

# THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

**Original citation:**

Hooper, Kirsty. (2007) Death and the maiden : gender, nation, and the imperial sacrifice in Blanca de los Ríos's *Sangre española* (1899). *Revista Hispanica Moderna*, Vol.60 (No.2). pp. 171-185.

**Permanent WRAP url:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/53270/>

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes the work of researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:**

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

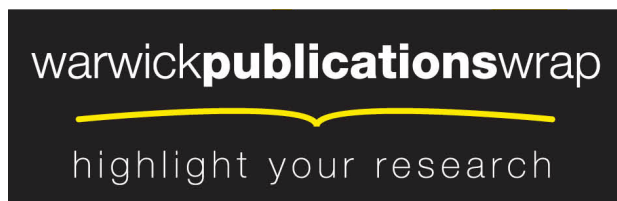
DOI: 10.1353/rhm.2007.0004

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations used for purposes of scholarly citation, none of this work may be reproduced in any form by any means without written permission from the publisher. For information address the University of Pennsylvania Press, 3905 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-4112.

**A note on versions:**

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP url' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)



<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications>

## Death and the Maiden:

### Gender, Nation and the Imperial Compromise

#### in Blanca de los Ríos's *Sangre española* (1899)

¡Amigos míos, sed testigos en la presencia de Dios de que yo, Guillermo Richemond, barón de Siegberg, he sido un asesino miserable, obstinándome en obtener por fuerza el amor de esa mártir sublime, cuyo cadáver solemnemente restituyo a su patria, para que duerma por toda la eternidad entre los pliegues de esa bandera, como en el regazo de su madre! Yo juré conquistar a esa mujer mientras el Emperador conquistase a su independiente patria. ¡César Napoleón, he ahí nuestra victoria! ¡Eso hallaron nuestras armas en Zaragoza y en Gerona! ... ¡Un cadáver heroico envuelto en una bandera invencible! ¡Ay del que intente someter a esa raza de numantinos, a esa indomable sangre española!  
(187)<sup>1</sup>

This passage, the closing scene of Blanca de los Ríos's turn-of-the-twentieth-century novel *Sangre española*, provides a melodramatic – if rather superfluous – key to interpreting a novel that like the majority of De los Ríos's fiction has received little or no critical attention. It signposts a reading of the novel not only as an (all too rare) female contribution to the contentious debate about nation and empire then taking place in *fin de siglo* Spain, but also as an equally rare Spanish contribution to 21st-century conversations about history and empire in *fin de siècle* Europe. The words of the Franco-German Guillermo Richemond-Siegberg as he stands beside the coffin of Rocío – the wife he ripped from her native Andalusia at the height of the Napoleonic invasion of 1808 – spell out the novel's defining conceit. Our appreciation of the novel turns around our recognition of the parallel between Guillermo's failed "conquest" of one Spanish woman, and Napoleon's equally unsuccessful conquest of the Spanish nation, both defeated – as Guillermo says – by

the indomitable “sangre española” of the title. Given De los Ríos’s well known “nationalistic agenda” (Torrecilla 141), the novel’s triumphalist final assertion of the invincibility of the “Numantine” race was undoubtedly designed to inspire a nation that, nearly a century after the events described in the novel, once again saw its global standing in jeopardy following the loss of its last colonies to the United States in 1898. At the same time, however, Siegberg’s remorseful speech reveals the dissonance in the parallel De los Ríos wants us to draw between the story of Guillermo’s relationship with his wife, and that of the Spanish victory over the invading forces. The overriding problem for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader grounded in feminism is that Spain’s victory is equated in the novel with the death of the (female) national subject – in this case, Rocío, the “mártir sublime”.

This apparent paradox is perhaps all the more surprising when we consider it in the context of what we know about Spanish women’s writing at the *fin de siglo*. Research is beginning to show that from the 1890s, women such as Rosario de Acuña, Eva Canel, Sofía Casanova, Emilia Pardo Bazán and De los Ríos herself increasingly dealt in their works with matters of national, political, and public interest (Arkininstall; Davies; Hooper “Reading”; “A Spanish Woman”). Plays such as Acuña’s *La voz de la patria* (1892), novels such as Pardo Bazán’s *Una cristiana* (1890) and Casanova’s *El doctor Wolski* (1894), or socio-political commentaries like Canel’s *Álbum de la trocha* (1897) and Casanova’s *Sobre el Volga helado* (1899) may not have been openly subversive, but at the very least questioned the (gendered) assumptions of hegemonic nationalism, and often proposed their own female-centred alternatives. De los Ríos, it is true, tended to distance herself from the

increasing number of female “transgressions” into the public sphere, as in the following exhortation taken from “Por la República”, a novella published shortly after *Sangre española*: “No, no crean ustedes que voy á hacer historia. ¡Dios me libre del atrevimiento! Novela es, ó novelita, ¡y gracias!” (“República” 99). The clear delimitation of the boundaries of gender and genre inherent in the plea that her readers “shouldn’t think I’m about to start giving history lessons” is common in women’s writing of the time, perhaps to prevent accusations of impropriety, but history (especially Spanish history) is a key element in nearly all of De los Ríos’s work, regardless of the labels attached to individual texts.<sup>2</sup> What the present study explores is how despite De los Ríos’s reticence and its apparently problematic ending, *Sangre española* can contribute significantly to our understanding of the myriad ways in which issues of gender inform nineteenth-century Spanish discourses of history and social, cultural, and colonial relations.

