más alejada de las cosas de la tierra; allí veía su rostro, unas veces púdicamente velado, otras radiante y coronado por reluciente aureola” (174). The varied states of dress in his imagining of the object of his obsession reinforces the idealistic nature of Flavio’s sentiment. It is not a real woman that he imagines, but at once the archetype of a blushing virgin and a wanton lover.

It is in the company of this imagined woman that Flavio experiences a full separation of eyes and reason: “Remontado en alas de su pensamiento, recorría en un instante el espacio que le separaba de las nubes, y siguiendo allí a Mara tan de cerca, con su airoso ropaje recorrían juntos la celeste esfera, incansables, eternos...” (175). This imagined flight through the sky leads the mind to a joining in the afterlife, rather than in the physical plane, through both the nomenclature used in creating the location, the celestial sphere, and through the description of their state upon their joining: untiring and eternal. It is not a passionate joining that he imagines, but a permanent, heavenly one.

Castro would return to this imagistic association of the image of the beloved in the water and a desire for death, of images of the mind and suicidal ideation, in *El primer loco* (1881), where she further articulates each element established in *Flavio*. The relationship between the image of the beloved and the water goes from the obtuse to the concrete: “Ella, en tanto, me sonreía allá abajo, muy abajo, incorpórea, pero identificada con cuanto la rodeaba y formando

parte de aquel ambiente y de aquel abismo que me atraía a su seno con melódicos y secretos acentos...” (461). The beloved appears within the moving water, and in the midst of the water’s lure to death. Both before and after the beloved appears, Luis is nearly overcome by his desire to enter himself in the water’s depths. Before he sees her —“Allá en el fondo sin fondo del diáfano espejo, al par que los altísimos robles y el espeso follaje que borda ambas riberas, reflejábanse asimismo los abismos celestes, incitándome a sepultarme en ellos por medio de tan halagadoras promesas y de atracción tan apacible y dulce que causaban vértigos” (461)—, death is a sweet promise. After this, the lure is ever stronger: “Contemplar la celeste bóveda [...] a nuestros pies reflejándose en el húmedo espejo del agua transparente es una verdadera tentación para los que desean abandonar la tierra o ir en busca de algo que aquí no pueden hallar. ¡Oh, si uno pudiera caer tan hondo como parece mentirnos el agua traidora...! ¡Pero no hay tal mentira... se cae más hondo... más hondo todavía...!” (461). The similarities—in lexicon, setting, and sentiment—in these interactions with images of the beloved seen while at the bank of a river make this later instantiation an apt mirror of Flavio’s nascent suicidal ideation.¹¹

The suicidal subtext in Flavio’s first Ophelia moment is made more concrete when taken in the context of his more extended attempt at suicide, where he leaves the bank and abandons himself to the water. It must be noted, in the context of the erotic and morbid ideation that is associated with the sea in this novel, that Castro’s conception of the Sar, the river flowing through Santiago and Padrón, conflated it with the sea. Indeed, her final request as she lay dying cements this connection, as she asked her daughter to open the window for her, “que quiero ver el mar” (qtd. in García Martí 128), where that sea was, in fact, the Sar. The tidal nature of the

¹¹For an excellent treatment of the locus topography of *El primer loco* that situates this riverbank scene within the cultural geography of both Rosalía’s other novelistic Santiago de Compostela and its surroundings, see Cabo Aseguinolaza.

river, allowing the mussel trade that it enjoys, makes such a correlation, and a conflation of salt and sweet waters all the more reasonable. Truth be told, the running water of the Sar and the surging water of the sea frequently mesh together in Castro's oeuvre.¹² For Flavio too, this tidal nature of the Sar will be key in his attempt at abandoning his terrestrial existence.

