WOMAN AS VICTIM IN THE SPANISH AMERICAN NATURALIST
NOVEL, 1889-1919

Jessica Shade

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Romance Languages (Spanish).

Chapel Hill
2007

Approved by
Advisor: Professor Rosa Perelmuter
Reader: Professor Marsha Collins
Reader: Professor Juan Carlos González Espitia
Reader: Professor José Manuel Polo de Bernabé
Reader: Professor John Chasteen
ABSTRACT

JESSICA SHADE: Woman as Victim in the Spanish American Naturalist Novel, 1889-1919
(Under the direction of Rosa Perelmuter)

This dissertation sets out to analyze a representative group of Spanish American naturalist novels that feature a central preoccupation with women and their social situation. My corpus includes Chilean Augusto D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero (1902), Mexican Federico Gamboa’s Santa (1903), Argentine Manuel Gálvez’s Nacha Regules (1919), Gaucha (1899) and Beba (1894) by Uruguayans Javier de Viana and Carlos Reyles, respectively, and Blanca Sol (1889) and Herencia (1895) by Peruvians Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera and Clorinda Matto de Turner, respectively. My contention is that the main female characters in these novels, whether prostitutes, virtuous women, or adolescents, become the targets of victimization that stems from the values of the patriarchal society that dominates their lives. Their status as victim is above all driven by gender and oftentimes leads to a mental, emotional, or physical elimination from mainstream society. The repression of women takes many different forms and oftentimes is an important contributing factor to their downfall, the end result frequently being death, suicide, prostitution, violence, and/or other forms of degradation. While discussing the situations of the women, I bring into play, when appropriate, the question of space. I analyze the representation of the spaces, whether repressive or liberating, traversed by the female characters. I devote a separate chapter to each of these
discussions: Sinful Spaces, which focuses on prostitution; Spaces of Contamination, in which I analyze the connection between illness and women; Spaces of Victimization, which discusses violence against women; and Marriage as a Victimizing Space. It is my hope to extend through this study the existing scholarly interest in the victimization of woman in European and other literatures by including the Spanish American narrative, and to offer a coherent and thorough analysis of the woman as victim in the naturalist novel of that region.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sinful Spaces: Life Inside and Outside of the Brothel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Juana Lucero</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Santa</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV. Nacha Regules</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spaces of Contamination: Women and Illness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Juana Lucero</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Santa</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Women and Violence: Spaces of Victimization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Juana Lucero</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Nacha Regules</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV. Gaucha</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marriage as a Victimizing Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Herencia</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. **Blanca Sol** ................................................................. 153

IV. **Beba** ............................................................................. 167

Chapter 6  Conclusion .............................................................. 181

Bibliography

I. **Works Cited** ................................................................. 185

II. **Other Sources Consulted** .............................................. 193
En la novela naturalista no habrá individuo más inerme ante las pasiones propias o ajenas que la mujer (183).

Manuel Prendes, *La novela naturalista hispanoamericana*

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation sets out to examine the representation of woman as victim in a representative group of Spanish American naturalist novels published between 1889 and 1919. Five countries in Latin America (Peru, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina) are viewed by Manuel Prendes as the most important with regard to the production of naturalist novels, and he devotes a separate section of his book to each of them (57-96). The seven novels I have chosen for examination correspond to these five countries and are *Blanca Sol* (1889) and *Herencia* (1895) by Peruvians Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera and Clorinda Matto de Turner, respectively, *Santa* (1903) by Mexican Federico Gamboa, *Beba* (1894) and *Gaucha* (1899) by Uruguayans Carlos Reyles and Javier de Viana, respectively, *Juana Lucero* (1902) by Chilean Augusto D’Halmar, and *Nacha Regules* (1919) by Argentine Manuel Gálvez. In addition to country of origin, my choice of novels was guided by their central preoccupation with women and their social situation and by the presence of female central characters who are victimized, whether by other characters, by society, or by a mixture of the two. In the novels chosen for this dissertation, woman’s status as victim is articulated through a number of means such as prostitution, illness (both mental and physical), physical violence, and marriage, each of
which contribute to the female character’s eventual elimination from society in one form or another. These topics will each be discussed at length in separate chapters, thus providing an overview of woman as victim in a specific context.

The female characters under study in this dissertation are of various types: rich and poor, virtuous and corrupt, naïve and worldly. Likewise, they play various roles in the novels: mothers, daughters, wives, lovers, prostitutes, and orphans. The common ground they share is that, as a result of their gender, they are victimized by a male-dominated society that seeks to either idealize or destroy them. Although there are certainly strong similarities at times, the victimization that these women suffer does not necessarily follow a specific pattern. They are at risk of victimization regardless of the space that they inhabit at any given time; they can be victimized in their own home or outside, in the city or in the country, in a brothel or in a church. Additionally, they are bound by social pressures that dictate their lives down to the very last detail. As women, they are expected to be pure, virginal and, most of all, submissive and subservient to the men around them. The patriarchal society of which they are a part demands that they behave according to their socially-designated role and metes out swift punishment if they stray from expected behavior. In that case, they are eliminated from mainstream society in one way or another. Some of the women are pushed to the margins of society when they resort to prostitution; others disappear physically through death or suicide, and still others suffer an emotional collapse that disables them, when they are driven to madness or are forced to remain in abusive relationships. Concerning the portrayal of woman and her subjugation to masculine authority in the Spanish American naturalist novel, Manuel Prendes makes the following statement: “Dentro de un panorama intelectual marcado por
la preeminencia masculina, como lo está la misma estructuración social, la mujer será retratada como un ser de bellísimas potencialidades en el aspecto moral, siempre y cuando éstas no se salgan del papel que tienen asignados de la sociedad del momento” (183). Rarely, a female character is permitted to escape of her victimizing circumstances and rejoin society, but even then it is with the help of a man, thus underscoring her powerlessness and subordinate status.

The crushing and devastating circumstances in which the female characters under study are entrenched are quite characteristic of the naturalist novel as developed by nineteenth-century French novelist Emile Zola. Typical of the naturalist novel is “sexuality […] combined with primitive, brutal, or spineless characters who become alcoholics or victims of other social ills” (Schwartz, A New History 105). Naturalism generally paints a pessimistic picture of humanity and of society. While Zola was certainly not without followers, his theories provoked criticism as well. For example, in his book Degeneration, nineteenth-century physician Max Nordau harshly criticizes Zola and naturalism for being “a literature the baseness of which made us sick” (473). He goes on to assert that those interested in reading Zola’s works are “lovers of the obscene and nasty” (474). In spite of the criticism against Zola, he did influence, if briefly, many novelists writing at the turn of the twentieth century, including those in Spanish America. The biggest source of discontent expressed by Spanish Americans towards Zola concerned his theories on determinism, which state that man’s fate is determined by his heredity and surroundings (Zola, The Naturalist Novel 11). Because of their strong Catholic heritage, Spanish Americans were at times unwilling to embrace determinism completely, as these ideals clashed with their beliefs. As Naomi Lindstrom puts it,
“many believed that naturalism, which showed behavior as the product of heredity and environment, was unsuited for a Catholic society that valued free will” (36). Lindstrom goes on to state that nineteenth-century Spanish novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán “recommended that for Spanish-language readers, naturalism be made compatible with a Christian vision according to which human beings can transcend their circumstances” (36).¹ Unlike Zola’s novels, Spanish American naturalist novels, while still extremely pessimistic, at times offer the possibility of redemption for some of their characters, as we will see in Federico Gamboa’s Santa and Manuel Gálvez’s Nacha Regules. However, most of the women who will be analyzed in this dissertation find it impossible to escape their unfortunate situations and the novels come, almost exclusively, to a devastating end for the victimized female characters, thus exemplifying the pessimism and hopelessness that is inherent in the naturalist novel.

Although there are a fair number of naturalist novels being produced around the turn of the twentieth century in Spanish America, according to Sabine Schlickers naturalism in Spanish America has not received as much critical attention as it merits as, “en su conjunto es una amplia corriente literaria insuficientemente investigada” (El lado oscuro 11). Schlickers notes that while naturalism in Argentina has received quite a bit of scholarly attention, Spanish American naturalism as a whole has been largely overlooked. Existing studies on the topic include, in addition to Schlickers’ El lado oscuro de la modernización: Estudios sobre la novela naturalista hispanoamericana (2003), Manuel Prendes’ La novela naturalista hispanoamericana: evolución y direcciones de un proceso narrativo (2003), which includes a section of particular interest

¹Pardo Bazán’s La cuestión palpitante (1883) and her ideas concerning the tenets of naturalism will be dealt with more fully in Chapter one.
entitled “Tratamiento de la mujer en la novela naturalista,” and La novela naturalista de Federico Gamboa (2002), Guillermo Ara’s La novela naturalista hispanoamericana (1965), Rita Gnutzmann’s La novela naturalista en Argentina (1998), Vicente Urbistondo’s La novela naturalista chilena (1966), and Sintia Molina’s El naturalismo en la novela cubana (2001). While the topic of the victimization of woman in all its variants has not received as much attention with regard to the novel in Spanish America as it has for the European novel of this same period, there are several studies focusing on individual Spanish American novels that should be mentioned. For example, in an article from 2002, Ana Peluffo discusses the contrasting characters of fallen woman (prostitute) and virtuous seamstress in Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera’s Blanca Sol. Peluffo traces Blanca’s fall from the height of Peru’s materialistic society to the depths of alcoholism and prostitution as a result of her social situation. Ana María Alvarado, in a 1980 article, also discusses the theme of prostitution, as it applies to Federico Gamboa’s Santa. Alvarado argues that Gamboa chooses to focus on a prostitute “para lograr encarnar el mal de un pueblo prostituido” (57). She proceeds to make connections between the social and political situation in Mexico at the time and Santa’s situation as a prostitute, and examines Santa’s life in the brothel, as well as her eventual fall into extreme sexual degradation and alcoholism. María R. González devotes her 1996 book to studying the figure of the prostitute in Mexican literature. She begins by recognizing the lack of research dedicated to this important topic: “A pesar de ser la prostituta un motivo recurrente en la literatura universal, no se ha hecho hasta este momento ningún trabajo que siga su desarrollo en la literatura mexicana” (13-14). In this book, González studies Gamboa’s Santa, Mariano Azuela’s María Luisa and La Malhora, Miguel Nicolás Lira’s
Una mujer en soledad, Homero Aridjis’s Perséfone, Antonio Mora’s Del oficio, and Jorge Ibargüengoitia’s Las muertas.

There are also important works devoted to the study of women in the nineteenth century that are pertinent to this study. The essays by Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin in their edited volume, The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World (1978), discuss the role of women in the Victorian period, what was expected of them, and the numerous ways in which they were repressed socially. The topic of illness, both physical and mental, is discussed, as well as the sexual limitations placed on women. Another study, Sweet Suffering: Woman as Victim (1984), is by psychiatrist Natalie Shainess, which deals with woman as victim, in which she analyzes woman’s involvement in violence, and proposes that she can be seen as a masochist who will submit to painful or disturbing situations rather than assert herself. Although these studies do not focus specifically on Spanish America, they provide valuable theoretical support and commentary for my analyses of the victimized woman in the naturalist novel.

Additionally, there are sociological studies regarding women in Latin America that are significant for this study. For example, both Donna Guy and Andrés Carretero have written books on prostitution in Buenos Aires. In Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina (1991), Guy focuses on prostitution and its ramifications around the turn of the twentieth century, while, in Prostitución en Buenos Aires (1995), Carretero traces prostitution from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. In La prostitución en Santiago: 1813-1931. Visión de las élites (1994), Álvaro Góngora Escobedo provides an analysis of prostitution in Santiago. His book will prove particularly useful in analyzing Juana Lucero, which centers on a prostitute in Chile at the
end of the nineteenth century. Góngora Escobedo discusses the circumstances that propel women into prostitution, as well as the illnesses and consequences connected with it. Additionally, I will make use of Luis Lara y Pardo’s nineteenth-century sociological study of prostitution in Mexico, specifically in my analysis of Gamboa’s *Santa*.

The topic of the victimization of woman in the Spanish American naturalist novel has not been examined thoroughly enough. In this dissertation, I will attempt to fill in this gap by analyzing the various forms of victimization to which women in the naturalist novel in Spanish America were subjected. The seven novels I have selected will enable me to discuss the repressive social climate faced by women in Spanish America around the turn of the twentieth century and the ways in which this oppression manifests itself in the naturalist novel of the time. The victimization faced by these protagonists takes many different forms and oftentimes is a contributing factor to her downfall, the end result frequently being death, suicide, prostitution, violence, and/or various other forms of degradation.