Blanca de los Ríos y Nostench de Lampérez was born in Seville in 1862 and died in Madrid in 1956. She is best known for her scholarly work on the Golden Age playwright Tirso de Molina and for her fervent patriotism. She regularly gave lectures in both areas, on topics such as *Las mujeres de Tirso* (1910) and *Afirmación de la raza ante el centenario de la independencia de las repúblicas hispano-americanas* (also 1910), and during the 1920s was founding and managing editor of the journal *Raza española*. Although her creative work is less well known, De los Ríos was also a prolific poet, novelist and short story writer, publishing her first novel *Margarita* in 1878 and her first book of poetry, *Los funerales del César*, two

years later in 1880. *Sangre española*, first published in the Madrid journal *Revista Contemporánea* in 1899, is a short novel, only 46 pages long. It was republished in book form in 1902, and then collected with *La niña de Sanabria* and *Melita Palma* in the second volume of De los Ríos's *Obras completas* in 1907, but does not seem to have appeared again, and like most of De los Ríos's works, it has received negligible critical attention. Antonieta González López discusses it briefly in her study of De los Ríos's literary and journalistic production (the only full-length one to date), calling it "una decisiva apuesta por la potencialidad de España como nación para salir de la crisis" (73) and connecting its ideological background with Menéndez Pelayo's "cristianización ... de los planteamientos culturales de Herder" (74). Roberta Johnson, too, briefly alludes to the novel as part of De los Ríos's "project of exploring the nature of the contemporary Spanish nation" (*Gender* 127).

An initial reading of the novel bears these interpretations out: it is an apparently straightforward (if melodramatic) romance, set during the Peninsular Wars – or more precisely, as the opening line tells us, during "el año de luto y de gloria de 1808" (143). Most of the action takes place in Seville in the days and weeks around the iconic Spanish victory at Bailén, which De los Ríos succeeds in mentioning regularly throughout the novel. The plot, which recounts the story of a doomed relationship between a Franco-German soldier, Guillermo Richemond-Siegburg, and an Andalusian girl, Rocío Morales, is simple and familiar: when Rocío's father is captured in battle and imprisoned by the French [Chapter I], his daughter treks across the battlefields to ask for her father's freedom [II-IV]. The man she must persuade is Guillermo, half French and half German, who falls in love with the exotic,

veiled woman on sight [V] and tells her he will free her father if she agrees to marry him. Rocío accepts, warning him that although she will marry him, she will never love him [VI]. However, when her father is freed and discovers what she has done, he disowns her [VII]. Guillermo takes Rocío back to his estates in Germany where, despite his best efforts, she wastes away and dies from homesickness [VIII-X]. In the final scene, he stands beside her coffin, which is draped in the Spanish flag, and declares that he has learned a lesson he would now teach to Napoleon – “¡Ay del que intente someter a esa raza de numantinos, a esa indomable sangre española!” (187)

As is abundantly clear from this summary, the novel is written as an allegory of conquest figured in terms of gender. Seemingly aimed at the new mass readership created by the fashionable weekly *folletín* (soon to give way to the equally fashionable *novela corta*), it retells for a popular (and perhaps largely female?) audience one of the foundational events of modern Spanish nationalism, when “the impact of harsh foreign occupation and bitter internal strife ... forged for the first time a real sense of Spanish nationhood” (Ucelay 34). The first meeting between Rocío and Guillermo takes place on 17 July 1808 at Andújar, two days before the iconic battle of Bailén (145). De los Ríos briefly summarizes the major events of the war, but as her use of formulae such as “sabido es” (145) shows, these are not her focus: she assumed that her readers would already be familiar with the historical narrative. What, then, is *Sangre española* supposed to achieve? A reader familiar with the works of De los Ríos’s more explicitly feminist contemporaries – women such as Burgos, Casanova, or Pardo Bazán – might expect a feminist revision of the standard historical narrative, perhaps reclaiming a place for women in a national

history that had hitherto been largely masculine, and this is indeed partly the case.<sup>3</sup> What is most striking about the view of women expressed in *Sangre española*, however, is that the novel – and especially its conclusion – in many ways perfectly illustrates the chief fin de siècle commonplaces about woman’s place in the national imaginary (and consequently the national literature), not only in Spain, but further afield as well. Although things were changing by the 1890s, Rocío’s death at the end of the novel was all but inevitable in the context of nineteenth-century European fiction, for as Rachel Blau DuPlessis has written, there were normally only two possible resolutions for the nineteenth-century female protagonist: “social – successful courtship, marriage – or judgmental of her sexual and social failure – death” (1). The limited endings available to women in nineteenth-century literature reflected the limited possibilities available to women in real life, which, by the end of the century, many women were beginning to challenge – as Roberta Johnson has repeatedly and convincingly demonstrated in the case of *fin de siglo* Spain (*Gender; “Domestic Agenda”, “Gender and Nation”*).

*Sangre española* does not explicitly challenge these limitations, but in fact seems positively to celebrate them, which can make it uncomfortable reading for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader. Even reading the novel in the light of what recent scholarship (e.g. Hooper *Extranjera*; Kirkpatrick) reveals about female authors’ treatment of the relationship between gender and modernity in *fin de siglo* Spain makes it seem rather tame.<sup>4</sup> It is important, however, to consider the wider context, especially its attention to questions of Orientalism and Empire, two areas which are only now beginning to make an impact on our readings of nineteenth-century and *fin de siglo*

literature (Blanco “El fin”; Charnon-Deutsch “Exoticism”; Hooper “Reading”; Martín-Márquez). The really interesting question in the case of *Sangre española* is not so much De los Ríos’s presentation of gender per se, but rather her treatment of the intersection between issues of gender and issues arising from the application to Spain of European discourses of Orient, Empire, and – inevitably at this point in Spain’s history – Nation. This intersection is highlighted by the novel’s setting at the birth of what Ucelay da Cal calls “a real sense of Spanish nationhood, expressed as a mature nationalism” (34). The historical backdrop, combined with Guillermo’s dual French and German nationality, provides the author with a powerful framework within which to examine Spain’s recent history. As I will argue now, the novel’s problematic ending is closely connected with the link between De los Ríos’s gendered interpretation of that history and the equally gendered disjunction between Spain’s position as the oppressed other of French imperialism and exotic other of German romanticism on the one hand, and on the other, its status as an aspiring colonial power with interests in the Philippines, the Caribbean, Latin America, and North Africa.