In moving from the floral to the drowned, it bears repeating that water death is a definitionally female death. The nineteenth century saw scholarly "attempts to establish the masculinity of staying alive, and the femininity of death and suicide" (Brown 134), and defined suicide as the "danger of submitting to the warm emotions of the heart in preference to the cool deductions of reason" (135). Suicide also became gendered in terms of method, as developed in a SPCK pamphlet of 1817: "Female 'deaths' were contrasted with male 'suicides'" (qtd. in Brown 148), where males killed themselves by violent means for economic reasons, and women died due to disappointed passion or the loss of virginity, and were characteristically drownings (148). Both of these elements in the gendering of suicide: method and in motivation are present in Flavio's case. His suicide attempt follows directly after his disappointment in love with Mara, after seeing her speak and dance with another man.

The chapter that precedes the suicide sees Flavio attempting to explain the depth of his grief in a letter: "Siempre he creído que el dolor se mitigaba con el llanto, pero me había engañado. Yo he llorado toda la noche: lloro todavía, y mi dolor no mengua; pudiera decirse que

¹²The inscription of Ophelia's riverbank into Galicia, and the importance of its Galician-ness can be better understood through Kirsty Hooper's *Writing Galicia into the World*, though it treats a more contemporary corpus. She reads Galicia through the importance of geography and space in the ascription of meaning, and seeks the inter- and trans-national presence of Galician geographies (3); this use of Ophelia's Danish/British stream in a geographically particular location within Galicia (see Medina and García Vega) subsumes traits of the culturally dominant British (and French, with France's love of Ophelia in the century, see Lafond) Romantic into a work that is fully grounded in Galicia.

mi corazón se abisma en el sufrimiento” (219). Here is the character who, disappointed in love, “drowns in feeling” (Showalter 83). Indeed, at the beginning of the scene that is his river suicide, Flavio again points to his lovesickness or disappointed love as the motivator for his death: “Moriré yo, [...] ¡Oh Dios mío! ¡Dios mío... Perdonadme! Bien veis que no puedo soportar un dolor tan cruel como el que devora mi corazón (231). And yet, later in the same letter mentioned above, Flavio rejects a suicide that is more “violent,” more self-inflicted, more masculine than a river death: “Hubo unos instantes en que quise estrellar mi Cabeza contra las dismanteladas paredes de mi aposento...; pero, ¿cómo, si vos vivís?” (219). His extreme emotional loss is not something that can be solved by a masculine suicide, it requires a feminine mode.

Therefore, Flavio heads to the bank of the river, with the intention of dying. Castro’s setting is a romantic one, hidden from the world and carpeted in flowers. The stream is both near and safe, connected to but separate from the sublime danger of the sea, or the river that it flows into.

había un bosquecito de pinos jóvenes aún [...] El terreno inclinaba suavemente hacia las aguas, cubierto de florecillas moradas y blancas [...] y los arbustos de la cercana orilla y los altos y torcidos álamos, lamiendo con sus ramas la superficie, formaban graciosos surcos y extendían en torno suyo una débil sombra que hacía más intensa la profundidad del río (231).

As discussed above, meditations on water are, in themselves enough to rouse the spirit of Ophelia. Flavio’s stated determination to kill himself, in conjunction with the discourse on intended water death, makes this shaded clearing—with its poplars leaning over and kissing the water—into a direct corollary for death locus.¹³

¹³While the connection to Ophelia in this scene speaks for itself, there is a startling congruence

The trees being poplars here has a very similar connotation to the willow that grows aslant Ophelia's brook. While they are different species, both the poplar and the weeping willow represent grief or sadness, and forsaken love (Jazmín, "Willow" 137, Miller 217). Poplars, while representing time and valor (Jazmín 124), represent grief when looked at in terms of their classical connotations. From mythology, they are the earthly manifestation of the Heliades, nymphs, whose unrelenting grief as they wept for their fallen brother Phaeton on the bank of a river turned them into the trees, among other roles (*New Larousse Encyclopedia* 143, 165; Grimal 234, 316). The poplar that shades the site of Flavio's suicide is not an idle reference, nor one that is merely a botanical regionalism. It adds to the preemptive mourning of the scene, creating a grotto beside the stream that is the site of a great sorrow.