This dissertation consists of four chapters, each of which will focus on a theme that illustrates a different aspect of the representation of woman as victim. The first chapter addresses the subject of prostitution. Prostitution was a growing problem in the nineteenth century, both in Europe and in Spanish America. In the society of the time, women were expected to be pure and virginal. The popular dichotomy of the time was the representation of woman as either angel or whore. According to Lorna Duffin, “the angel and the whore were the characteristic images of the double standard of Victorian morality” (31). This statement is equally applicable to Spanish American society, where respectable woman were expected to suppress any sexual urges before matrimony or face
being labeled a whore. For a woman to express interest or desire in sexual activity was considered abnormal and immoral. Sexual activity by men, however, was not only condoned, but expected. For this reason, prostitution became a necessary social evil, as it was often seen as a way to control men’s lustful urges. They were able to satisfy themselves sexually with a prostitute, while keeping their wives pure.² In this chapter, I examine this double standard and the reasons why many women turned to prostitution and then explore this topic in three novels: Santa, Juana Lucero, and Nacha Regules. The protagonist in each novel is a woman who becomes a prostitute, whether she be a virtuous, unassuming young woman or a more sexually experienced female, and therefore finds herself eliminated from mainstream society, as she enters the marginalized world of the brothel. I examine the women’s lives and the circumstances under which they become prostitutes, and also provide a commentary on the ambiguous space of the brothel, which can at once be seen as a victimizing space that contributes to the women’s downfall and a space of comfort and belonging for these women in distress. Michel Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” (1986) and Arnold van Gennep’s Rites of Passage (1960) anchor my analysis of the brothel as a liminal heterotopic space. Additionally, Foucault’s History of Sexuality (1978), as well as Luis Pardo Lara’s La prostitución en México (1908) and the aforementioned studies by Carretero and Góngora Escobedo serve to provide further theoretical and sociological support.

Illness is a constant topic in naturalist works, both in Europe and in Spanish America. In the second chapter I discuss woman as victim of illness, both physical (cancer in Santa) and mental (madness in Juana Lucero). In these novels, illness

²Cf. sources such as Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature, edited by Christiane Schönfeld, and Manuel Prendes’s La novela naturalista hispanoamericana (especially page 183) for more information on this topic.
ultimately leads to the female character’s death or mental disability, thus carrying the woman’s status as victim to a devastating end and effectively eliminating her from society in one way or another. In these cases, illness can be interpreted as a punishment for women who go against the type of behavior deemed to be socially appropriate. The woman’s illness is often seen as a source of contamination or infection and she must be separated from society in order to preserve its purity. The circumstances leading up to and contributing to these forms of illness are analyzed in this chapter. Works such as Illness as Metaphor (1978) by Susan Sontag, The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, studies by Sigmund Freud discussing the connection between hysteria and women, and Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero’s The Female Offender (1895) among others, serve to support my discussion on the connections between illness and women and its application to the Spanish American naturalist novel.

The treatment of pregnancy is also examined in chapter two. In both Juana Lucero and Santa, for example, the protagonist suffers the loss of her child – Juana is forced to have an abortion and her child is literally cut out of her against her will, and Santa’s pregnancy is also terminated in a very graphic scene. The pregnancies of these fallen women are not carried out to full term. They are not allowed to produce offspring, and the connotations of this detail with regard to determinism are discussed.

As stated above, women in the nineteenth century in Latin America were forced to conform to the strict social roles assigned to them. Violent measures were often used to either ensure that a woman remained in her place, or to punish her if she strayed from acceptable behavior. In chapter three of this dissertation, I examine the forms of violence inflicted upon female characters in the naturalist novel. Whether a form of punishment
for sins committed, or an attempt by men to demonstrate their power and control, women were often the objects of brutality. In this chapter, I focus on women subjected to violence in *Juana Lucero* (rape, abortion by force), *Nacha Regules* (physical abuse), and *Gaucha* (rape, physical abuse, death). Violence in the form of rape is common in these novels and I will discuss the circumstances under which they occur, the reactions of the women, and the consequences (in *Juana Lucero* pregnancy, for example). In *Gaucha*, the violence inflicted on Juana, the protagonist, leads to her death, thus eliminating her completely from society. While the forms and circumstances of violence vary in the novels, the representation of woman as a victim of violence remains constant. John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) will be particularly useful in discussing the subjugation of women in the nineteenth century, while Michel Foucault’s discussion of the social function of the disciplinary regulations of pain and torture in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) is useful in assessing the narrative representation of repressive mechanisms in the novels under consideration. I also refer to Shainess’s psychological study in order to analyze the connection between masochistic behavior and women. Additionally, nineteenth-century physician Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study* (1886) is yet another source that supports my discussion of rape.

In chapter four, I focus on the institution of marriage as a loveless space of victimization in the Spanish American naturalist novel. In the nineteenth century, women were expected to marry for reasons other than love. Husbands were often chosen based on their social standing, financial situation, and family background. Since women could not take jobs for themselves, they were dependent upon men to provide for them (Pines...
They often yielded to the social pressures surrounding them by getting married and, in so doing, sacrificed their happiness. Loveless marriages affect women of all kinds in the Spanish American naturalist novel. In this chapter I focus on the female protagonists in Herencia, Blanca Sol, and Beba to analyze the ways in which socially-imposed marriage leads to a degrading downfall for each of them, including consequences such as alcoholism, poverty, suicide, incest, prostitution, and physical abuse. Marriage in these novels is at times seen as a socially-imposed punishment for sins committed, while in other instances it is the result of the young woman’s unhappy compliance with family and social expectations. None of the three protagonists is happy in her marriage, and each of them eventually suffers some degree of misery as a result of her loveless marriage. If she chooses to stray from the expected responsibilities of her marriage, whether this entails committing adultery, ignoring her children, or simply not treating her husband with the respect men demanded from their wives in the nineteenth century, the consequences are disastrous. Davida Pines’s book The Marriage Paradox: Modernist Novels and the Cultural Imperative to Marry (2006) provides useful information regarding women and the pressure to marry in the nineteenth century.

Additionally, in my discussion of Camila in Herencia, René Girard’s The Scapegoat (1986) is helpful in identifying her situation in the novel, as she is physically abused by her husband and essentially blamed and punished for the inappropriate behavior of other women.

Victimization leads to elimination or disappearance of some sort, and the seven protagonists in my corpus are examples of how socially-imposed victimization leads to a

---

3 Although prostitution was a job in the nineteenth century where women could earn money, I am speaking here of the lack of “respectable” jobs open to women living at this time. Prostitution did allow women to make money, but it was also an activity that produced oppression and degradation.
devastating and degrading end. By discussing the victimization of women in the naturalist novel in terms of prostitution, illness, violence, and marriage, I have attempted to set the stage for further studies of the woman as victim in the Spanish American naturalist novel and provide a common ground for comparative studies, especially with regard to the European naturalist novel.
Y para buscar a Nacha bajó a la sima espantosa
donde yacen las infelices que han perdido todo:
el alma, la personalidad, la posesión de su cuerpo.
No son dueñas ni de su cuerpo, que pertenece a
unos hombres que las venden como a los perros o
a los caballos (151).

Manuel Gálvez, Nacha Regules

Chapter 2: Sinful Spaces: Life Inside and Outside of the Brothel

I. Introduction

The city of Santiago, Chile exploded with numerous brothels around the turn of
the twentieth century, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the citizens of the city. Indeed,
in 1891, a disgruntled neighbor even went so far as to complain to public city officials
that these places were “un encierro de corrupción y del más escandaloso comercio con
mujeres que, embrutecidas por el vicio y el licor, ofrecen al público el más grosero
espectáculo” (as qtd. in Góngora Escobedo 122).¹ As is apparent from this quotation, the
general public was vehement in its denunciation of the brothels and their inhabitants.
Prostitutes were greatly marginalized, looked down upon, and rejected for their behavior,
but this was not the extent of their miserable existence. They were also the victims of a
great deal of social hypocrisy, as they were condemned for being decadent and amoral
while at the same time recognized as being a necessary part of society. Prostitution at the
time was seen as a way to provide men with an appropriate outlet for their sexual energy
and lust while keeping the institution of marriage pure (Guereña 266). For this reason,

¹This information comes from Chile’s National Archive, Intendencia de Santiago, from January of 1891.
prostitution became a necessary social evil, designed to protect the purity of legitimate female companions such as girlfriends and spouses, and thus maintain the family unit and social order: “Lo importante a fin de cuentas era no poder confundir en ningún momento a una mujer pública (o sea ‘deshonrada’) de una mujer honrada, la ‘esposa y madre’ potencial” (emphasis in the text; Guereña 265). Hence, prostitutes became a pawn of patriarchy, caught in a web of hypocrisy, in which they were alternately utterly despised and tacitly accepted.

The growing presence of prostitutes and brothels was the source of great social concern at the end of the nineteenth century, a time when, according to Michel Foucault, the theory of sexual repression “had its point of origin” (128). Foucault states in The History of Sexuality that in accordance with this theory, “all sexuality must be subject to the law; more precisely, that sexuality owes its very definition to the action of the law: not only will you submit your sexuality to the law, but you will have no sexuality except by subjecting yourself to the law” (128). The ideologies of sexually active unmarried women are obviously not in accordance with these ideas, and therefore, these women must be dealt with very carefully, so as not to upset the social order. Foucault discusses a solution forged by Victorian society to deal with this difficult situation, that of choosing to ship these women off to a brothel: “If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit” (Foucault 4). The women would, in a sense, be eliminated from society, as they were pushed to the margins by entering the deviant space of the brothel. In a time when females were seen as either “pure” or “potentially polluting” and the popular
dichotomy was woman as either “angel” or “whore,” those women who derived pleasure from sexual activity were seen as abnormal and had to be dealt with accordingly (Duffin 31).

As a result of the prevalence of prostitutes around the turn of the twentieth century, it should come as no surprise that the theme of prostitution frequently found its way into the literature of the time, becoming particularly common in the naturalist novel. Perhaps the model for this thematic representation of the prostitute is Emile Zola’s *Nana* (1880), a novel that would become representative of the naturalist movement as a whole and whose protagonist is a prostitute. The influence of Zola is seen not only in other European naturalist writers, but in those of Spanish America as well, as we will see when we discuss the three novels in this chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the situations and lives of three prostitutes from Spanish American naturalist novels who are each the target of victimization not necessarily because of their status as prostitute, but instead as a result of both the circumstances leading up to their entry into the brothel as well as their life in the brothel. These female characters suffer victimization simply because they are women and cannot uphold, for one reason or another, the strict social regulations for “appropriate” female behavior. Each of these women ultimately comes to the same point, as they each end up in a brothel. Although I have provided commentary on the hypocritical nature of society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in terms of its attitude toward prostitutes, my intention is not to suggest that all prostitutes are victims, but instead to focus on three women who become prostitutes as a result of a strict and hypocritical society that leaves them little choice but to end up in a brothel. By
becoming prostitutes, the women are marginalized and effectively eliminated from mainstream society.\(^2\) In this chapter, I will discuss the portrayal of the prostitute as victim in Augusto D’Halmar’s *Juana Lucero* (1902), Federico Gamboa’s *Santa* (1903), and Manuel Gálvez’s *Nacha Regules* (1919), focusing on the use of space in the novels, including the depiction of the brothel and other spaces frequented by the women.

In the three novels chosen for discussion in this chapter, the brothel is an overwhelmingly negative space, but it is important to point out that there are instances in which it seemingly becomes a place of acceptance and liberation, oftentimes the only place these women can find refuge from judgmental and hypocritical eyes, and enjoy some semblance of social tolerance. Nonetheless, in spite of these moments of comfort, the brothel remains a repressive social institution constructed by a male-dominated society, and the women retain their status as victims. Beatriz Pastor Bodmer states that “la identidad femenina que construye el discurso patriarcal dominante de la cultura occidental a través de los siglos es la de un ser mutilado, incompleto, inferior. El lugar que le corresponde es subalterno; sus opciones de desarrollo se definen entre dos extremos: ser objeto de posesión o ser objeto de subyugación” (204). The brothel is obviously such a space, in which women are seen as objects to be possessed, but at the same time, it may provide them with a sense of comfort and liberation.

This ambiguous nature of the brothel contributes to the possibility of interpreting it as a liminal space, an in-between place where women find themselves to be a part of society, but marginalized to the point where they feel like they are outside of the social order. The brothel is, according to Foucault, an “extreme type of heterotopia,” a space

\(^2\)The sole exception in this chapter, and in the dissertation as a whole, is Nacha Regules, the only woman who is allowed to escape being eliminated permanently, either emotionally, mentally, or physically, and permitted to re-enter the society that once shunned her.
that is created by society, but at the same time transcends its social boundaries (“Of Other Spaces” 24, 27). Rodrigo Cánovas applies Foucault’s ideas on heterotopic spaces to the brothel in Augusto D’Halmar’s *Juana Lucero* in the following way: “D’Halmar configura el prostíbulo al modo de una heterotopia, es decir y según proposición de Michel Foucault, como un lugar cuya propiedad consiste en convocar todos los demás espacios de la sociedad, para ponerlos en crisis” (33). The women discussed in this chapter pass from an accepted social world (life outside the brothel) to a world that, while remaining part of society, is viewed as violating social norms.