De los Ríos is certainly not alone in identifying the importance of the intersection between gender and colonialism. Much work by feminist critics over the past two decades has revealed the extent to which discourses of orient, empire and nation are acutely gendered, even while universalist conventions continue to obscure the full extent to which concepts of gender are embedded in the most everyday discourses. As Meyda Yeğonoğlu has argued, “A more sexualized reading of Orientalism reveals that representations of sexual difference cannot be treated as



its subdomain; it is of fundamental importance in the formation of a colonial subject position" (2). The question Yeğonoğlu raises is especially germane when we are looking at writings by women that deal with issues of orient and empire. A key strategy both in nineteenth-century female-authored texts and in early feminist scholarship was to claim identification with the colonial subject, but we are now acutely aware that these white, middle-class women (which describes most female Spanish writers, at least until the early twentieth century) have often in fact been complicit – whether consciously or not – in maintaining the existing structures of power. Charnon-Deutsch, for example, talking about nineteenth-century women's writing, demonstrates how "a brief sampling of texts shows the degree to which Spanish women writers constructed their narratives of feminine victimization and self-sacrifice on unchallenged differences of class, race, and ethnicity" ("Gender" 125), a strategy that she criticizes as "bourgeois myopia" (127). Ann McClintock points to a similar situation in the colonial world in general, where "white women were not the hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting" (6). In response to this critique of white, middle-class women's often-voiced sense of solidarity with the colonial subject, third-world feminists and women of colour have argued for the importance of a relativized, historically and geographically specific analysis of the gendered dimensions of orient, empire, and nation (e.g. Kahf; Yeğonoğlu).

The need for a relativized, contingent analysis of these key concepts is equally important in the case of Spain, where additional complications pertain.

These complications arise from the balancing act the nation was forced to perform during the nineteenth century as it tried to hold on to a vanishing Empire and thus to its position in the European “big boys” club, while all the time acutely conscious of its status as Europe’s exotic (and thus by extension, subordinate) other. This position – which José Colmeiro describes as “the particular double bind of Spanish culture” – became even more difficult in the second half of the nineteenth century with renewed scholarly and political interest in Spain’s Islamic past and its implications for the neo-colonial present (Goode; Jubran; Pedraz Marcos). The consequence of this “double bind” is, as several scholars have argued (Colmeiro; Hooper “Reading”; Tofiño), that the Spanish case does not fit theories of “Orientalism”, which are based on a clear distinction between the (Western) Self and the (Oriental) Other: the call for relativized, historically and geographically contingent studies is thus perhaps more pressing for Spain than for any other Western European nation. Some aspects of critical theory can be very helpful in unpicking the complexities of nineteenth-century Spain: Charnon-Deutsch, among others, has shown how Anglo-American feminist theory has been helpful in understanding nineteenth-century Spanish women’s writing (“Gender”). Whether we can continue to make this assumption in relation to (gendered) theories of Orient and Empire, however, is, as my reading of *Sangre española* suggests, much less certain.

*Sangre española* dramatizes the way in which discourses of nation are built on gendered foundations. The story is constructed from a variety of stereotypical representations of gender and nation that have more in common with the works of

De los Ríos's canonical contemporaries, the androcentric Generation of 1898, than with those of other women. The widespread view of man as the active defender of the nation and woman as the passive repository for the national spirit is expressed through the novel's presentation of Rocío and her father. When we first meet him, Don Manuel is the embodiment of masculine patriotism and the indomitable Spanish spirit:

Rayos despedían los negros ojos del señor Manuel y chispas saltaban de los cascos de los coraceros, abollados por la culata de su escopeta, terrible como la clava en las manos de Hércules [and then he is captured] es decir, le cazaron como se caza un león, y como león cogido en lazo, rugía él al ser conducido a Andújar (143).

Where Don Manuel is motivated by patriotism and anger, his daughter Rocío is driven by more "feminine" emotions such as "dolor", which "inspiró entonces a Rocío una locura sublime" (144). As befits the heroine of a melodramatic romance, Rocío is "la moza más linda y codiciada del barrio" (142), a "débil criatura" (147) whose physical frailty is one of the qualities that makes her so attractive. Importantly, this is not portrayed as a weakness, but as a quality that defines her place in her family line and thus, implicitly, in the "family" of the nation (143). In fact, despite her femininity and physical frailty, she is very much her father's daughter, "hecha del bronce con que se hacen los héroes" (144), and it is not insignificant that when the possibility of her marrying Guillermo is first raised, she too is compared to a wounded lion:

Una ola de fuego subió á los ojos, á las mejillas, á la frente y á la garganta de Rocío, que se irguió súbita, gallarda, fieramente, como una leona herida, como una española injuriada en su patriotismo, en su religión y en su pudor (158).