Castro goes beyond the physical composition of the setting to reinforce the femininity of Flavio's intended death. She also takes the sun (a masculine symbol, reaching back to Phaeton), to the moon (Luna), a traditionally, historically and mythologically feminine symbol. The illumination of the scene comes from "un sol de invierno, claro pero tibio y de un color pálido, semejante a la luna llena" (232). So too does she tie the stream (and its river) to the sea: which is both death and the divine feminine. The stream is bordered by "una arena blanca y fina como la que se halla en las playas de la costa" (232). In itself, this is perhaps pure description, but for the fact that the metonymic connection between the stream and the sea re-centers the location in the semantic, bringing everything back to female water death. This shore space also holds the intermixing of erotism and sorrow that we saw in the first chapter.

between the scene's content and the specific lines in which Gertrude narrates Ophelia's death. I include line comparisons with the purpose of demonstrating this confluence in imagery and development, but with no claim that this closeness is what evokes Ophelia in the scene. Take then these twisted poplars that lick and reflect upon the water with: "There is a willow grows aslant a brook, / That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream" (V.i, 166-7, 1177).

The next stage in the construction of Flavio's water suicide is the way that he decides to come into contact with the water. Because the river is affected by the tides, he decides to lie on the bank and simply allow the water to cover him. This is a supremely slow way to go. Unlike Ophelia, who fell by accident when a branch on which she was leaning broke, Castro removes any possibility that this death will occur by chance. Dying is a decision that Flavio makes out of the overwhelming feelings that attend him. Allowing the water to come is as passive, and therefore feminized, as the decision to suicide can be. It also flies in the face of feminine agency on the entry into the water that we have seen in the last two chapters. Flavio's femininity lies far more in line with societal expectation than we have seen with female characters.

Lying on the bank, merely contemplating death, Flavio at first does not recognize the danger of the tide: "Pasado algún tiempo, el río, cubriendo de pronto sus pies y salpicándole de agua hasta el rostro, le hizo incorporarse rápidamente" (235). Yet when he does see the danger, he sees a perfect opportunity: "¡yo esperaré inmóvil sus besos fríos y sus helados abrazos; dejaré que me acaricien primero dulcemente, y que jueguen después con mi cuerpo como con la hoja de una flor marchita, sepultándome, por último, en su lecho de arenas!" (235). Flavio's decision epitomizes the passivity and lack of action that are the hallmark of a female suicide in cultural representation (Brown 148). Further, Flavio's exclamatory assertion that he will patiently await the kiss of the waters and of the death that they bring concretely ties his body to the physical ephemera of his earlier riverside sojourn: he will be one of the flowers that are carried by the stream down to the sea. This reference to the "flor marchita" that connects Flavio to the blooms that he dropped into the water is also a further linking between him and the female characters for whom this kind of death is more traditional, as the nomenclatural conflation of women and

flowers is near to ubiquitous in the century (Charnon-Deutsch 25). Flavio's own words at this point of the decision to die foreshadow him as a dead woman.

As with the woodland dance at the outset of the narrative, this scene sees Flavio giving sway to a feminine sublime, allowing himself to be carried by external forces that figuratively, or here, literally, bring death: "Y tendióse lo más cómodamente que le fue posible sobre el musgo, resuelto a dejarse arrebatar por las aguas" (235). This "dejarse arrebatar" recalls the "dejarse arrastrar" of that earlier scene—and the 'dejarse llevar' of chapter 2—with the verbal alliteration further cementing the similarity of Flavio's responses to energetic stimuli. Flavio's interaction with the feminine sublime will come to fruition in this scene, where he subsumes himself fully to the power that faces him, ceding any remaining confrontation.