According to Arnold van Gennep, this idea of social passage from one world to another is a three-part transition consisting of “rites of separation [preliminal rites], transition rites [liminal rites], and rites of incorporation [postliminal rites]” (11). If we view the brothel as a liminal space, it becomes a space of transition, in which the prostitutes are caught between two worlds, that of social acceptance and that of social marginalization. At times, the women may move on from this liminal state and enter the postliminal stage by again becoming incorporated into mainstream society while, at other times, this stage can become a permanent one when the prostitute remains in the brothel. In these instances, “the transitional period is sufficiently elaborated to constitute an independent state, [and] the arrangement is reduplicated” (Van Gennep 11). According to this idea, the brothel would move from being a transitional state to one that displays all three states of separation, transition, and incorporation in and of itself, as is the case with the whorehouse in D’Halmar’s *Juana Lucero*. The prostitute’s victimization is made all the more poignant by the way in which she is suspended between two worlds when she is placed in the liminal space of the brothel.
II. Juana Lucero

Chilean author Augusto D’Halmar’s *Juana Lucero* (1902) centers on a young woman who, through a series of unfortunate events, is dropped into the lap of prostitution. She is portrayed as a victim throughout the novel. According to Sabine Schlickers, “Juana es una víctima que se deja arrastrar, violar y prostituir sin defenderse jamás…” (*El lado oscuro* 271). Instead of asserting herself, this unfortunate woman allows herself to be victimized both by society and by men, a situation that results in her downward spiral into the decadent world of the brothel. Juana’s status as victim essentially commences with the death of her mother Catalina at the very beginning of the novel. From that point on, the innocent and naïve orphan is shuffled from place to place, and suffers countless episodes of neglect and abuse, first in the care of her great-aunt Loreto, and then in the house of Loreto’s friend Pepa. When Juana ultimately lands in the brothel, the madam, Adalguisa, takes an interest in her solely because of the potential for economic gain she sees in her beauty. If we return to our previous discussion of the brothel as a liminal space, Juana’s life before entering the brothel would constitute the preliminal stage. During this time, although Juana is repeatedly victimized, she is part of a socially-accepted world. She will soon, however, begin the transition from one social world to another, as she passes from the center of social existence to its margin, the brothel.

During Juana’s process of separation from mainstream society, she suffers a great deal of victimization, brought upon her by both the dominant patriarchal society of the time and the women who support it. The catalyst that initiates Juana’s journey to the brothel is the sexual violence she suffers at the hands of Pepa’s husband Absalón when
he strips her of her virginity by brutally raping her.\(^3\) This seems to be the first step in Juana’s separation from a pure life, as she moves toward becoming a disposable woman who is necessary “so as not to corrupt either good matrons or good men who might be driven to sodomy” (Saporta Sternbach 72). By losing her virginity, albeit not by choice, Juana can no longer be considered an example of the ideal woman according to society’s standards. She has become devalued and, instead of being a good woman herself, will become a protector of the virtuous good women, a “venereal safety valve for men” (Daly 61). According to Daly, fallen women, such as prostitutes, must exist in order to preserve the existence of virtuous women by allowing them to retain their status as “unmolested private property” (61). In Pepa and Absalón’s house, Absalón does indeed choose to sleep with his sexually active servants instead of his wife, as D’Halmar writes that “no era caso del otro mundo éste del amo y la doméstica, pan cotidiano en toda casa de Santiago, lo que a la postre es legal, ya que las chinas no tienen idea del honor, justo es que sirvan de salvaguardia a los hombres útiles en la sociedad que no buscarán así otros entretenimientos perjudiciales para su salud” (emphasis in the text; 100). Men are permitted to have sexual relations with whomever they choose, oftentimes the hired help, in order to keep their wives pure while at the same time satisfying their male urges. Not only does Absalón sleep with the help, but his son Daniel has also learned this trick and sleeps with Filomena, one of the servants, in order to satisfy his sexual desires while avoiding contracting “enfermedades vergonzosas” by essentially having his own personal prostitute (D’Halmar 100).

Surprisingly, it is not only men who condone these types of extramarital sexual activities, but the women as well. For example, when Pepa finds out what happened

\(^3\)This rape will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter three.
between Juana and her husband, she reacts with the utmost calm: “[N]o sintió celos ni sorpresa por el asunto, ya repetido en ocasiones anteriores” (100). The reader is repeatedly given information regarding Absalón’s sexual encounters, but none of them is with Pepa, his own wife. According to Brenda Keiser, “men had been taught to respect women from their own social class as wives and mothers of their children rather than to regard them as the objects of their sexual desires” (65). This theory would explain Absalón’s habit of seeking sexual pleasure from his servants. Pepa herself reflects on the lack of sexual interaction with her husband, and we are told that, “como hacía tanto tiempo que se dedicara en exclusivo a sus hijos, olvidándose hasta del sabor de los besos, la hembra murió en ella, acaso prematuramente…” (100). Obviously the relationship between Pepa and her husband conforms to society’s ideal of the accepted role of a woman: that of devoted (and sexless) wife and mother.

As Pepa is evidently accustomed to dealing with Absalón’s infidelities, her biggest concern after learning of the situation between him and Juana is figuring out what she will say to Loreto. Instead of blaming Absalón for his actions, she decides to hold Juana responsible, and tells Loreto that “esa infeliz tiene instintos malos” and “Había notado en ella costumbres censurables…” (109). Instead of condemning Absalón’s appalling behavior, Pepa is “interesada únicamente en conservar la estructura de su hogar potencialmente amenazada por la lujuria desbordante de su sobrealimentado cónyuge” (Urbistondo 33). Juana finds no support or empathy from the women in the Caracuel household, from Pepa to the servants. As a result of the fact that the other women in the novel “condone, aid, and abet” horrible acts such as Absalón raping Juana, Nancy Saporta Sternbach goes so far as to state that the real villains of the novel are not the men,
but the women (52). By acting maliciously towards Juana and allowing her to be
victimized by Absalón, the women support and uphold the repressive patriarchal system,
thus joining the male victimizers and contributing to Juana’s suffering.

As we have seen, Juana’s stage of separation from the realm of social propriety is
prompted by the rape committed by Absalón. The second, decisive action that completes
Juana’s stage of separation from a socially accepted world and pushes her straight into
the den of prostitution is carried out by another man, Arturo Velázquez. As a result of
the brutal sexual encounter with Absalón, Juana becomes pregnant and decides to leave
Pepa’s house. She takes up with Arturo, a young man who is also involved with Pepa’s
daughter. Although concerned about her pregnancy, Juana is happy with Arturo, and for
the first time in her life, receives tenderness from a man. After Arturo expresses his love
for Juana, she feels “alegre como un pájaro” and she sings, something that “no le pasaba
en muchos años” (107). After all the suffering she has endured since her mother’s death,
Juana has finally found a bit of happiness in her life, but unfortunately, it turns out to be
short-lived, and Juana’s victimization continues. Her sexually active relationship with
Arturo pushes her further towards the edge of society, and her separation from the
socially-accepted world is made complete when Juana musters up the courage to tell
Arturo that she was raped by Absalón and is now pregnant. Arturo responds with anger,
not because of what Absalón did to Juana, but because of the fact that Juana was not the
virgin he thought she was: “¡Lo habían burlado como un bobo, haciéndole creer que era
el primero en tocarla, cuando antes estuvo el viejo cochino…” (119). Arturo was happy
to be Juana’s lover as long as he thought she was a virgin when she came to him, but as
soon as he finds out that she is a “fallen woman,” he no longer wants to be associated with her.

For lack of a better thing to do with a fallen woman such as Juana, Arturo decides to take her to a brothel, a choice that demonstrates that Arturo is part of “una cultura que estima la mancebía como el lógico asilo de la mujer caída” (Urbistondo 35). This attitude exemplifies Foucault’s aforementioned discussion of both the “theory of repression,” the idea that sexuality must be subjected to the law, and the opinion in Victorian society that women who display sexual behavior seen as socially aberrant should be taken to a brothel (The History 128, 4). In accordance with the ideas of the time regarding males and sexual freedom, Arturo’s decision has no negative impact on his life. He is able to separate himself socially from this “indecent” woman while at the same time satisfying himself sexually whenever he desires by frequenting the brothel. Arturo is quite pleased with himself as he comes to this conclusion: “¡Cómo no se le había ocurrido antes…! ¡Soberbio …! Eso era proporcionarle una colocacioncita decente al apartarse de ella y todavía poder seguir tratándola cada vez que se le antojase” (emphasis in the text; 121). In his mind, his problems are solved: he is able to save face socially while privately maintaining sexual relations with Juana.

Obviously, Juana’s separation from one social world to another is a process, thrown into action by the behavior of first Absalón and later Arturo. It is important to analyze the actual moment of Juana’s passage from a preliminal space (mainstream society) to a liminal space (the brothel). It is at this moment that her life as a member of mainstream society comes to an end as she prepares to enter the liminal space of the brothel. She does not, however, know that her destination is a whorehouse. Arturo
astutely hides the truth about where she is going, telling her the following: “[H]e hallado para ti magnífica colocación en casa de una amiga modista. Por eso puedes ir viendo lo que te quiero, lo que me preocupo de tu suerte” (125). Juana has no idea that she is on her way to a brothel, a fact that underscores her victimization at the hands of a man, and agrees to do exactly as Arturo says even though she would prefer to do things in another manner: “Dolíale la repentinidad del cambio […] pero sabiendo que menos que nunca era dueña de decidir las cosas según su gusto, no opuso ninguna objeción” (126). She blindly follows Arturo, oblivious to the fact that he is not looking out for her best interest, but instead forcing her to join the marginalized world of the brothel. The accepted role of females, that of pure and virtuous women, is very clear-cut, and there is no place in society, other than the brothel, for an unmarried “used” woman.

As I mentioned before, the brothel is, according to Foucault, an example of a heterotopic space, meaning that it is “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate [its] location in reality” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). Foucault goes on to discuss different types of heterotopias, such as crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. In Juana Lucero, the brothel functions primarily as the latter type which is defined by Foucault as “those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (25). In Arturo’s opinion, it is precisely because of Juana’s deviant sexual behavior that she must go to the brothel. When Juana enters it, the second stage of her transition from one social sphere to another commences, as she finds herself in this liminal heterotopic space into which “everyone can enter […] but in fact that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded” (Foucault 26). This characteristic of a heterotopic space demonstrates the
liminal nature of the brothel, for by entering one space (in this case, the marginal space of
the brothel), one is excluded from another (here, “respectable” society). This is precisely
what happens to Juana upon her arrival.

When Juana sees her new home for the first time, the reader is immediately given
a hint as to what kind of place this is, as the house is described as “esa conocida casa
verde con estucos de yeso, cuyas dos cerradas ventanas se abren y se iluminan por la
noche como nictálopes ojos de mochuelo…” (126). The comparison between the house’s
windows and an owl’s eyes obviously alludes to the fact that this is place that comes alive
at night. The house is shut up tight during the day, but at night the windows glow,
attracting customers to come in and take part in the nocturnal festivities. Juana is
completely oblivious to the sexual exploitation that awaits her, as she enters the brothel
and meets Adalguisa, the madam, who Arturo simply told her is a widow with several
single daughters. The first thing that attracts Juana’s attention in the lavishly decorated
room is a painting in which an ugly old man bends down to kiss a sleeping girl’s cheek as
she “inconscientemente extendía el brazo hacia la bolsa de oro que él dejaba sobre el
almohadón” (127). Aside from being an obvious commentary on the kinds of things that
await Juana in her new life, the painting also suggests another space, a new world
consisting of sex, money, and dissipation that will soon devour Juana.

As Juana is shown to her room, we find an example of the way in which the
brothel can be viewed as an ambiguous space, as Juana is overwhelmed by the luxurious
nature of her room as she “probaba las esencias, abría los cajones, hundiendo sus manos
en la blandura del lecho, hasta mermando o acrecentando la llama del gas” (129). From
Juana’s initial reaction, the brothel is not presented as a negative space, as Juana goes
about curiously experiencing things she has never seen before. However, the narrator goes on to state that “a pesar de esto, encontrábase Juana más sola, más perdida que nunca en ese lujo artificioso” (129). In spite of the fact that Juana now possesses all the material comforts of life, she does not feel at ease in her new surroundings, which she regards as materialistic and artificial. The young woman expresses her concerns about her new environment: “¿Seré útil en la casa…? ¿Me acogerán bien…? ¿Se trata de personas bondadosas…?” (129). As a result of being thrown into the liminal space of this new place, and of experiencing the feeling of displacement that comes with existing between social worlds, Juana feels quite uncomfortable, both in her new surroundings, and with her new housemates.