This passage reveals not only the motives that drive Rocío (patriotismo, religión, pudor), but also what is at stake for her as a woman on the (figurative as well as literal) battlefield. While she does not risk being physically taken prisoner like her father, the threat of being forced into a relationship with Guillermo is a quite different, but equally traumatic form of subordination. Her desire to enter “la desigual contienda” with Guillermo (148) is, because of her motive (to rescue her father), seen as a pure and noble cause and thus an acceptable reason for entering the “public” sphere of the war: “¡Pues Dios, que veía la santidad de su causa, no podía dejar de salvarla, y la salvaría, porque en su justicia ponía ella toda su confianza!” Furthermore, the conceit allows De los Ríos to emphasize the comparison between her heroine and the nation she represents: “No de otro modo pensaba España en aquella alta ocasión” (144). As she physically enters the battlefield, her purity and innocence are her sole protection:

tan firme, tan recogido, tan casto y resuelto era el continente de la niña, que invenciblemente se impuso a los más osados [soldados franceses], con esa augusta entereza del pudor que defiende a la virgen, como a la rosa las espinas (148).

The importance attached to Rocío’s virginity is key to interpreting her tragic ending. If her virginity acts as her protection from the massed hordes of French barbarians,

then her sexual subjection to one of those barbarians (when she marries Guillermo) removes that protection and anchors her in a body that, no longer pure, can no longer function as the de facto repository of the Spanish national essence. As McClintock observes, “the idea of racial ‘purity’ ... depends on the vigorous policing of women’s sexuality” (61). In other words, Rocío embodies the essential problem facing *fin de siglo* intellectuals engaged in restoring a Spanish national project that was, as Roberta Johnson (among others) has shown with regard to the “Generation of 1898”, inherently gendered (*Gender*; “Domestic Agenda”). The central aim of this project was to reconceptualise Spain as masculine, “viril” and “castizo”: as Alda Blanco has argued, it depended heavily on “the retrieval and recirculation of the traditional idea of ‘lo castizo’ which came to function in the discourse as the symbolic representation of ‘masculinity’” (“Gender” 133). Furthermore, the all-important concept of *casticismo* that underpinned the entire project was itself located at the intersection between discourses of gender and nation: a chief concern, frequently expressed, was to reclaim the newly *castizo* Spanish culture from the malign (and feminized) taint of foreign (especially French) influence.

Of course, the novelistic and intellectual theory that informed the renewed national project did not exist in a vacuum. In fact, this newly purified and invigorated national energy was channelled in the first years of the twentieth century into a renewed colonial project based on the (re)acquisition of colonial dominance in North Africa. The colonial project itself, as is widely accepted, was inherently gendered, and Spain thus hoped to affirm its “virility” by asserting dominance over a “feminized” Oriental subject. In so doing, it hoped to erase its own

recent history of repeated feminization, first by the French invasion of 1808, and subsequently by its promotion at the hands of the Northern European Romantics as Europe's exotically oriental other. This would prove to be a difficult task, for the idea of exotic Spain had been firmly embedded in the self-representation of neighbouring states for the best part of a century. José Colmeiro suggests that its power lay in its specific blend of familiarity and unfamiliarity: "because it was closer to home and the unfamiliar was spoken in a familiar language, it was perceived as a more sheltered space onto which the fears and anxieties caused by modernity could be safely projected". As Diego Saglia observes in his study of English-language representations of Spain at the time of the Peninsular Wars, the resulting discourse was inherently gendered:

The Iberian nation was alternately represented as powerless and empowered or, in other words, as either a traditionally masculine or a feminine civilization ... narratives on Spain illustrate how Romantic writing employed stereotypes of gender to represent the nation at war and often to recount teleological and epic versions of history (365).

Read against this background, we can see how Rocío's sexual subjugation to Guillermo echoes that of the Egyptian dancer Kuchuk Hanem to the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, which according to Edward Said "fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enables" (6). Guillermo himself voices the conceit that underpins the novel when, as Rocío stands before him pleading for her father's life, he declares to his friend that: "Yo juro conquistar su alma, como el Emperador conquistará la tierra de España".

His friend, shocked at Guillermo's inherent lack of understanding, chastises him that "¡... la tierra podrá conquistarse [pero] las almas son de Dios!" (166). The introduction of this conceptual layer into the relationship between Rocío and Siegborg means that we can read her death at the end of the novel in two distinct ways. As a nineteenth-century fictional heroine, she never has any realistic prospect of an ending other than marriage or death (DuPlessis): unfortunately for Rocío, because her marriage is inappropriate within the context of the story, the only respectable solution is ultimately death. On the other hand, in her function as embodiment of the widespread belief in Woman as receptacle of national essence, her sexual purity is her only protection against the threat of contamination by the foreign that was the driving force of the *noventayochista* national project. Once she is tainted by sexual contact with Guillermo, she is no longer fit for purpose, but becomes a corporeal reminder of Spain's subjugation to the rest of Europe: in this case too, the only appropriate solution if honour is to be restored is for that contaminated body to be killed off once and for all.