Once his decision to let the waters take him has been made, Flavio is subsumed into the natural world that makes up the scene. He becomes native to it, rather than something exterior that is interacting with it: "El río seguía creciendo; los pies de Flavio parecían oscilar y marchar con la tranquila corriente [...]; el sol bañaba de lleno su hermoso semblante y oreaba el viento su frente y algunas plantas de tallo alto y ligero y de agreste perfume" (235). His feet move as part of the natural motion of the water: moved by it, but not moving, indeed "medio inerte" (235). Though the sun and the wind interact with him, he has become for them another plant growing in the shallows. He has become part of the natural world, rather than something above or opposed to it.¹⁴

Because the method of death is such an extended one, Flavio has an opportunity that Ophelia does not: the opportunity for a realization of the horror of approaching death and an

¹⁴Compare to "Or like a creature native and indued / Unto that element" in Shakespeare (V. i, 179–80, 1177).

equivocation in the expressed desired outcome. In a trajectory towards a death coded through passivity and a lack of internal regulation, death becomes something that happens, not something that is done. The function of this is to indelibly write the feminine into Flavio's death. Yet, in the extremity of that association, the agency in his death has been robbed from him. To allow him to regain that agency, without negating the association between this pre-death Flavio and the feminine, something in the situation has to break him out of his identification with the natural world.

That element is fear. Flavio is shocked into recognizing the downside of letting the river take him: the pain of death, though not the state of death itself. Already coded visually and figuratively as pertaining to the land of the dead, he comes to an awareness that this escape from emotional pain will come with pain of its own. Already touched by the water and appearing a ghost already, he cries out his new fear: “¡Ay!... —exclamó en un acento tembloroso, reconcentrado, desgarrador—. ¡No creí nunca que pudiese ser tan amargo el paso de la vida a la muerte! ¡Debe ser horrible el dolor de morir!... ¡Tengo miedo a ese dolor!” (235). Flavio's equivocation, while bringing him back to a state of action, is not a desire to live. It is the appearance of a contrasting fear to his original fear of having to exist without control/love of Mara. Then follows Flavio's reversal of course: from passive acceptance to action, and action that, at first, pushes him to the shore: “Y se adelantó hacia la orilla, como cediendo a la fuerza interior que le mandaba vivir...” (235). It is key here that Flavio is not ruled by the will to live, but is acting *as if he were* pushed by such a force.

This recognition, however, is not capable of creating a lasting change of course. Although Flavio has regained his will to act, its employment leads him into, not away, from the river: “Pero retrocediendo luego de improviso, se arrojó como un loco a merced de la rápida corriente.

Su cuerpo apareció momentos después en medio del ancho río, luchando con la muerte” (235).

Because he has regained the ability to direct his own actions through anagnorisis, Flavio’s final step toward suicide is coded concretely as a decision. His return to the water emphasizes the agency in his death, while not a reasoned choice, is fully a choice. The language here too reinforces that agency. He acts *as if* he were a madman, which means that he is not.¹⁵ The reversal highlights the main quality of Flavio’s suicide: agency and femininity.

So much for the suicide. What remains is the rescue, and what it is, who it is, that is rescued. A young doctor sees Flavio in the water, and saves him, inches from death’s door. Survival of the body is imposed upon him against Flavio’s will.¹⁶ After repeating the description of Flavio’s body rolling in the current, “un joven desconocido, lanzándose entonces al río y nadando vigorosamente, logró alcanzarle cuando iba ya a sumergirse para siempre; le agarró por los cabellos, y sosteniendo, con peligro de su vida, aquel cuerpo inerte que las aguas trataban de disputarle, le puso en salvo” (236). The body has progressed from seeming spectral before the attempt at death and ‘medio inerte’ lying beside the waters; it is now fully inert. At the end of the scene the approximation to death is yet more concretely described: “El pobre viajero tenía ya todo el aspecto de un cadáver, pero respiraba aún” (236). This comparison to a cadaver is not a hypothetical, like the references to a will to live and madness. The presence of those elements is

¹⁵This nomenclature of madness in suicide additionally demonstrates the century’s modernizing view of suicide as mental illness, rather than a state/economic concern (Brown 135–36).