Juana’s assimilation into the brothel is not an easy one. Although she has already been sexually corrupted prior to entering the brothel, she still somehow remains an essentially pure and naïve soul. So naïve is she that she does not realize she is in a brothel until about a day after her arrival. Her prior sexual experiences have not turned her into a corrupt woman eager to prostitute herself, but have rather caused her to be timid and shy. When she attends the first dance at the house, she has no desire to take part in the activities of drinking and dancing, and feels very awkward and out of place. It is during this first gathering that Juana finally realizes where she has landed and she reacts in the following way: “El espanto de Juana era inmenso; comprendía entre qué clase de gente había caído y tuvo impulsos de escapar, de refugiarse […] pero no hizo nada y quedó temblando” (145). Obviously, Juana does not possess the desire to embrace this place or this new-found profession, but she is too timid to try to escape. Just like
many times before in her life, Juana finds herself the target of victimization: trapped and helpless.

Juana does not sleep with a man on her first night in the brothel, but on the second night, Adalguisa approaches her and introduces her to Napoleón, “un caballero chico y gordo,” and tells her that he has been very eager to meet her (141). Juana reluctantly dances with him and, in the next scene, we witness the aftermath of their sexual encounter. The text does not explicitly describe Juana’s first sexual experience in the brothel, but instead focuses on her reaction shortly thereafter, as she “tuvo una intuición de lo que había pasado hacía dos horas apenas, pero trató con toda su voluntad, apretando los párpados y hundiendo la cabeza en la almohada, de amodorrarse nuevamente, de alargar el olvido del sueño, aunque los recuerdos acudían cada vez con más viveza” (148). She goes on to “[meterse] en la cama, con la cabeza envuelta en la sábana…” (148). Juana does not want to accept what she has done with Napoleón, and thus she reacts in a very dazed way to the situation. She seems not to fully comprehend what has happened, and yearns to hide in her bed and go to sleep so she will not have to deal with the situation. As Juana sinks further into the world of prostitution, we often see her react in this trance-like way to certain situations. Nancy Saporta Sternbach interprets this “retreat into a somnambulant state” to be a “safeguard against more psychic damage” (57). It seems to be a defense mechanism employed by Juana to deal with the victimization she is being forced to endure that will eventually morph into a very disturbing mental illness by the end of the novel.4

4Juana’s mental illness will be dealt with more fully in Chapter two.
Even after sleeping with her first client, Juana does not easily fall into her new role as prostitute. During the party the following night, when she does not want to drink or dance, Adalguisa pulls her aside and informs her of what is expected of her: “Hay que chupar, hija, para que se acaben luego las poncheras y pidan otras; tenemos que ser verdaderas esponjas, porque ése es el negocio. Además, no diga que no sabe baile. Desde mañana le enseñaré yo” (153). Drinking alcohol and partaking in parties on a daily basis, both of which make Juana very uncomfortable, are obviously integral parts of life in the brothel, and Juana, as a new addition, will be expected to conform and take part in these activities.\footnote{In his study on prostitution in Santiago, Álvaro Góngora Escobedo mentions heavy alcohol consumption and daily partying as characteristics of Chilean brothels at the end of the nineteenth century (185-86).} Juana remains on the fringe of the party, hoping that nobody will pay attention to her. Although she has fulfilled her first sexual obligation of her life in the brothel by sleeping with Napoleón, she does not express a desire to repeat the activity.

As time passes, life in the brothel begins to have a very negative effect on Juana and she starts to feel much older than her years: “[E]n la vida hay viejos de diecisiete años, porque no siempre la experiencia está en las arrugas del rostro, ya que las ocultas, las del alma, son más hondas, más crueles” (161). Her soul is becoming damaged, as she sees her profession in the following way: “[L]a obligación de llevar un hombre a su cuarto, hoy Napoleón, mañana otro y otro y otro, mintiendo arrumacos a todos, a fin de sacarles un peso más, regateando con ellos el precio del placer, que a la larga se trueca en angustia…” (161-62). Juana realizes she is in a situation from which she needs to escape, and she decides to leave the brothel. However, when she reveals her plan to her friend
Mercedes, she is quick to bring Juana back to reality, to a situation in which she has no money and nowhere to go. Just like that, Juana’s plan is shattered, as she realizes that she has no way out of the brothel.

Even after this first disillusion, Juana does not give up completely on the idea of escaping from the world of prostitution. When Arturo comes to visit, she begs him to take her away with him: “No me dejes…sufro mucho…Te quiero…llévame, Arturo…Yo trabajaré…¡Dios te lo premiará! ¡Llévame, seré tu sirvienta, pero no quiero que lo maten!” (163). Juana is willing to do anything to get out of the brothel. She wants to save herself, but the grand motivating factor in her desire to leave the brothel is her yearning to save her unborn child, whom Adalguisa has informed her she will have to abort. Arturo refuses to take Juana out of the brothel, although her words do have some effect on him: “Aunque le gimiese con el alma, tuvo que reconocer desalentada que sus palabras eran casi las mismas con que en el prostíbulo se les sonsaca el dinero a los hombres” (163). As a result of her situation of forced prostitution, Juana has become a woman whose words are no longer to be trusted and honored. Unfortunately, Juana’s only option for lifting herself out of the brothel depends on a man. As a woman, she does not have the means to help herself, and when Arturo refuses to help her, her fate is sealed.

As has been discussed, Juana faces great challenges both during her path to the brothel, the preliminal stage of her passage between social worlds, and her time inside the brothel, the liminal stage. According to Van Gennep’s theories (11), to complete the process there should be a third step, incorporation, or in this case, Juana’s integration back into society. Juana never reaches this step. Instead of being reintegrated into mainstream society, she becomes irreversibly incorporated in the brothel. This liminal
space becomes her permanent reality, and she is forever suspended here in this place of social outcasts, a situation that contributes greatly to her eventual mental deterioration and plunge into madness.

Although Juana is never fully able to reincorporate herself into mainstream society, there are a few instances in which she leaves the brothel for a short time and comes into contact with women from society. Such occurrences are important to understand Juana’s status as victim. It is not only in the space of the brothel that she is a victim, but outside of it as well. For example, towards the end of the novel, Juana and Bibelot venture out of the brothel to go downtown to do some shopping.\(^6\) When they come into contact with a group of women on a narrow street, the women “se apartaban con asco visible de las dos mujerzuelas” (167). Obviously, these women can tell right away that Juana and Bibelot are prostitutes, and do not want to be anywhere near them. In fact, they behave as if the two women were contagious. Because of her status as a fallen woman, Juana no longer fits in with society. Even when she is outside the confining space of the brothel, she remains a victim, and perhaps even more so than when she is in the brothel.

Although the brothel has many negative effects on Juana and contributes to her victimization, it is important to recognize that there are instances in which the brothel can be seen not as a place of incarceration, but as a place of acceptance. Since the death of her mother, Juana yearns for comfort and compassion from another human being, something that turns out to be extremely difficult to find. It is interesting, and rather

\(^6\)Of great interest is the name of Juana’s fellow prostitute, “Bibelot.” This word, which comes from the French language, literally means “a small, decorative ornament or trinket” (McKean 160). The fact that a prostitute carries this name is significant, as it portrays her as an object, something that is to be collected and admired solely for its physical appearance.
ironic, that the one place where she is able to find this kind of acceptance and friendship is in the brothel where she is among other outcasts. Juana does not become friends instantly with the other prostitutes, but slowly begins to form a real closeness with them.

The narrator describes the girls’ acceptance of Juana in the following way: “La admitieron llanamente, en su calidad de compañera” (151). Juana is welcomed into the group by the girls and, for the first time, has the opportunity to forge a feminine bond. She becomes friends with the other prostitutes and grows to “quererlas a todas, hallándolas, en el fondo […] buenas, generosas […] Bibelot era su confidente, o más exacto, viceversa, y […] Mercedes habría dado su mano derecha por ella” (186).

Interestingly, Juana believes her fellow prostitutes to be good and loyal women, and sees many positive qualities in them, an observation that contrasts sharply with what others believe about prostitutes. Obviously, the relationships Juana forms with these women are deep and meaningful to her, and she receives from them what she has not had since her mother died: companionship, love, and acceptance.

During Bibelot and Juana’s shopping outing, they enter another important space that should be mentioned: the church. They enter to pray, but Juana quickly realizes that she no longer possesses the faith she once had: “Juana trató de abismarse en la oración, pero no halló su piedad antigua; quiso llamar a Dios para que la socorriese, mas su corazón rebosante de amargura, no subió hasta Él y ella pudo sentirlo vacío de fe…” (172). As a result of her constant debasement, Juana is not able to maintain the faith that was instilled in her for all of her upbringing. Interestingly, Bibelot is able to pray and does so with “un fervor nada fingido” (172). Regardless of the fact that Bibelot and Juana are both prostitutes, Bibelot still believes in God, while Juana seems to have lost
her faith, possibly as a result of the many deceptions she has suffered in her young life. She is disillusioned with her existence and feels ill at ease in the church. The descriptions of the church as “el templo helado y solitario” and “la iglesia vacía y glacial” exemplify the way Juana feels inside the sacred place; it holds nothing for her. She cannot find comfort or acceptance inside its walls, and begins to feel very frustrated that she cannot call upon her old faith to console her in this time of suffering. Inside the church, Juana not only realizes that she has lost her faith, but she suffers another important loss: she loses the name “Juana” and becomes “Naná.” Bibelot decides that Juana needs another name and asks Juana what her nickname was as a child. When Juana responds that her mother called her “purisimita,” Bibelot starts laughing, and Juana feels humiliated. The name Bibelot decides upon is quite different from Juana’s childhood name: Bibelot crowns Juana “Naná,” a name that holds an obvious connection to Emile Zola’s famous prostitute. Bibelot even goes so far as to make an allusion to Zola’s Nana when she says, “Es una novela en que sale una tipa que hace mil locuras” (173). Juana passively accepts her new name, and as she looks back at the “catedral desierta y fría,” she says, “Sí, tienes razón…La otra ha muerto…¡Es mejor que me llamen así!” (173). At this moment, there is an important juxtaposition of Juana’s loss of faith, her loss of her childhood purity (all of which are associated with her name), and the changing of her name from the pure and wholesome Juana to the decadent prostitute Naná. Juana leaves the church, essentially a different person. The fact that Juana has received a new name inside a church calls to mind the act of baptism, as the persona of “Naná” is first brought to life inside this holy place. Arnold van Gennep notes in The

---

7This is a decisive moment in the development of Juana’s mental illness, as it pinpoints the creation of Juana’s alternate identity, Naná. This will be dealt with fully in Chapter two.
Rites of Passage that “baptism has most often been regarded as a lustration, a purging and purifying rite, a final rite of separation from the previous world, whether it be a secular world or one that is actually impure” (63). Juana’s “baptism” as “Naná” marks her final separation from the innocent and sane woman she once was and her initiation into a world of insanity and torment as she takes on this new persona. Instead of lifting Juana up, as a church is traditionally thought to do to a person, this church scene actually becomes the catalyst for Juana’s downfall into the depths of madness.

Another way Juana’s madness, and transition from “Juana” to “Naná,” is manifested is through the use of mirrors, which appear frequently throughout the entire novel. Juana repeatedly uses them to communicate with the spirit of her dead mother. According to Michel Foucault, mirrors are an alternate space, a “mixed, joint experience” somewhere in between being a utopia or a heterotopia (“Of Other Spaces” 24). A mirror is a utopia because “it is a placeless place […] but it is also a heterotopia so far as the mirror does exist in reality. It makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). The mirror serves as a space within a space, an alternate world in which Juana sometimes physically sees herself, but at other times, sees herself as reflected in the appearance of her dead mother. Her feelings about whatever she is going through at the moment are projected onto her mother, and Catalina’s reaction becomes the manifestation of these sentiments.