This reading suggests that De los Ríos's novel can usefully be considered alongside the canonical works of the period, in particular those of her peers who are commonly associated with the label "Generation of 1898." Like contemporaries such as Azorín, Unamuno, and Baroja, De los Ríos was deeply committed to the intellectual project of re-examining the relationship between past and present in order to (re)construct a workable narrative of Spanish history. Her gendered perspective on Spanish history and the Spanish spirit, like that of her more radical contemporary María Martínez Sierra, provides an interesting complement to the

huge body of male-authored canonical works in which individual – or individualised – women rarely appear (Johnson *Gender* 31-68). Reyes Lazaro, writing about De los Ríos's later novel *Las hijas de don Juan* (1909), sees the tension resulting from the writer's gender as a defining characteristic of De los Ríos's work: "el género de la escritora fractura la casi perfecta pertenencia del relato al proyecto nacionalista de un gran número de intelectuales que escriben en castellano a principios del siglo veinte en España" (477). I agree wholeheartedly with Lazaro's comment that "la inserción en primera línea de De los Ríos en el nacional-romanticismo tardío del llamado noventayocho... hace incomprendible el olvido de esta escritora" (476). I would argue that this is especially true because De los Ríos so clearly bucks the trend of female authorship (and authoriality) to which her male contemporaries were so opposed. That is, *Sangre española* also provides a foil for the emerging narrative of female-authored interventions into Spain's *fin de siglo* public sphere by contemporaries such as Martínez Sierra, not least because De los Ríos's nationalist vision is so surprisingly close to the "Krausist-inspired transcendental notion of an eternal Spanish tradition or Spanish national soul", which, as Johnson has argued, "clashed with the reality of women's increasingly immanent and concrete role in a rapidly changing national public life" (*Gender* 31).

This reading of *Sangre española* is certainly persuasive, and in itself shows the inadequacy of many assumptions about *fin de siglo* writing, most notably that women writers played little or no part in the major debates of the period. However, it is important to recognise that it is also inevitably limiting. It is true that De los Ríos and her contemporaries were concerned – to varying degrees and with varying



conclusions – with the question of women’s role in Spanish history and society, and what we might now call the patriarchal constructs that sought to keep them in their place. However, to read texts such as *Sangre española* and others like it purely as a defence of women’s place in Spanish history and society is, I think, increasingly problematic. The view of society as constructed upon a binary division between oppressed women and oppressive men, according to which women are always victims and men always perpetrators, is now generally regarded as flawed. Instead, third wave feminist scholars argue, we have to reconsider both the binary divide and the valorisation on which such a divide is based, for if we continue to employ them uncritically, the “sanctioned binaries ... drawn historically from the metaphysical Manicheanism of the imperial enlightenment itself ... run the risk of simply inverting, rather than overturning dominant notions of power” (McClintock 15). That is, it is imperative to acknowledge the inconsistencies, difficulties, and hidden sites of complicity in the work of our foremothers, rather than simply celebrating them as straightforward pioneers and sole occupiers of the moral high ground. To demonstrate this, I want to focus on a key passage in the novel where these binary divisions are scrutinised and – whether consciously on the author’s part or not – undermined. That is to say, I want to offer a close reading of the central encounter between Rocío and Guillermo as a key site for revealing the limitations of the concept of difference that underpins and structures *fin de siglo* Spanish perceptions of history, society, and Spain’s place in the world.

Difference is the central motor of De los Ríos’s text, structured as it is around what McClintock describes as the “sanctioned binaries” of the enlightenment that

continued to shape European thought throughout the nineteenth century (15). This structure is demonstrated most explicitly in the initial confrontation between Rocío and Guillermo, figured as “la doble significación del Norte y del Mediodía en eterna rivalidad” (160).<sup>5</sup> The passage reveals the two protagonists to embody the defining tension of nineteenth-century Spain, between: “dos razas, dos nacionalidades, dos tendencias inconciliables: el derecho y la fuerza, la independencia y la conquista, la revolución y el tradicionalismo, el hecho dominador y el albedrío indomitable” (160-1). For *fin de siglo* Spain, this Manichean structure provided a means by which to justify a national project driven by the desire to recover national pride through erasure of a colonized past in favour of a colonizing present. As McClintock points out, however, such justification was inherently misguided, for the Manichean structure is “[not] adequate to the task of accounting for, let alone strategically opposing, the tenacious legacies of imperialism” (15). We get a hint of this in *Sangre española*, for despite the importance of gender and national difference in the novel, *De los Ríos* can achieve its effect only through the elision of other, equally important structuring differences, notably that of social class.<sup>6</sup> This limitation notwithstanding, the distinction between Spanish and Other encoded in the differences between Rocío and Guillermo is powerfully expressed, not least in its emphasis of the parallel drawn by so many scholars between the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonised subject, when “both patriarchy and imperialism exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate” (Ashcroft 101). This parallel is exemplified in the motif of the gaze – so important to both postcolonial and feminist theory – that shapes Rocío and Guillermo’s initial encounter. As

Ashcroft et al have written, "Surveillance, or observation, is one of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance [because] the imperial gaze defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalternity and powerlessness" (226).

When Rocío first enters the room where she is to plead for her father's life, she is veiled, which immediately casts her in the mould of the exotic but anonymous female. Guillermo has no interest in her at all: "visiblemente preocupado, saludó a la recién venida sin mirarla" (152). It is only when she removes her veil and begins to speak that he notices her and is immediately overwhelmed with emotion.

Significantly, he does not hear what she is saying to him, as her anguished words are converted into music in his ears:

[su] hablar seseoso, tímido, blando halagador, dulcísimo ... tenía para el franco-germano cadencias, modulaciones, suavidades, ignotas y jamás presentidas de puro tiernas, melodiosas y femeninas ... la pobre criatura acongojada habló ... sin sospechar que el dolor de su alma sonara como una música, como una caricia eufónica en los oídos del guerrero del Norte (152).