¹⁶Previous critical texts that mention the suicide tend not to look at the agency in the outcome, as typified by Varela Jácome’s reading, which concludes that Flavio *decides* not to kill himself, that his equivocation is the end of the scene: “Los desplantes de la amada y los celos de Ricardo, trastornan el comportamiento del agente, lo empujan al delirio romántico del suicidio (cap. XXX),[...] Pero en Rosalía la intención suicida se frustra, influido por las percepciones de la naturaleza circundante. [...] Pero es precisamente este enlace con la realidad viva del paisaje lo que le hace reaccionar y adelantarse hacia la orilla, obedeciendo a una fuerza interior que le manda vivir” (396). Ignoring the rest of the scene after this equivocation drastically shifts the psychological and emotional outcome of Flavio’s survival.

negated in the construction of language, this is concrete.

His appearance is that of a dead man, albeit a breathing one. This extreme proximity to death allows the suicide to have been completed; not for the body, but for the sentimentality and femininity that motivated it. Flavio does not die, but his inner Ophelia does not survive.

This death of the inner feminine allows the narrative of the novel to reach its conclusion, where Flavio, having lost all of his sentimental idealism, impregnates a village girl and abandons her to her own suicide, then marries an older woman for her money, and lives the rest of his life making fun of the wild stories of his youth. While the trajectory of Flavio's character from romantic to debauched does not occur all at once in the water—it needs him to lose his virginity to a prostitute, at the suggestion of the doctor who saves him from the river—this suicide attempt is the turning point.¹⁷ He is born again after his baptism in the water, but unlike Esperanza, there is no hopeful end for him. With his emergence from the water, all of the beauty and appreciation for the world vanishes from his character, leaving nothing but the functioning human machine of capitalism. Even the form of the narration evinces the death of culture in the death of his sentimentality, as the rich, fluid, heavily figurative prose give way to a terse and very brief denouement.

While this reading of *Flavio* leans in to the poetic elements of the text, its merit is not merely aesthetic. It also redoubles the interrogation of modernization incumbent to this novel, brought into discourse with the balance of Castro's oeuvre by María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar's chapter in her recent edited volume *Canon y subversión*, where she discusses the author's

¹⁷While her focus on this text is different, Rábade Villar also charts this as the point of change: "Al fracasar como héroe romántico en virtud de un calculado recurso al *Deus ex machina*, a Flavio no le quedará ya sino fracasar también como amador. Luego de su intento de suicidio, se irá consumando lentamente el camino del personaje hacia la degradación moral." ("Spleen" 491).

balancing “entre la defensa de un pueblo a quien los poderes políticos y económicos consideraban ‘atrasado’ con la crítica de la noción misma da ‘atrasado.’” (“Rosalía” 81). *Flavio* implicitly critiques the processes of urbanization, and the “idea del progreso” (82). Another of her readings of this novel, “*Spleen, tedio y ennui*” couples this problematizing of modernity with the century’s shifting appreciation of emotion as Flavio goes “del héroe romántico al *dandy* y del *dandy* al *flaneur*” (“Spleen” 485), making spleen and ennui, the hallmarks of the flaneur, the “condiciones propias de la ciudad industrial” (475). The beginning of the end, the beginning of this transition for Flavio comes with the suicide at the river (491). When that river death becomes the death of the feminine in Flavio, the gendering of her critique of the modernizing city becomes yet more fierce.

Whereas March reads the feminism of the text through a protagonizing of Mara in conjunction with Flavio’s diminution to anti-hero (152), reading the river death as the death of the feminine, and of the sentimental in Flavio, ties in to the novel’s gendering of interpersonal relationships. By appropriating feminine tropes in the construction and disarticulation of her male character, Castro adds another layer to the shade that she is throwing at hegemonic patriarchal institutions. Even though Mara may fall and become subject to the whims of her male suitors and Rosa (Flavio’s country dalliance) may kill herself and her child, the most powerful scene of the kind of emotional weakness, typically ascribed to female characters, is brought about in the novel’s hero.¹⁸ Castro succeeds in making a mockery of gendered categories of sentiment and performance through bending the gender in her characters as strongly as she does