Each time Juana looks into a mirror during her stay in the brothel, it is at a pivotal moment in her transition from the pure and virginal Juana to the experienced prostitute.
Naná. The first time she looks into the mirror at the brothel is during her first night there, when she is still oblivious as to where she is and what the future holds for her. She looks into the “gran espejo del ropero” and, instead of seeing her reflection, she sees her mother in a very disturbing way: “[E]lla vio que los cabellos de la muerta tornábase blancos por completo y que de sus ojos negros extraordinariamente relumbrosos rodaba una lágrima” (129). From Catalina’s appearance, we as readers can infer that she knows that her daughter is in a brothel and that she is being sucked into a world of prostitution and vice. Juana’s mother is dead, but seems to continue aging, as she now has white hair. It is as if by looking into the mirror, Juana can see into her own soul, as her mother’s physical appearance seems to reflect the condition of her spirit: aging and sad. By becoming a prostitute, Juana is, in some respects, becoming her mother. The text never explicitly states that Catalina was a prostitute, but it is implied that she was sexually active. For example, when Pepa tells Juana’s aunt Loreto about the sexual encounter between the girl and Absalón, Loreto’s response is, “‘Yo me lo esperaba…’ ‘Eso es hereditario…’ ‘Tiene mala sangre en las venas…’” (110). Obviously, in Loreto’s eyes, Catalina has passed down some sort of sexual corruption to her daughter, and it is only natural that Juana would fall victim to the same sort of vice. Catalina knows what losing one’s purity can do to a woman and, for that reason, she displays a great deal of sadness upon realizing that Juana is in a brothel. Her reaction seems to foreshadow the misfortune and suffering that awaits Juana, as she becomes incorporated in the brothel.

This is not the first time that Juana has used the mirror as a tool through which she can communicate with her dead mother. Catalina first appears in the mirror during Juana’s stay at her aunt Loreto’s house, when the girl is lonely and in desperate need of
companionship. After quelling the fear and shock of seeing her mother in the mirror the first time, it becomes a daily routine that comforts and soothes Juana’s soul: “Todas las noches acudió la fantasma para acompañar sus horas más crueles. Consultaba al espejo como a un juez bondadoso que debía perdonarle sus faltas o aplaudir sus buenas acciones…” (63). Juana depends on this daily interaction with the image of her mother, and is able to deal with her suffering because of Catalina’s encouragement and love. However, as shown above, what starts out as a comforting experience soon turns into a further reminder of Juana’s status as a woman fallen from grace. The mirror no longer soothes Juana, but instead adds to her anguish. 8 Juana again looks in the mirror after taking part in her first sexual encounter in the brothel, and is shocked and terrified by what she sees:

Sólo cuando se halló ante el espejo de su ropero, tuvo terror a la aparición. En la tenuidad alabastrina del alba, ese abismo plateado parecía infinito, indeciso en partes, cual si la tiniebla le arrojase sombras, le amontonase sombras para tomarlo opaco...un algo misterioso encortinado por jirones de noche, donde se creía percibir mil formas vagas, experimentándose el sueño o el vértigo de encontrarse de pie frente a la puerta abierta de lo desconocido (148)

Here, Juana does not see her mother as in the previous example, but the mirror offers her access into another space, another world. She is not sure how to interpret what she sees in the mirror: she feels uneasy and confused, as if she were on the verge of stepping into the realm of the unknown. Her response after seeing this confusing and disconcerting portrayal of herself is to run to the bed and bury herself in the covers. The tormenting

---

8There are various other instances of Catalina appearing as a vision in the mirror to Juana, and these will be discussed in Chapters two and three, as they relate directly to Juana’s subjection to illness and violence.
images Juana sees in the mirror will play an integral role in Juana’s eventual fall into madness.

As exemplified in Juana Lucero, society’s solution to dealing with women whose sexuality makes them uncomfortable is to dispose of them where they will not be reminded of their existence. In this case, the heterotopic liminal space of the brothel serves this purpose, as Juana is tricked into entering the world of prostitution by her lover. Juana’s powerlessness as a woman in a male-dominated social world is obvious throughout the novel, for she cannot break free from the brothel on her own. She depends on Arturo to help her leave this victimizing space and, when he refuses to do so, she becomes permanently suspended in this in-between space and eventually loses her sanity. Juana’s ultimate elimination from society is twofold: she is physically eliminated by being disposed of in the heterotopic and marginalized world of the brothel, but she also suffers a mental disappearance as she ultimately loses her mind and is plunged into the depths of madness.

III. Santa

Much like D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero, Mexican novelist Federico Gamboa’s Santa (1903) focuses on a young woman driven to prostitution by the rigid patriarchal society in which she lives. Strong connections can be made between Gamboa’s Santa and D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero and, in fact, Sabine Schlickers suggests that Gamboa, “que en esta época estuvo en Chile, llegó a conocer la novela de D’Halmar la cual le sirvió posiblemente como hipotexto de su novela Santa, publicada un año después” (El lado oscuro 273). Like Juana, Santa is victimized not only after her fall into prostitution, but
throughout the novel, whether by society in general or by men in particular. She suffers as a victim both through the circumstances that lead up to her integration into the brothel, and during her time there. Because of her status as a woman, Santa cannot change her situation, and must accept the circumstances as they are. As in *Juana Lucero*, Santa struggles to find acceptance, and finally finds it in the brothel, a fact that strengthens the argument that the brothel can be seen as an ambiguous space. Like Juana, Santa’s plunge into prostitution is actually a result of the victimization she suffers beforehand. Of great irony is that Santa, whose name evokes purity and chasteness, will become the very opposite, a gravely ill, alcoholic prostitute. Her name is further emphasized by the fact that her last name is never divulged, so we only know her as Santa, a word that sounds much like a pronouncement, albeit an ironic one.

In much the same way as Juana, Santa passes from one social world to another and becomes suspended in the liminal space of the brothel. In Van Gennep’s terms, Santa’s separation consists of her flight from her mother’s home, and from the rigid social norm of accepted sexual behavior, to the decadent world of prostitution and complete sexual liberation. The transition occurs in the in-between world of the brothel which for Santa, unlike for Juana, is truly a transition stage, as she is able to emerge from the brothel and once again join mainstream society. She tries to leave the brothel several times, but each of these stints is temporary, and she does not permanently leave the world of prostitution until the end of the novel, when she is gravely ill. The variety of spaces that Santa inhabits throughout her profession as a prostitute and their importance in terms of Santa’s victimization will be discussed shortly. Her integration back into society at the
end of the novel, albeit quite brief because of her illness, constitutes the stage of incorporation and fulfills the third and final step of her passage between social worlds.

Santa falls into prostitution after being seduced, impregnated, and abandoned by Marcelino, a military man. She falls in love with Marcelino and, as a result of his pressure to have sex and promises of love and marriage, loses her virginity to him. María R. González comments that Santa’s downfall begins at this point, when she “dejó de ser esa virgencita pura para convertirse en la mujer maldita…” (50). As soon as Santa has sex with Marcelino, her separation from the social world of sexual propriety begins. Before Santa’s fall, she had been held up as exemplary by her family and town, as she is described as: “hija mimada de la anciana Agustina […] ídolo de sus hermanos Esteban y Fabián […] ambición de mozos y envidia de mozas; sana, feliz, pura…” (99). Santa enjoys a childhood of happy innocence with her mother and brothers, but all that changes when she begins to spend time with Marcelino. Marcelino is very smooth and seems to know exactly what to say to a woman to get what he wants: “Te quiero mucho, mi Santa, te quiero mucho mucho…como nunca he querido y como nunca volveré a querer…” (113). Unfortunately for Santa, she believes him and, although she is somewhat uncomfortable, surrenders herself to him. An emphasis is placed on her deflowering: “[A]hogó sus gritos – los que arranca a una virgen el dejar de serlo” (114). Immediately afterwards, Santa realizes the gravity of what has happened, while Marcelino seems oblivious and wonders why Santa is behaving so strangely. Santa expresses her concerns to Marcelino, telling him that she cannot return to her house in this state, “haciendo alusión a su virginidad asesinada” (115). Santa and Marcelino’s first sexual encounter is depicted in all its violence, as one in which her virginity is “asesinada” (115). This
choice of words connotes the brutality of the act, with Marcelino portrayed as a criminal, a violator, as opposed to a loving mate. As a result of her decision to have sex with Marcelino, Santa has fallen from the angelic pedestal of purity reserved solely for untouched women. Deborah Anna Logan, in a study of Victorian society, uses the term “madonna-harlot dichotomy” to describe the “rigidity of acceptable social standards” (7). Logan’s observation applies just as well to Santa’s society. Once she has had premarital sex, she no longer embodies the feminine virginal ideal and, as a result, will be regarded by society, including her own family, as fallen, corrupt, and disgraceful.

Marcelino’s nonchalant attitude regarding their sexual activities demonstrates the aforementioned ideas regarding the double standard for men and for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Marcelino is obviously accustomed to sleeping with women and sees it as a normal activity, while for Santa who, as a result of being a woman, is expected to refrain from sexual activity until marriage, the action holds a great deal more significance. Santa begs Marcelino not to abandon her, and he promises that they will get married. For Santa, this is the only way she can “legalize her sexual activity” (Martín-Flores 130). Marcelino subsequently abandons her, leaving her socially ruined, heartbroken, and pregnant, a situation that recalls both Absalón and Arturo’s attitude toward Juana Lucero. Marcelino’s abandonment of Santa will eventually lead her to prostitution, thus turning Santa into one of those women characterized by Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle as the “seduced-and-abandoned-prostitute,” a woman who,

---

9For more information on this gender-based double standard, see Shönfeld, 11.
as a result of losing her virginity, is consequently thrown out of her house and destined to a life of prostitution (4).\(^\text{10}\)

In the fourth month of her pregnancy, Santa suffers a miscarriage which is described graphically, in keeping with the style typical of the naturalist novel: “Un copioso sudar; un dolor horrible en las caderas […] un dolor de tal manera lacerante que Santa […] se abatió en el suelo. Luego, la hemorragia, casi tan abundosa y sonora cual la del cántaro…” (121). As a result of her miscarriage, Santa’s mother and brothers realize her dishonor and command her to leave the house, as she has become a disgrace to them. Agustina, Fabián, and Esteban are described as being Santa’s judges, as she is virtually on trial in her own home. They are clearly more concerned with social opinion than with Santa, for social redemption, in their eyes, is not possible and they do not want this fallen woman anywhere near them. The family’s decision to expel Santa from their home is described in this way: “[P]orque cuando una virgen se aparta de lo honesto y consiente que le desgarren su vestidura de inocencia; cuando una mala hija mancilla las canas de su madre […] la [chica] que ha cesado de ser virgen […] apesta cuanto la rodea y hay que rechazarla, que suponerla muerte y que rezar por ella” (122). Santa, who was seen by her family and friends before her loss of virginity as “pura,” “sana,” “ambición de mozos,” and “hija mimada” (99) is now considered dirty, impure, and contagious. The way in which others view her has changed altogether based solely on the fact that she is no longer a virgin. The reaction of Santa’s family exemplifies Foucault’s description of the common desire to regulate and repress sexuality in the nineteenth century, and the opinion in Victorian society that a woman who deviates from the sexual social norm

\(^{10}\)María R. González also comments on the connection between Horn’s ideas of this type of prostitute and Santa’s situation (48).
should find her way to the brothel (The History 128, 4). In his discussion on Santa, Mario Martín-Flores also brings into play Foucault’s The History of Sexuality with the following statement:

As Michel Foucault emphasizes in his The History of Sexuality, giving voice to silenced sexuality possesses an enormous relevancy because of the extralegality it represents […] The Foucaultian relationship between the sexual and the social refers to how the masculine, social-patriarchal, and repressive regime assume the role of masters, superiors, victors, with the marginal, whether sexual, social, or political, belonging to opposing positions. (129)

Like Juana, Santa’s only option is to pass from the world of social acceptance to the heterotopia of deviation known as the whorehouse. Hence, with this familial rejection, the first step, that of separation, in Santa’s passage from one social world to another is completed. Just as Juana is pushed towards the brothel by a male-dominated society and by two men in particular, so is Santa thrust towards a life of prostitution by a man she loved and by the patriarchal society that rejects her.

According to Francisco Mena, Santa’s downfall into the depths of prostitution is determined both by her environment and her heredity (212-13). This idea constitutes the basic tenet of Emile Zola’s theory of determinism, a central principle of naturalism, as he states, “I consider that the question of heredity has a great influence in the intellectual and passionate manifestations of man. I also attach considerable importance to the surroundings” (The Naturalist Novel 11). Obviously, Santa’s flight to the brothel is brought about as a result of the sexually repressive environment in which she lives, but her actions are also determined by her hereditary makeup, as the narrator states: “[E]s de presumir que en la sangre llevara gérmenes de muy vieja lascivia de algún tatarabuelo que en ella resucitaba con vicios y todo” (127). Like Juana Lucero, who was thought to
have “mala sangre en las venas” as a result of her heredity (D’Halmar 110), so is Santa assumed to be corrupt because of her female ancestors. Santa’s destiny is predetermined as a result of the hypocritical society that surrounds her and the blood that runs through her veins; according to the theories of naturalism, she has no control over her fate.