He is transfixed, unable to do anything but watch her. Her words wash over him in a "armonía suave de sonidos exóticos, apasionados y arrulladores... como... una patética romanza sin palabras" (154). Through Guillermo's gaze, Rocío is turned from a thinking, speaking subject into a visual and aural experience, a manoeuvre that the text connects directly with the German half of his identity: "Al ver a Rocío, al sentirse besadas por el rayo de sol de Sevilla, las auras del Rhin se levantaron del

alma de Mayor" (154). In other words, this encounter comes to stand directly for the construction of "exotic" Spain according to the dictates of German Romanticism. This connection is strengthened when Siegburg eventually regains his composure and declares that although he has never seen Rocío before, she is acutely familiar to him: "¡Nunca la he visto, pero la conozco de siempre; es *la que yo esperaba*, y la adoro!" (156, italics De los Ríos's). His words recall the basic tenet of Orientalist theory – that the Orient, while superficially exotic and unknown, was in fact subject to a discourse of "Orientalism" that enabled the West to "know", that is, to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the Orient (Said 3). Guillermo's reaction exemplifies this process in action and refers us back to Ashcroft's definition of the imperial gaze. His declaration that he "knows" Rocío has the effect of defining her identity according to his own terms. His perception of her as "exotic" music, there to be experienced and adored, objectifies her within the identifying system of power relations. Finally, and most explicitly, his inability to hear her words, despite her obviously anguished desire to communicate with him, confirms her lack of subjectivity, her subalternity and powerlessness.

What is significant in this text, however, is that the gaze works in both directions. Rocío, although she is not only a woman, but also a representative of a colonised people, is not simply gazed upon. She looks back at Guillermo, and she looks at other people too, and this is important because by returning the imperial gaze, "the colonized subject not only alters [imperial technologies, discourses and cultural forms] to local needs, but uses them to direct the gaze upon the colonizer and thus reverse the orientation of power in the relationship" (Ashcroft 228-9).

When Rocío arrives in Guillermo's office, veiled, and he does not look at her, she performs a swift mental calculation, removes her veil, and assumes the position of a weeping Madonna:

ansiosa de mantener su causa, si no con las palabras, sin duda  
ininteligibles para el extranjero, con el gesto, con la expresión, con la  
presencia del alma, que se asomaría entera á su rostro para defender la  
vida de su padre, alzóse el velo, y, cruzando las manos en actitud de  
súplica, puso todo su ternura envuelta en lágrimas... (152)

In this new guise, she gazes directly at Guillermo "en una mirada que se clavó como un rayo en los ojos del francés" (152). In this way, she appropriates the cultural form that will, she calculates, have the greatest effect on him and thus enable her to achieve her aim. That is, we might read Rocío's reaction to Guillermo as an attempt – and evidently a not altogether unsuccessful one – to co-opt the cultural form most associated with the Spanish Catholic female (ie the Madonna) in order to turn the gaze back on the colonizer and thus reverse the orientation of power in their relationship. The success of this manoeuvre, however, is inevitably limited, for if Rocío represents Spain and Guillermo represents Northern European military and cultural imperialism, then her returning of his gaze might be read as representing a Spanish attempt to co-opt the power structures of the imperial system.

This reading is reinforced when in her analysis of this first encounter, De los Ríos describes the role-reversal explicitly: "El Norte... acababa por sentirse *atraído, penetrado, poseído* por el poder irresistible de la luz. El Sur, ardiente y orgulloso de su energía, rechazaba violentamente el influjo helador del Septentrión, hiriéndole

con rayos encendidos que apresuraban su deshielo” (160, italics mine). In other words, Guillermo’s obsession with Rocío is figured as a means of reversing Spain’s orientalized subordination – so while Rocío might become physically subordinate to Guillermo, he in turn is emotionally subordinate to her. The German Romantic fascination with Spain and Spanish culture, so often expressed through music, art, and culture, is here codified as an emotional weakness of the sort more readily identified in nineteenth-century Spain with “feminized” sentimentality. Indeed, De los Ríos explicitly describes the process as one of penetration and possession. The consequence of this dynamic, in the context of *Sangre española*, is a complete shift in the balance of power, since Guillermo’s desire for dominance is wholly unachievable: “Comprendíase que, al encontrarse en hora trágica, el franco-germano se enamorase de la niña sevillana; lo incomprensible, lo absurdo, lo imposible era que Rocío se enamorase de un francés” (161). At the same time, Rocío (and through her, Spain) can contemplate the renunciation of physical liberty safe in the knowledge that the spiritual remains untouchable: “España era todavía aquella ingente roca formada de granos de arena que se mantenían unidos en compacta masa por una cohesión sublime: la fe. Rocío era la encarnación viviente de aquella dura pena del patriotismo español” (163). Ultimately, however, this spiritual liberty comes at a price, for as we have seen, it can be maintained only through Rocío’s death.

And so we return to the thesis I outlined at the start of this essay: that the apparently contradictory ending of *Sangre española* can tell us a great deal about the relationship between gender, nation and empire in *fin de siglo* Spain. On the one

hand, Rocío's sexual subjection to the colonizer (in the person of Guillermo) means that her death is inevitable because she can no longer fulfil the only role available to women in the national discourse, as the "mother" of the *castizo* Spanish nation. At the same time, her death represents the death of the colonized (and thus feminized) Spanish subject of the past, which was essential to the fulfilment of the newly masculinized national project of the *fin de siglo*. De los Ríos's apparent commitment to hegemonic gender norms reveals her distance from her female contemporaries who were engaged in seeking out alternatives for their female protagonists to the prescribed endings in marriage and/or death. Whether this is because her concerns are explicitly nationalist (and therefore public) and so she needs to be more circumspect in order to avoid accusations of transgression, or simply because she is inherently conservative, her decision exposes the bind in which *fin de siglo* women inevitably found themselves. Furthermore, her strategy is unquestionably a risky one whichever interpretation we choose to make. By conflating the contemporary view of woman as embodiment of the national spirit with the emerging and highly gendered discourses of Orient and Empire, she makes the killing-off of the woman inevitable, and thus effectively writes herself (and her female contemporaries) out of the national project and into a dead end. At the same time, her attempt to appropriate the strategies of European colonialism for the Spanish cause not only exposes the contingent universalism of a Spanish national project that has no place for large sections of the Spanish population, but also contributes to upholding the inequalities of power that ensured Spain's own subordination for nearly a century. In both cases, we might read *Sangre española* as an explicit demonstration of the

dangers of unthinkingly appropriating the master's tools (to borrow Audre Lorde's vivid metaphor), for even when you are only trying to help prop up the master's house, there is a terrible danger that the whole construction might simply come crashing down on top of you.