¹⁸The silencing of Rosa’s death, which is mentioned only once and in less than a full sentence, merits further investigation, as it is a male violence more insidious than physical or emotional abuse: the violence that is the silencing of pain, or experience. In the words of Ani DiFranco, “cause silence / is violence / in women and poor people / if more people were screaming then I could relax.” (“My IQ”)

through the gendering of language.¹⁹

The satirizing of gendered expectation that Castro accomplishes through creating a male Ophelia furthermore enhances the metaliterary satirizing of genre that the text accomplishes, drawing *Flavio* into closer dialogue with the author's later work. Deanna Johnson-Hoffman has laid out the ways in which the apparent flaws in *Flavio*, most notably the breaks in narrative at the apex of occurrences of dramatic tension, as the novel's strengths in that they are part of the trajectory of subversion that runs through the author's corpus. Here in *Flavio*, and later in *El Caballero de las botas azules*, these "awkward passages tend to occur when Castro focuses her critical gaze on the gender roles which were still being idealized in sentimental romantic pulp fiction" (152). These ruptures allow *Flavio* to deconstruct the genre to which it is purported to belong, the sentimental romance. While asides and ruptures in dramatic tension are a method for the deconstruction of genre, inverting the gendering of one of the century's most important images of feminine frailty, madness, and beauty is likewise a blending of artistry and a commentary thereon.

In reading the feminism of *Flavio* through this inversion of gender in an Ophelian suicide, alongside the novel's representation of female strength and authorship, discussed by March, Akiko Tsuchiya's concept of nineteenth century gender as a "regulatory fiction" is very useful. In her seminal *Marginal Subjects*, Tsuchiya investigates the relationship between reality and fiction in societal gender constructions, concluding that "In late nineteenth century Spain, many literary works expose gender normativity to be no more than an ideal, a regulatory fiction impossible for real bodies and subjectivities to achieve" (113). By creating a male Ophelia, Castro exposes the "regulatory fiction" of gendered romantic relationships. By characterizing the

¹⁹ For the gendering of language in Castro, and its feminism, see Geoffrion-Vinci.

positive, idealist, attributes of the hero in terms of female tropes, *Flavio* questions the loss of sentiment in the modernizing world. By drowning Flavio's sentiment in the river, the masculine world loses the good of the feminine.

CONCLUSION: THE LAYERS OF A WAVE

Diz que un sabio al aplicar
A la perla el microscopio.
Allí, en primoroso acopio.
Vio cuanto hay bello en el mar;
Y después, al golpear
Su esfera con la varilla,
E hirviente en química hornilla
Al analizar su albura,
Integra halló, en miniatura.
La oceánica maravilla.

Allí su azul oleaje
En pliegues, surcos y montes,
Sus mágicos horizontes,
Su áureo tul y níveo encaje;
Allí el divino lenguaje
De onda y trueno y vendaval
Y aquella esencia vital
Que se respira en su aliento
Como hijo del firmamento
Sin mezcla vil terrenal.

(From "Mar y perla" (1896), by Rafael Pombo; 257)

Rafael Pombo's "Mar y perla" is a useful tool for pulling back the focus on the images that this dissertation has explored.¹ Under a scientific gaze, this pearl comes to hold all of the vast beauty of the sea. It goes on to hold all of its bitterness too. By the end of the poem, the pearl is the bride herself, holding all the beauty and capacity for emotion of her mother the sea. Written for the wedding of Lázaro Barriga y María Victoria de Rojas y Antommarchi, this poem inextricably links beauty and sorrow, by sequestering them with the smooth, effable container of the pearl. What this poem demonstrates is the use of a scientific apparatus as a means to access emotion, to see a complex whole by means of a distillation of its essence. The diffractive reading of the contact between women and the water in this dissertation functions similarly. It allows us to see how different vertices of feminine interaction with the aqueous both inform each other and dialogue with the expectations of gender performance in the social imaginary of the transatlantic nineteenth century.