When Santa leaves her home in the country and heads for the city, her victimization continues. According to Mario Martín-Flores, Santa, “after having been asphyxiated by rural morality, arrives in the big city – the sign of progress, order, and refinement – only to find herself even more exploited, alienated, and cast aside as so much human trash” (129). Unlike Juana Lucero, Santa is not taken to the brothel by a third party, but instead finds her way there on her own. Some days earlier, immediately following her loss of virginity to Marcelino, Santa had been approached by “una señora alhajada y gruesa” who comments on her beauty and tells her of Elvira’s brothel:

“Preguntas por Elvira la Gachupina, plaza tal, número tantos, en México, ¿se te olvidará?...Prometo trocarte en una princesita” (emphasis in the text; 120). This is the first time Santa hears of Elvira’s place, but it is unclear whether she realizes that it is a brothel. After leaving home, she takes a cab to the brothel and at this point, her further descent into degradation begins. The reader is immediately presented with a vision of what the future holds for Santa. In Juana Lucero, a painting was the first thing Juana saw upon her entrance into the brothel, and this painting provided insight into what kind of life awaited Juana. In Santa, instead of a work of art, the young woman is immediately faced with a look into the future: a much older woman, Pepa, who serves as one of the madams of the house who lifts her shirt and exposes her naked ravaged body to Santa, thus illustrating what being a prostitute will do to you over time: “Santa miró, en efecto,

---

11The country-city dichotomy that is introduced here will be analyzed further in Chapter two.
unas pantorrillas nervudas, casi rectas; unos muslos deformes, ajados, y un vientre
colgante, descolorido, con hondas arrugas que lo partían en toda su anchura, cual esas
tierras exhaustas que han rendido cosechas y cosechas enriqueciendo ciegamente al
propietario…” (77). Santa is, like Juana, sucked into the liminal space of the brothel, an
in-between place that is both tacitly accepted out of necessity and socially despised. The
brothel is a place that will eventually take away all of Santa’s physical beauty, and seal
her loss of purity, as it is described as the “antro que a ella le daba de comer; antro que en
cortísimo tiempo devoraría aquella hermosura y aquella carne joven que ignoraba
seguramente todos los horrores que le esperaban” (73). Santa does not know what this
place, that reeks of alcohol and tobacco, will do to her; she only knows that she feels very
uncomfortable and overwhelmed as she follows Pepa around the house “en verdadero
periodo sonambúlico” (78). The choice of the word “sonambúlico” to describe Santa’s
dazed state as she attempts to take in her new surroundings is reminiscent of Juana
Lucero’s attitude in the brothel, as she is also depicted as moving about in a baffled
trance in order to deal with her difficult situation.

As in Juana Lucero, when Santa arrives at the brothel, it is during the day and the
house is shut up tight, as it is a place of nocturnal activity. The brothel is located near a
butcher’s shop in an industrial neighborhood, leading Rodrigo Cánovas to comment, “En
este gran fresco de la ciudad industrial, el prostíbulo se inserta naturalmente como un
espacio de producción y venta de mercaderías” (“Lectura gratuita...” 84-85). The brothel,
which trades in human flesh, is contrasted to the nearby butcher shop, since in both
spaces meat is sold daily to customers. Also of importance is the garden that partially
hides the brothel from view and “parece ofrecer una máscara de decencia” (Sklodowska
In his book-length study on prostitution in Mexico, published in 1908, Luis Lara y Pardo discusses the extreme importance placed on keeping brothels as hidden as possible from public view. As a result of being partially hidden by a garden, the brothel in Santa seems to comply with this visibility rule which stated: “No tendrán los burdeles señal alguna exterior que indique lo que son” (63). This idea of corruption and vice hiding behind an innocent façade applies not only to the brothels of early twentieth-century Mexico, but can be seen also as a parallel for the judgmental, hypocritical society as a whole.

Much like Juana Lucero, Santa is still basically decent and innocent when she arrives at the brothel. She is not a lustful woman who cannot wait to get into her new role as prostitute. She expresses a great deal of hesitation and reluctance to take part in the activities of her new home. Shortly after her arrival, Santa is overwhelmed by feelings of loneliness and helplessness, and feels a burning desire to leave this place and return to her home, but she realizes that, as a result of her disgrace, she can never go back. Like Juana, she seeks refuge in her bed, burying her face in the pillow: “Tan miserable y abandonada se sintió, que escondió el rostro en la almohada…” (80). To hide under the warm covers of a bed seems to provide a sense of comfort and a feeling of protection to both Juana and Santa. Regardless of the sadness and loneliness that Santa is experiencing, she is unable to find sympathy from the other women in the brothel. The head madam, Elvira, is particularly callous and very intimidating; she does not care in the least about Santa’s feelings. To her, Santa is just another nameless, pretty face that will earn her money. She acts as though she has complete control over Santa’s entire being, and expresses the utmost disgust towards Santa when she voices her desire to leave: “Lo
que es tú, te encuentras ya registrada y numerada, ni más ni menos que los coches de alquiler, pongo por caso…me perteneces a mí…(84). She proceeds to tell Santa exactly how to act with the men who are willing to pay, and Santa buckles under this woman’s forceful persona and agrees to stay.

Juana’s discomfort in this liminal space continues when she is informed that she must undergo a medical examination to confirm that she is in good physical shape. Santa promises that she is healthy, but Pepa replies, “Aunque lo estés, tonta, esto lo manda la autoridad y hay que someterse” (79). Before even taking part in her first sexual experience in the brothel, she will have to prove her “purity” in terms of her health. Luis Lara y Pardo confirms that the enforcement of regular medical exams for prostitutes was indeed a rule that the brothels were expected to follow at the beginning of the twentieth century, as the regulation reads, “Cuidar de que las mujeres que estén a su cargo concurran puntualmente a la Inspección de Sanidad” (64).

Throughout Santa’s time in Elvira’s brothel, she is forced to do many things with which she is not comfortable, including drinking, dancing, and of course having sex with many men. She does eventually begin to feel at home in the brothel, almost experiencing a sense of pride as she becomes the top prostitute in the brothel, but often feels a sense of self-disgust as she thinks about the pure girl she used to be and realizes what she has now become. These feelings of self-loathing are intensified and culminate in the desire to change her life and become an honorable woman when Santa’s two brothers visit her to tell her that their mother has died. Before this exchange, Santa is feeling exhilarated by her newfound power: “Santa considerábase reina de la entera ciudad corrompida […]"

---

12 In this study, Lara y Pardo focuses mainly on the years 1904-1906. Although Santa was published in 1903, the information in Lara y Pardo’s book is quite relevant and provides concrete historical details to support and contextualize Gamboa’s representation of life in the brothel.
sentíase emperatriz de la ciudad históricamente imperial…” (165-66). The characterization of the city as a place of corruption contrasts sharply with Santa’s previous home in the country, an atmosphere that exudes healthy living and wholesomeness. Santa’s success as a prostitute in Mexico City has empowered her and provided her with a sense of control. However, she completely breaks down with the news of her mother: “[U]nos minutos antes Santa sentíase reina, emperatriz y dichosa, ahora sentíase lo que en realidad era: un pedazo de barro humano; de barro pestilente y miserable que ensucia, rueda, lo pisotean y se deshace…” (170). The shocking news of her mother’s death has taken Santa away from her world of false illusions and brought her back to the reality of her miserable situation. After this realization, Santa thinks back on her pure childhood and experiences “ansias de cambiar de vida” (173). She goes to a church to pray and, even in a sacred space that should represent forgiveness and hope, Santa cannot escape the scathing eyes of society.

As in the church scene in Juana Lucero, the holy place does not provide Santa with what she needs to feel at peace. Whereas for Juana it is her own personal faith that fails her, in Santa’s case it is the social interaction that takes place inside the church that quells her hopes for redemption. A group of women enters the church and, like the women that Juana encounters on her trip into town, they “la miraban, la señalaban con el dedo…” (177). The women do not just gossip but proceed to order the sexton to tell Santa to leave. She is obviously seen as a contaminating presence in the church. Jann Matlock supports this idea of social contagiousness, as she attests that a prostitute is seen as a “holding tank for desires that might contaminate society” (Matlock 4). The body of the prostitute is seen as the house for the sexual corruption and lustfulness of society and
cannot be allowed to come into contact with “honorable” women, for fear of
contamination. Elżbieta Skłodowska comments on the social apprehension concerning
the physical contamination of prostitutes in connection with Santa’s expulsion from the
church by stating that her “presencia puede profanar cualquier espacio” (121). Therefore,
the sexton brutally and disrespectfully throws Santa out of the church. She leaves,
saying, “Tiene usted razón, nosotras no deberíamos venir a estos lugares…, ya me
voy…” (178). Even in a space where what should matter is the willingness of the spirit,
and not the state of the body, Santa can find no refuge from her status as a fallen woman.
According to Mario Martín-Flores, this experience leaves Santa a “bruised body and
mutilated in spirit” (132). Even when Santa possesses the desire to make herself an
honest woman, she is constantly pushed down by a repressive, hypocritical society that
gives no second chances to a woman like her. Manuel Prendes analyzes the portrayal of
the woman in the naturalist novel and says that oftentimes she is the victim of “una
sociedad retrógrada e hipócrita” full of prejudices and strict regulations (La novela
naturalista 184). Santa is victimized whether in her maternal home, in the brothel, or
even in the religious space of a church. She cannot escape the social repression and is
constantly the target of unfair judgment and persecution. As in Juana Lucero, the
heterotopia of deviation known as the brothel is the only place that accepts a woman like
Santa.

Santa returns to her life of decadence, but soon receives the opportunity to leave
the brothel when one of the patrons, a Spanish bullfighter named Jarameño, expresses the
desire to take her home with him. Santa hesitates to leave the brothel, a reaction that is
significant as it expresses the dual nature of the space of the brothel. At this moment it
becomes clear that the brothel is both a space of exploitation and victimization, and a home for Santa, a place of familiarity, comfort, and acceptance. While she recognizes that the brothel is a decadent, sinful place, at the same time she is sad to leave the only home she has known since being forced from her mother’s house. She looks back at Elvira’s brothel as she is driving away and, to her, the house seems to be burning, as “llamas de lascivia” envelop the structure: “Santa veía ese incendio justiciero que arrasaba el burdel” (210-11). It is obvious that Santa recognizes that Elvira’s house is a sinful place, full of passion and lust, and that, as the narrator characterizes it, the destruction of this space would actually be justified. However, on the other hand, Santa is not completely delighted to be leaving the brothel, as “miró de nuevo a la casa con melancólico cariño ahora; que así miramos todos […] el puerto que se abandona y que sin embargo nos dio abrigo cuando a él nos arrojaron…” (211). Santa arrived at Elvira’s house because she had nowhere else to go, and was initially reluctant to be a part of the brothel’s activities, but eventually the house became her home. If we consider instances such as the situation inside the church, Santa, like Juana, seems to find more acceptance inside the brothel than outside of it. In Elvira’s house, Santa is accepted for who she is, and she does not have to feel bad about herself, while as soon as she finds herself interacting with people outside of the space of the brothel, she is spurned and rejected. Hence, for all the exploitation Santa suffers inside the walls of the brothel, there is a sense of acceptance and lack of criticism that Santa grows to find very comforting.

The connection that Santa has formed to her life in the brothel is clearly seen in the way she behaves when she moves into the inn where Jarameño lives with a group of other Spaniards. By moving in with Jarameño, Santa leaves the liminal space of the
brothel, and temporarily reintegrates herself in society, thus seemingly fulfilling the third step in van Gennep’s theory on the rites of passage between social worlds, incorporation. However, this period of stability in Santa’s life will prove to be very short-lived. As a result of the fact that Santa earlier expressed a desire to change her life and become an honest woman, one would be led to believe that Santa would be ecstatic to be away from the sinful space of the brothel and would flourish in her new atmosphere. Quite to the contrary, Santa quickly becomes bored with her new life: “No, no bastaba el perpetuo y monótono ‘te quiero’ […] ¡habialo oído tanto y a tantos! [...] ¡extrañaba su vida de antes! Aquel ensayo de vida honesta la aburría…” (245). Santa has become so accustomed to life in the brothel that she no longer seems capable of living what she considers a monotonous and boring existence. She has grown accustomed to her other life to the point that she no longer seems to possess the desire to lead a monogamous life, but longs to return to the world of prostitution. Santa purposefully sabotages her chances of staying with Jarameño, the only man who, up to this point, has offered her a decent life, by sleeping with another guest in the house, Ripoll. Jarameño actually catches them in the sexual act, becomes enraged, and throws Santa out of the house.