Ultimately, I would argue that *Sangre española* makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of *fin de siglo* Spanish intellectual currents not only in its provision of a rare female-authored complement to the *noventayochista* position on Spain's national debate, but also for the way that its unabashed social and cultural conservatism complicates the emerging narrative of *fin de siglo* women's writing. In so doing, it enhances our understanding of the innumerable ways in which nineteenth-century Spanish discourses of history and social, cultural, and colonial relations were figured in terms of gender. Even more valuable, however, is the way it forces a 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader to reflect on the benefits and limitations of reading *fin de siglo* Spanish literature solely through hegemonic Anglo- and Franco-centric theories of gender, nation, orient and empire.



## WORKS CITED

- Arkininstall, Christine. "Rosario de Acuña's *La voz de la patria*". *Hispanic Review* 74.3 (2006): 301-318.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: the key concepts*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Bieder, Maryellen. "Woman and the Twentieth-Century Spanish Literary Canon: The Lady Vanishes," *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea* 17 (1992): 301-24.
- Blanco, Alda. "El fin del imperio español y la Generación de 1898." *Hispanic Research Journal* 4.1 (2003): 3-18.
- "Gender and National Identity: The Novel in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Literary History". In Charnon-Deutsch & Labanyi: 120-36.
- Bordonada, Ángela Ena. *Novelas breves de escritoras españolas, 1900-1936*. Madrid: Castalia/Instituto de la Mujer, 1989.
- Brownlow, JP and JW Kronik, eds. *Intertextual Pursuits. Literary Mediations in Modern Spanish Narrative*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP / London: Associated UUPP, 1998.
- Charnon-Deutsch, Lou. *The Spanish Gypsy: History of a European Obsession*. University Park: Penn State UP, 2004.
- "Gender and beyond: nineteenth-century Spanish women writers". *The Cambridge*

- Companion to the Spanish Novel from 1600 to the Present*. Eds. Harriet Turner & Adelaida López de Martínez. Cambridge: CUP, 2003: 122-137.
- "Exoticism and the Politics of Difference in Late Nineteenth-Century Spanish Periodicals." In Charnon-Deutsch & Labanyi: 250-270.
- & Jo Labanyi, eds. *Culture and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Spain*. Eds. Charnon-Deutsch & Jo Labanyi. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
- Colmeiro, José F. "Exorcising Exoticism: Carmen and the Construction of Oriental Spain". *Comparative Literature* 54.2 (Spring 2002). Accessed at <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/> (20 Dec 2006). No pagination.
- Davies, Catherine. *Spanish Women's Writing, 1849-1996*. London: Atlantic Highlands / NJ: Athlone Press, 1998.
- De los Ríos, Blanca. "Sangre española". *Revista Contemporánea* (Madrid) CXIII (15 marzo 1899): 449-483. Reprinted first as *Sangre española*. Madrid: Imp. A Marzo, 1902; then in *La niña de Sanabria. Melita Palma. Sangre española. Novelas. Obras completas Tomo II*. Madrid: Est. Tip. de Idamor Moreno, 1907.
- "Por la república". *Blanco y Negro* (Madrid) 506 (1 dic 1901). Reprinted in *La rondeña (cuentos andaluces). El salvador (cuentos varios). Obras completas Tomo I*. Madrid: Est. Tip. de Idamor Moreno, 1902: 97-122.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.
- Gabriele, John P, ed. *Nuevas perspectivas sobre el 98*. Madrid: Iberoamericano, 1999

Glenn, Kathleen. "Demythification and Denunciation in Blanca de los Ríos's *Las hijas de*

*Don Juan*". In Gabriele, ed, *Nuevas perspectivas*: 223-230.

González López, María Antonieta. *Aproximación a la obra literaria y periodística de Blanca de los Ríos*. Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2001.

Goode, Joshua Seth. "The Racial Alloy: The Science, Politics, and Culture of Race in Spain, 1875-1923." Diss. U of California, Los Angeles, 1999.

Hooper, Kirsty. *Extranjera en mi patria. Gender and the Modern Nation in the Pre-1914*

*Narrative of Sofía Casanova (1861-1958)*. Forthcoming MS.

----- "Las autoras de unas novelitas? Spanish Women Writers, 1890-1916".

Forthcoming

in Ann Davies, Par Kumaraswami, Claire Williams, eds. *Making Waves: Essays on the Anniversary of Women in Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin-American Studies*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

----- "Reading Spain's African Vocation: The Figure of the Moorish Priest in Three *fin*

*de siglo* Novels." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 40.1 (2006): 175-199.

----- "A Spanish Woman in the Orient: Sofía Casanova's *Sobre el Volga helado* (1903)".

In: R Archer, V Astvaldsson, S Boyd & M Thompson. ed(s). *Antes y después del Quijote: en el cincuentenario de la Asociación de Hispanistas de Gran Bretaña e Irlanda*. Valencia, Biblioteca Valenciana: 341-49.

Johnson, Roberta. *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel*. Nashville:

Vanderbilt UP, 2003.