The affective function of the water is always multiple, and it is by teasing out that multiplicity that we can see its whole impact. Some of the power of the water is to reveal feminine erotic agency. The edge of the water, as an extra-social liminal space evokes the possibility for erotic congress; the viscosity of the water and its foam double for human sexual fluids, allowing the turbulence of water to be the movement of human passions. Some of its power is to connect personal and sexual agency to social systems of privilege and oppression. The transgression of the boundary of the water, the acceptance of its danger, is freedom. Female water suicide can be a kind of freedom as well, when the choice to die in water is a rejection of the impossible limits of a social system. It can also hang in the balance between cure and death.

¹Rafael Pombo (1833-1912) is considered the best exponent of Colombian Romanticism. He also trained as a mathematician, and wrote and translated extensively, including a canon of fables for children.

Though these diffractions function differently, they return to the essential question of the space for feminine agency within a social system that views women as not fully rational, and that idealizes female sexlessness while employing a sexualizing, objectifying gaze. Exploring how the image of femininity and water diffracts, and how those diffractions layer and interact, uncovers spaces for the exercise of female agency, both erotic and systemic.

Through the images of femininity in contact with the water that these four chapters address, the dissertation demonstrates the strata of interrelated meaning that come with contact between women and the water. In chapter 1, the edge of the water showed us a liminal space that allows for amorous congress, subverting the societal expectations of female purity in the *Cartas amatorias* by Arolas. While there is a return from this liminality that can result in repercussions, there is a space here for the expression of female desire for sex, and female embodiment of their own sexuality, as in Isaacs's peasant romances. That chapter also saw the edge of the water as it allows for an exploration of female sexual pleasure and erotic identity that is not dependent on a male gaze or on a catering to male pleasure, through contact with—intra-action with—the water itself. Tempering all of this pleasure, the water's edge is also charged with the emotional weight of love lost, where the boundary of the water is impossible to cross.

Crossing that boundary and entering into the water is, by dint of that impenetrability, a transgressive claiming of liberty and identity. The choice to surrender to the water is an articulation of the sublime that comes from finding agency and building strong identity from within a disprivileged societal position. Coupling that sublimity with gendered labor politics and work as a primary identity marker, the female maritime laborers—la Camarona, Elena, and their fellow *pescadoras*—treated in chapter 2 embody freedom. In the cruxes where there is a

negotiation of agency and an assertion of vital vibrancy in the face of danger, and a negotiation of agency from within a delimiting social system, the rules of that system start to bend.

Entering into the water can also be a wholesale rejection of that system, and an allegiance to personal identity that supersedes life itself. In nineteenth-century retellings of myths — Martina and Jacinto, and Galatea and Polyphemus— as seen in chapter 3, we can see inversions in power structures that allow transformative —if mortal— female agency. That same agency translates to narratives where the rejection of social oppression is demonstrated by a rejection of continuing to exist within that society. Like entering into it, choosing to die in the water can be a joyful expression of agency. In cases of water death that use tropes of feminine passivity and the overwhelm of affect that is lovesickness or madness —like for Flavio— the entry into the water can be both a healing process and a death of sentiment, rather than a physical death. Even for male characters, the elements of feminine water death mandate a negotiation of agency and affect, blurring the lines of gender and representation.

In order for us to understand the multiple femininities and feminisms of the nineteenth century, we have to find the spaces where the expression of that femininity lives, and broaden our own expectations for what the resistance to oppression is. This dissertation has found an access point to those spaces through the cultural palimpsest of the water. It has shown us the complication in saying what the water is or what it does, because it is always both sex and death, both a womb and a tomb. When lovers meet on the shore, there is already the specter of heartbreak in their love, and of freedom in the transgression of the water's boundary. Reading the material world as culture, as agentive matter, opens a window into the social imaginary, and lets us really see the woman and the sea.