Santa finds herself out on the street once again, but this time she knows exactly where to go, and moves quickly to reinstate herself in the in-between space of the brothel. Without a second thought, she heads straight for Elvira’s house, all thoughts of forging a better life forgotten: “Derechamente, sin asomos de titubeos ni vacilaciones, como golondrina que se reintegra al polvoriento alero donde quedó su nido desierto resistiendo escarchas y lluvias, así Santa enderezó sus pasos fugitivos a la casa de Elvira, sin ocurrírsele que le sobraban recursos más seguros y más honestos…” (248). João
Sedycias comments on Santa’s eagerness to get back to the Elvira’s whorehouse, stating that for her, “survival means going back to the brothel” (87). In sharp contrast to the way Santa felt when she first arrived at the brothel, this homecoming is a happy one, in which Santa takes in the familiar atmosphere with a sense of relief and contentment. Here, she is expected to sleep with numerous men and will not be punished or judged for doing so. However, Santa’s feelings quickly vacillate, as she begins to regret what she has done to Jarameño, and the way she so nonchalantly threw away her chance at being an honest woman: “¿Por qué tan pronto estar tan pervertida, si ayer, sí, ayer no más, todavía era buena?” (249). Santa recognizes the fact that she has made a poor decision, but she does not seem to have any control over her actions, as she will repeat this situation again with another lover, Rubio. She is obviously the victim here of biological determinism; this sexual corruption is in her blood and, as a result, she seems to be unable to change and break the habit of sinful behavior that has overtaken her life.

Shortly after returning to Elvira’s house, Santa receives a second opportunity to free herself from the brothel. She again moves to another space, as another of her lovers, Rubio, takes her with him to serve as his personal mistress. At first, Santa considers herself very lucky to be able to be with Rubio, as she tells Hipólito, the blind piano player at the brothel, “Creo que es un caballero perfecto y que me he sacado la lotería” (281). Santa is quite excited at the prospect of living in a decent house, and optimistic about what this can mean for her future. However, the situation between them is complicated by the fact that Rubio is married and does not hold any respect for Santa. As a matter of fact, he does not even seem to like her, but uses her to attain sexual satisfaction. In his article entitled “The Whorehouse and the Whore in Spanish American Fiction of the
1960s”, Kessel Schwartz comments that the reason married men often sought out prostitutes with whom to have sexual relations instead of, or possibly in addition to, their wives is that pure women were required to remain virgins until marriage, thus meaning that they would be very sexually inexperienced, making it “difficult for some husbands to experience satisfactory relationships within marriage, where sexual enjoyment, in any event, is viewed as sinful” (477). Therefore, the men seek out prostitutes, who were not supposed to be pure or virginal, and consequently would provide them with the sexual gratification they desired.\textsuperscript{13} Rubio sees Santa simply as a body that can perform sexual acts. He does not love her, but regards her as a possession, and does not wish to share her with any other men: “Además de que Rubio no la quería, la despreciaba […] se familiarizaba con la idea de que Santa únicamente a él pertenecía” (301-02). Rubio clearly demonstrates the hypocritical nature of society: he exploits Santa sexually, but then denounces her for being a prostitute by saying things such as: “Las meretrices no arriban a las tierras de promisión […] las almas de las mujeres perdidas no vuelan porque no poseen alas, son almas ápteras” (302). He, as a man in early twentieth-century Mexico, is expected to respect his wife and keep her pure, while being openly permitted to maintain sexual relations with a prostitute whom he treats poorly. Santa becomes, once again, a victim of this patriarchal system that functions by victimizing “bad” women in order to glorify “good” women. Santa develops a strong dislike for Rubio, and grows tired of his possessiveness and his critical attitude. At about the same time, she begins to

\textsuperscript{13}In her book-length study devoted to the figure of the prostitute in various contemporary Mexican novels, María R. González’s observations lend support to what I have just observed. She states: “La mujer casada cumple con una postura sexual tradicional, que no va en contra de la normas ‘morales’ de la sexualidad doméstica. La prostituta, como objeto de placer, está para satisfacerle al hombre la sexualidad que no obtiene en el hogar” (120). Although this quotation comes from a chapter on Antonio Mora’s Del oficio (1972), González also provides commentary on earlier works such as Gamboa’s Santa.
suffer painful symptoms of a physical illness, and begins drinking to dull the pain. Santa sinks into the world of alcoholism and her life becomes more decadent than ever before.\textsuperscript{14} She spends much of her time in an alcohol-induced stupor and begins to sleep with many different men in order to spite Rubio: “[E]ngañó a Rubio, con frenesí positivo, sin parar, donde se podía, en la calle, en el baño, en los carruajes de punto, en la mismísima vivienda” (305). Rubio finally finds out what Santa has been doing and, like Jarameño, throws her out.

Santa’s devastating descent into illness leads her even further into the underworld of prostitution, as we see her hitting rock-bottom before she is able to achieve redemption. Neither Jarameño nor Rubio are able to save Santa from her immoral life, and she is instead forced “to traverse the most squalid brothels of Mexico City only to be saved at the end by the least physically attractive character in the entire novel, Hipólito” (Sedycias 93).\textsuperscript{15} Attaining redemption is something that Santa must want for herself and it is not until the end, when she finally accepts the pure love of the unattractive Hipólito, that she is redeemed. Santa, unlike Juana, completes the passage between social worlds, as she is integrated back into society at the end of the novel, thus fulfilling the step of incorporation. However, this integration is ephemeral because Santa dies shortly thereafter. This fallen, ravaged woman does not rejoin mainstream society for long. She is physically eliminated through death, but Gamboa offers her the possibility of religious redemption.

\textsuperscript{14}Both Santa’s physical illness (cancer) as well as her alcoholism will be discussed fully in Chapter two.

\textsuperscript{15}Santa’s descent even deeper into the underworld of prostitution, and her eventual redemption at the hands of Hipólito will be discussed further in Chapter two.
Santa, like Juana Lucero, is a prime example of a basically innocent, moral young woman who, as a result of societal pressures and deceptions and the suggestion of heredity, is the target of frequent and devastating victimization. This victimization leads both women to the doorstep of a brothel, the only place where they find acceptance. Becoming prostitutes has dreadful consequences for both Santa and Juana, as it leads Juana to go mad, and Santa to become doubly ill, as she suffers from both cancer and alcoholism. While it cannot be said that prostitution necessarily causes illnesses such as cancer, the brothel is certainly an atmosphere that does not promote a healthy lifestyle. The cancer that invades Santa’s body can be seen as a manifestation of the moral illness that has invaded her soul. The repressive social climate keeps Juana from ever being able to leave the brothel and ensnares Santa so that she only gets to leave for good when she is at death’s doorstep. These unfortunate women are certainly victimized in the brothel, but their victimization pales in comparison to life on the outside in places such as the maternal or family home, the church, and other houses such as Rubio’s in Santa and Pepa and Absalón’s in Juana Lucero. The brothel in both novels actually becomes at times a place of acceptance and comfort for these young women, and the “den of corruption” acquires for them many of the positive elements associated with “home.” It thus becomes a place of integration, whether temporarily as in the case of Santa – as the brothel serves as a transitional space for her – or permanently, as in Juana Lucero’s situation since she becomes irrevocably incorporated into the brothel.
IV. Nacha Regules

Prostitution was not only a growing problem around the turn of the twentieth century in Chile and Mexico, but it was also the source of a great deal of social unrest in Argentina, particularly in Buenos Aires. In a society where “the role of good women was to marry and bear future generations,” a woman who went against this social norm by leading an unconventional life posed a threat to the dominant, traditional social structure (Guy 2-3). For this reason, prostitutes were seen as dangerous, and the need to control them was widely felt by the citizens of Buenos Aires. Prostitution became very widespread in the Argentine capital, even leading the city to be described by Manuel Gálvez as “un vasto mercado de carne humana” (Nacha Regules 26). The widespread nature of prostitution in Argentina is reflected in, among other literary works, Manuel Gálvez’s Nacha Regules (1919), a novel that focuses, as in the case of Juana Lucero and Santa, on the fall of its protagonist into the dark world of prostitution. Like Juana and Santa, Nacha is victimized by an unjust, rigid, and hypocritical society that pushes her towards the decadent world of the brothel.16

Although Nacha Regules arrived late to the naturalistic scene, the novel is quite Zolaesque in that it “shows how the relentless forces of heredity and environment bear down on hapless man and eventually crush him” (Lichtblau 75). Nacha, the unfortunate protagonist of the novel, faces a series of difficult situations in which she is abused, both physically and verbally, exploited sexually, and forced to frequent decadent spaces such as cabarets, where she is visibly uncomfortable. Like Santa, Nacha does, however, find

---

16 As Alberto J. Carlos points out in his article “Nacha Regules y Santa: problemas de intertextualidad,” Nacha Regules first appeared as a minor character in Gálvez’s El mal metafísico (1916). Interestingly, Nana, the eponymous protagonist of Zola’s novel (1880), also first appeared in a previous novel, L’Assomoir (1877) (303).
redemption through the pure love of the noble, idealistic Monsalvat, who possesses many similar characteristics to Santa’s redeemer, the blind pianist Hipólito. In spite of the numerous similarities between Santa and Nacha Regules, Carlos J. Alonso states that Gálvez may not have read Gamboa’s famous novel, but that he was certainly familiar with the work of Zola, which undoubtedly served as a point of reference for Gamboa as well (302).17

Like Juana and Santa, Nacha’s departure from the world of social propriety is initiated by a man. She, like Juana, is the victim of sexual aggression, but Nacha allows herself to be violated because she cares about her lover Ramos. The situation and its outcome bear a striking resemblance to that of Santa and Marcelino’s. While living in the boarding house run by her mother, Nacha meets and falls in love with Ramos, one of the boarders. After Ramos leaves the house, he lures Nacha to a secluded place and robs her of her virginity in a manner that could be called rape. Nacha describes the scene in the following manner: “Me llevó muy lejos […] Yo no me imaginaba sus planes. Intentó la violencia contra mí. Yo me defendí, lloré. Todo fue inútil. Él era fuerte, hábil y yo estaba enamorada. ¿Qué otra cosa podía suceder sino lo que sucedió?” (37). After losing her virginity, Nacha, like Santa, feels ashamed and believes that she cannot face her mother in this state of disgrace. Kessel Schwartz explains that sexual activity for men is not only condoned, but expected, as “a young man’s machismo impels him to prove sexual superiority, but tradition enforces a girl’s chastity” and goes on to discuss the social double standard that maintains that men have stronger sexual urges than women, therefore permitting them to practice the sexual act more often than women and with

17Alonso devotes his article, “Nacha Regules y Santa: Problemas de intertextualidad” to comparing these two novels and also discussing their connection with Zola’s novels, namely Nana.
more partners (“The Whorehouse…” 477). Because of the shame Nacha feels as a result of her loss of purity, she stays with Ramos for two years and endures his cruelty. Nacha clings to whatever sense of stability, albeit abusive, she can find in her life. However, Nacha’s relationship with Ramos is short-lived, as Ramos, in a situation parallel to that of Marcelino and Santa’s and Juana and Absalón’s, uses her for his own sexual gratification and then abandons her, leaving her pregnant and alone. Nacha does not suffer a miscarriage like Santa, nor is she forced to have an abortion like Juana, but she does give birth to a stillborn child, thus demonstrating the fact that none of these three prostitutes gets to have children.

Like Juana Lucero and Santa, Nacha is pushed towards the world of prostitution by the rigid societal norms by which she must live. When Nacha Regules opens, our protagonist is already a prostitute, a story that is explained in Gálvez’s earlier novel El mal metafísico (1916). As a result of the fact that Nacha runs off with her lover Ramos and becomes pregnant in El mal metafísico, she faces not only discrimination from society in general, but rejection from her mother as well, as her mother expresses the disgust she feels towards Nacha in the following way: “¿Ha visto qué hija me ha salido? ¡Estúpida, bruta, desgraciada! [...] Que se la trague la tierra y no la vea más, que no la vea más…” (111). Nacha’s mother obviously wants nothing to do with her daughter, as she feels that Nacha’s poor decisions will bring nothing but shame to her. She continues to vent her feelings in a conversation with one of her boarders, when he questions her about Nacha’s whereabouts: “¿Ésa? Es una tal por cual. Y no me hable más de semejante arrastrada” (128). Nacha’s mother completely writes her off and does not want to be connected to her in any way. In a society that places immense importance on social
propriety, especially in the area of female sexuality, Nacha has lost all respect from her mother. She reacts to Nacha’s fall from grace in much the same way as Santa’s mother, who also essentially disowns her daughter in her time of need. For all intents and purposes, they no longer have a mother. Although the situation is different for Juana Lucero because her mother does not choose to abandon her, she too suffers the loss of the maternal figure when her mother dies. Juana then goes to live with her cruel aunt Loreto, who is a poor substitute for the loving and good-hearted late mother. After being left motherless, all three of these women, each at different stages in their downfall at the time of the loss, eventually end up being thrust into the world of prostitution. Perhaps it is the lack of maternal availability and support during the time of their “sexual rites of passage” that contributes to the fall of these women (Logan 8). Logan comments on the “assumption that motherless girls are destined to fall,” stating that the idea applies as much to girls whose mothers are alive but unavailable as to those whose mothers have actually died (7-8).