----- . "The Domestic Agenda of the Generation of '98" in Gabriele: 239-250.

----- . "The Domestication of Don Juan in Women Novelists of Modernist Spain". In

Brownlow & Kronik: 222-38.

----- . "Gender and Nation in Spanish Fiction Between the Wars (1898-1936)."

*Revista*

*Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos XXI/I (1996): 167-179.*

----- . *Crossfire: Philosophy and the Novel in Spain, 1900-1934*. Lexington, U Kentucky

P, 1993.

Jubran, Carl. 'Spanish Internal-Orientalism. Cultural Hybridity and the Production of

National Identity: 1887-1940'. Diss. U of California, San Diego, 2002.

Kahf, Mohja. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman. From Termagant to*

*Odalisque*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1999.

Kirkpatrick, Susan. *Mujer, modernismo y vanguardia en España (1898-1931)*.

Madrid: Cátedra, 2003.

Lázaro, Reyes. "El Don Juan de Blanca de los Ríos y el nacionalismo romántica

española

de principios de siglo". *Letras Peninsulares* 13.1 (2000): 61-73.

Lewis, Reina & Sara Mills, eds. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Edinburgh:

Edinburgh UP, 2003.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's house," in

Moraga and Anzaldúa: 94-101.

Louis, Anja. *Women and the Law. Carmen de Burgos, an Early Feminist*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005.

Martín-Márquez, Susan. "Here's Spain Looking at You': Shifting Perspectives on North African Otherness in Galdós and Fortuny." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 5 (2001): 7-24.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." In Reina Lewis & Sara Mills, eds: 49-74.

Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983.

Pedraz Marcos, Azucena. *Quimeras de Africa. La sociedad española de africanistas y colonialistas*. Madrid: Polifemo, 2000.

Saglia, Diego. "O My Mother Spain!': The Peninsular War, Family Matters, and the Practice of Romantic Nation-Writing." *ELH* 65.2 (1998): 363-393.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin, 1995.

Tofiño-Quesada, Ignacio. 'Spanish Orientalism: Uses of the Past in Spain's Colonization in Africa'. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 23.1-2 (2003): 141-8.

Tolliver, Joyce. *Cigar Smoke and Violet Water. Gendered Discourse in the Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1998.

Torrecilla, Jesús. *La Generación de 98 frente al nuevo fin de siglo*. Amsterdam:

Rodopi,

2000.

Ucelay da Cal, Enric. "The Nationalisms of the Periphery: Culture and Politics in the

Construction of National Identity." In H. Graham, J. Labanyi, eds. *Spanish*

*Cultural Studies. An Introduction. The Struggle for Modernity*. Oxford: OUP,

1995: 32-39.

Vásquez Recio, Nieves. "Las hijas de Don Juan de Blanca de los Ríos. Fin de siglo y

mirada femenina". *Don Juan Tenorio en la España del siglo veinte*. Madrid:

Cátedra, 1998. 379-403.

Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. New York: Harbinger Books, 1938.

Yeğonoğlu, Meyda. *Colonial Fantasies. Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*.

Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

---

<sup>1</sup> This and all further references are to the 1907 edition of *Sangre española*.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the prologues to Sofía Casanova's *El doctor Wolski* (1894), or Carmen de Burgos's *Los inadaptados* (1901), which both deny they are not even works of fiction (which would apparently require too much artistry for a woman!), but rather collections of costumbrist or journalistic sketches.

<sup>3</sup> De los Ríos's awareness of the incomplete nature of national historical narratives clearly informs the novel: on the very first page, she claims a place for the ordinary soldiers – representatives of Unamuno's *intrahistoria*? – in a future national history: "Con caracteres de oro y en páginas de bronce debiera escribir la patria los nombres de aquellos oscuros voluntarios, de aquellos campesinos, cazadores, chulillos, piqueros, contrabandistas y hasta presidiarios andaluces que mantuvieron con su esfuerzo la nacionalidad española" (141). Ann McClintock has argued that "No social category should remain invisible with respect to the analysis of empire" (9), but while gender and nation are highlighted in De los Ríos's novel, other categories of identity are not. After these initial claims, De los Ríos devotes little more space to the section of the population that indubitably provided the bulk of the Spanish cannon-fodder during the war. A few pages later, she returns to the question of the historical record, but this time it is to stake a claim for her protagonist (and through her, Spanish women in general) both in the national history and also – perhaps more pertinently – in the national literature: "¡... aquel grupo de jinetes armados, llevando en medio á la resuelta moza, caballera en andariega mula, parecía arrancado de una página del *Quijote*, y era digna de figurar en las eternas de la Historia!" (145).

<sup>4</sup> This tameness is especially marked when we compare Rocío with the female protagonists of novels such as Pardo Bazán's *Insolación* (1889), Casanova's *Más que amor* (1908), or Gloria de la Prada's *El cantar de los amores* (1912).

---

<sup>5</sup> De los Ríos is surely also alluding here to the contemporary obsession with the supposed decline of the Latin race in the face of Anglo-Saxon military, scientific and political dominance. These racial politics would shape her later career, with the founding of the journal *Raza Española* in 1920.

<sup>6</sup> We see this, for example, in De los Ríos's virtual silence, after she has celebrated them on the first page of the novel, about those from sectors of society other than her own. Her refusal to deal with the peasant classes as anything other than a series of generalized *tipos* or "oscuros voluntarios" (141) reflects a similar danger in contemporary scholarship, of "middle-class, urban African and Asian scholars producing scholarship on or about their rural or working-class sisters which assumes their own middle-class culture as the norm and codifies peasant and working-class histories and cultures as Other" (Mohanty 50).