While Rafael Pombo was the preeminent Colombian Romantic, the gaze that we see in “Mar y perla” is a scientific one, a gaze that reaches towards modernity and strives for an empirical epistemology, rather than an affective one. And yet, within the smooth, opalescent surface of the pearl, Pombo finds the same layers of meaning in the feminine that is the sea as we have seen in this dissertation: it is beauty, and loss, and sexual promise, and the endless rush of time. Just as these diffractions appear in Pombo, under the lens of his microscope rather than in the “raudal del llanto” (From “A una gota de rocío” (Coronado 97)) of sentiment, they still move through our cultural imaginary, influencing our perceptions of the world.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1. STRUCTURE OF THE *CARTAS AMATORIAS*

Poem #	Pgs.	To	From	PV gender	Use of water
1.	1–10	Célina	Amante de Célina	M	Pathetic fallacy through the sea; remembrance of lovers' meetings at the margin
2.	11–18	Amante de Célina	Célina	F	Locked up at home, signals the sea as freedom largely to love.
3.	19–28	Victorino	Amante de Célina	M	Both in a medico-poetic discourse on passion, in its sweet form, and in the narration of the past encounter between C and AdC.
4.	29–39	Inés	Amante de Célina	M	Inés's luck is characterized by her life being a crystalline stream.
5	41–50	Amante de Célina	Victorino	M	Compares his dead gf, Rosmira, to Venus through sea imagery. Edge of sea figured as literal refuge from storm, figurative from life.
6	51–60	Victorino	Amante de Célina	M	Refraction of pathetic fallacy from 1: she has returned and the sea is now a crystal stillness
7	61–70	Flora	Amante de Célina	M	No. Not about this romance, but a previous one.
8	71–80	Inés	Célina	F	Comparison of sweet and salt; sea linked to sexuality and adulthood: <i>autocarpe diem</i> in the pleasure of the sea.
9	81–84	Julia	Enriqueta	F	No. Worried about losing lover.
10	85–88	Enriqueta	Julia	F	Functions as the voice of reason, warning of the fallacy of the liminal space, warning against sex, linking it to the beach through classical mythology.
11	89–96	Julia	Enriqueta	F	Resolution: wed.
12	97–99	Enriqueta	Julia	F	Reaffirms sex as the danger evades through matrimony, coded through sea. Closes tale.
13	101–109	"A"	Victorino	M	Muerte de Silvia: little
14	111–115	Not a letter	Not a letter	?	Muerte de Silvia: little
15	117–126	Inés	Amante de Silvia	M	Muerte de Silvia: conclusion of pathetic fallacy - disappointment and all the things not achieved.
16	127	"Epitafio"	—		mdS: little
17	128	"Otro"	—		mdS: little

TABLE 2. STRUCTURE OF PEASANT ROMANCES

Title	Meet by water	Relationship	Sex	Fidelity	Outcome
“Amores de Soledad”	Yes, while both work.	Secretly betrothed.	No. Stipulated.	Yes.	Positive: She and her father discuss dowry; they will wed.
“Martina y Jacinto”	Attempted, ends in double death	Known in town that will be married in 6 months, she goes to also do work.	None. They die trying; the river allows for sealing of bond.	Yes.	Positively coded suicide, as discussed in another chapter of my project.
“Teresa”	Yes.	Went with ex, then left him for the nephew of the priest.	Probably. Definitely more touching than ever happens in <i>María</i> .	No.	Her fate is unknown, the ex-lover kills the new husband, ends up forever in jail and deranged.
“La montañera”	Yes.	Promised, but not yet married.	Yes.	Yes.	Poor: He dies in the war, she cries forever by the river, is a subject of pity.
“La aldeana infiel”	Yes.	Is promised to Camilo, but goes to the river with the lord’s son, Don Luis (she says) or with Pascual (he says).	Yes, and witnessed.	No.	Very bad: Her mother dies of grief /exposure, sex work future intimated, eight years later she is a blind beggar.

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