Nacha, like Santa and Juana Lucero, loses her virginity and therefore must be separated from the world of social decency. Consequently, she ends up in the heterotopic space of prostitution, the only acceptable place for a sexually deviant woman like her. In the first scene of *Nacha Regules*, we find Nacha in a cabaret surrounded by people dancing the tango and drinking. Donna Guy comments that the novel “began in a cabaret in 1910, thereby linking clandestine prostitution to tango dancing and the new type of nightclub” (165). Based solely on this opening scene, we can infer that Nacha is or has been a “cabaretera,” a type of prostitute commonly found in Buenos Aires around the turn of the twentieth century who dances at cabarets in order to recruit clients (Carretero...
However, Nacha is now seen as a kept woman, as she is accompanied by her lover, Arnedo. The cabaret is an oppressive space for Nacha, as she is seen to be completely subservient to her lover. Almost immediately, the narrator offers a commentary on the repressive situation of women in the Argentine society of the early twentieth century: “A las mujeres las tratan sin delicadeza, ni ternura, ni simpatía humana” (10). Men are not expected to treat women with respect, but are instead seen as their owners. Nacha’s lover in this cabaret scene is indeed referred to as “el dueño de Nacha” (13), and behaves as such, bullying Nacha into dancing and drinking when she demonstrates no interest in partaking in the activities of the dance hall. The cabaret becomes a space of victimization for Nacha, as she is subjected to the humiliating and degrading attitude of Arnedo.

In sharp contrast to the brutal and chauvinistic Arnedo is the noble and idealistic Monsalvat, who observes Nacha from a distance in the cabaret, and is immediately struck by the air of sadness that surrounds the young woman, as she possesses a “dulce melancolía” that is evident to him, as “se esforzaba inútilmente por alegrarse y reír con sus compañeros. La tristeza se había entrecado en su persona, y a su voluntad le faltaba fuerzas para alejarla” (8-9). In this very first encounter between Nacha and Monsalvat, he establishes himself as her protector and redeemer, as he confronts the arrogant Arnedo and commands him to stop mistreating Nacha. Monsalvat sees in Nacha an inherent goodness, and he is overcome with the desire to raise her out of her demeaning situation. After the scene in the cabaret, Monsalvat yearns to learn all he can about this intriguing woman, who he sees as a “víctima de su necesidad de vivir” (21). After a good deal of questioning, a friend reveals to him how Nacha ended up becoming a prostitute: “Al salir
del hospital entró en una tienda. Quería ser honesta. Pero usted sabe lo que pagan en las tiendas, ¿eh? [...] con estas cosas y el mal ejemplo de algunas compañeras, acabó por frecuentar ciertas casas donde ganaba diez veces más que en la tienda y con un trabajo… ¿eh? … relativamente fácil y agradable …” (23). After being abandoned by her lover, giving birth to a stillborn baby, and being rejected by her mother, Nacha finds herself alone and does not know what to do to earn a living. The narrator provides us with Nacha’s thoughts about her fall into prostitution in the following way: “Un miserable la engañó; su madre, dominada por un sujeto inconsciente y falto de toda simpatía humana, se negó a recibirla, arrojándola así al vicio; y la persecución de los hombres y la penuria de los sueldos la obligó a envilecerse” (29). Nacha, unlike Juana and Santa, attempts to make a living doing honest work, but simply cannot make ends meet. The employment options for women are few and low-paying, and Nacha obviously feels she has no choice but to sell her body to support herself.18 Nevertheless, Nacha is reluctant to cast blame on anyone for her fall, maintaining that it was simply her destiny to end up a corrupt woman, and that “una implacable fatalidad la había empujado hacia el mal” (29). Nacha eventually ends up as the kept mistress of Arnedo, in much the same situation as Santa when she briefly lives first with Jarameño and then Rubio outside of the brothel.

Although Nacha seems resigned to the fact that she was destined to fall into decadence, she continuously fights this fate throughout the novel, as she constantly oscillates between prostituting herself and attempting to support herself in other, more respectable, albeit less lucrative, ways. Like Santa, Nacha repeatedly expresses the desire

---

18Although she is discussing the situation in Germany and not Spanish America Christiane Schönfeld supports this sentiment of Nacha’s as she states, “Most historians, sociologists, or left-wing feminists of the time would have agreed…that the poor pay of proletarian women was one of the main reasons for the rapid growth of the number of sex workers…” (14).
to be a respectable and honest woman but, unlike Santa, Nacha actually takes measures to make this happen. The worst thing for Nacha would be to have to return to the world of prostitution after being taken in by Arnedo. The house she shares with her lover is, like the cabaret, a space of repression and mistreatment. Although Nacha suffers countless abuses at the hands of her “owner,” her fear of being abandoned again and being forced to return to the streets makes her suffering somehow bearable and she finds the strength to deal with it. The narrator expresses her feelings towards Arnedo and her situation in the following way: “Ella odiaba al Pampa [Arnedo], pero no podía dejarlo. La insultaba, la abofeteaba; y ella, más sumisa que nunca […] ¡Ah, si el Pampa la arrojase de su casa! Era horrible tener que buscar otro hombre, mendigar una protección, caer quizás en lo que tanto temía” (28-29). Nacha obviously depends on Arnedo to provide for her and support her financially, and would rather deal with his abuse than be forced to find another man or, as she fears, end up in a whorehouse. This passage clearly demonstrates the limitations of women during that time. Nacha is caught in an abusive situation and her only option seems to be to find a substitute for this man or fall back into prostitution.

After deciding that he will take it upon himself to save Nacha from the depths of degradation, Monsalvat invades the victimizing space of Arnedo’s house to visit her and try to persuade her to rise up out of her situation. It is during this conversation that Monsalvat realizes the extent of Nacha’s suffering, as even what she is allowed to feel is contingent upon society and its rules for women like her: “Nosotras no tenemos el derecho de sufrir […] ¿No ve que debemos estar siempre alegres, bailar, reír, dar caricias? […] en nuestro oficio no ser expansivas y alegres, no estar dispuestas para las bromas o las caricias, es ser odiosas, es como si robáramos el dinero que se nos paga”
(35). Cabareteras such as Nacha are not permitted to express the way they really feel; they must always hide behind the mask of a beautiful, sensual woman existing solely for the purpose of pleasing a man. Expanding on this idea of creating a sort of alternate persona, Nacha goes on to explain to Monsalvat that her “función social se asemeja a un disfraz carnavalesco” (Jiménez 63). Behind the mask of prostitution, a woman can do and say whatever the situation calls for, and essentially take off her disguise at the end of the day: “Es como en el carnaval. Usted se disfraza y hace y dice cuantos disparates se le ocurren. ¿Y se avergüenza después? No, porque le parece, una vez quitado el disfraz, que no era usted mismo…” (35). Nacha uses this analogy to make herself feel better about her occupation, to reassure herself that she is not really the one who is practicing the decadent and degrading acts. Changing one’s name is part of this process and this is a characteristic that is seen in both Juana Lucero and Santa, as well as in Nacha Regules. As she falls deeper into the depths of prostitution, Juana becomes Naná, and actually loses her identity completely as she replaces in her mind the pure young woman Juana with the decadent prostitute Naná. Santa, on the other hand, does not suffer from a mental illness like Juana, but she too loses her name as she becomes firmly entrenched in the realm of prostitution. Towards the end of the novel, she becomes known as Loreto. Although Nacha does not lose her name, she does take on another personality when she is performing: “Se sintió otra vez la Nacha de antes, la bailarina de tangos, la mujer de la vida” (40-41). It seems that there are two Nachas, the one who is anxious to change her life and become an honest, respectable woman, and the Nacha who is the star of the cabarets.
During her conversation with Monsalvat, Nacha tells him how she has struggled to maintain a pure and honest life, and has sometimes found it impossible: “Tenía a dos pasos la tentación. Luché algunas semanas; pero las deudas, el hambre, la necesidad de vestirme bien […] contribuyeron a perderme. Y un domingo le pedí a mi amiga que me llevara a aquella casa…” (38). From that point on, keeping away from prostitution becomes a constant struggle, and eventually, after Nacha lapses into the decadent profession yet again, Arnedo takes her as his mistress. Shortly after Nacha’s heartfelt conversation with Monsalvat, Arnedo tires of her and kicks her out of his house, an action that seems to be a blessing in disguise to Nacha, as she feels that she can now strive to attain a better, more respectable life. Monsalvat’s kindness and concern appear to have instilled in her the determination to purify herself. In an article entitled “Saving the Innocents,” published in 1885, Mary Jeune makes a distinction between fallen women who are not past the point of being saved and can be “easily reached by sympathy and kindness,” and those who are “too degraded to accept or wish for any help” (346). Because of her eagerness to change and her positive reaction to Monsalvat’s desire to help, Nacha clearly exemplifies the prostitute who possesses the potential to rise out of her degrading situation.

After leaving Arnedo, Nacha enters a boarding house, a space that has the potential to offer her a chance at living honestly, as her own person instead of as somebody’s mistress or concubine. The house is run by an elderly woman and starts out being a space of acceptance and positive energy, as Mademoiselle Dupont thinks Nacha is a decent young woman and they form a good relationship. However, Nacha feels the need to hide her past from the landlady, so as not to destroy the pure image Dupont has
constructed of her. When Dupont asks her about her past, Nacha trembles and does not know what to say. The woman goes off on tangents about how Nacha is innocent and so different from the other corrupt young women she has known and Nacha blushes profusely. The house becomes a space of refuge and purity for Nacha, even as she is compelled to lie to her landlady, and she lives chastely inside its walls and avoids the corruption of the streets: “No quería ni salir a la calle, pensando que en la calle estaban la tentación y el vicio” (75). Nacha thinks of Dupont as the epitome of wholesomeness and goodness, and tries to emulate her behavior. The purity of this house and Nacha’s thoughts of Monsalvat help initially to keep her away from prostitution and keep at bay her old way of life, as she wants to disappoint neither Dupont nor Monsalvat.

However, soon enough, the corruption of society and its hypocrisy seep into the accepting space of the boarding house and shatter Nacha’s illusions, returning her to the world of vice. Nacha realizes that Mademoiselle Dupont is not as pure and innocent as she appears to be when she accidentally catches the older woman in her bedroom in a very compromising position with a male visitor. In order to alleviate the landlady’s supreme embarrassment, Nacha “para consolarla, le contó algunas cosas de su vida. No le dijo haber frecuentado casas de citas, pero sí que tuvo muchos amantes” (78). Nacha’s decision to try to ease Dupont’s shame by revealing something of her own corrupt past serves only to drive a wedge between her and the landlady. In a very hypocritical fashion, Dupont turns against Nacha and wants nothing to do with her now that she knows that the girl is not innocent and virginal. She immediately demands the month’s rent, knowing full well that Nacha cannot pay it, but tells her, “No le cuesta nada ganarla. Usted tiene amigos muy… benévolos, que se la darán gustosamente” (78-79). Upon
learning of Nacha’s tainted past, Dupont, the woman who up to this point had been her friend, adopts a superior attitude and speaks to Nacha in a very condescending fashion. Nacha suffers discrimination and marginalization even inside the one space she thought could be her refuge. This episode demonstrates clearly the hypocrisy of some women and the ways in which less than pure women will always be treated as inferiors and be seen by society as corrupt and immoral. Nacha begins to realize that true virtue does not exist, but that “los virtuosos son los que se ocultan, ‘los que se cuidan’, como suele decirse” (79).

After being kicked out of Mademoiselle Dupont’s boarding house, allegedly for not being able to come up with the money for rent, Nacha heads for the one place she knows she will be accepted without questions about her virtue, “una casa de huéspedes de la calle Lavalle, donde vivían muchachas de mala vida” (81). According to Michel Foucault, the brothel is one of the only “places of tolerance” where sex does not have to be carefully hidden and subject to the “triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence” that abounds in mainstream society (The History 4-5). As in both Juana Lucero and Santa, the space of the brothel serves not only as a place of exploitation, but also as a sort of refuge for Nacha, as it is the place to which she goes when she has no other options. This ambiguous space, therefore, represents both desperation and misery while at the same time offering acceptance and tolerance. Nacha, like Juana and Santa, sees the brothel as a familiar space in which she finds more friendly faces than in the outside world. Upon arriving at Madame Annette’s house, Nacha immediately encounters one of her friends, a fellow prostitute, and is very happy to see her: “De pronto, apareció en el umbral una figura familiar a Nacha. Al verse, las dos mujeres se saludaron y se besaron”
Until the end of the novel, when she is eventually saved by Monsalvat, Nacha has very little positive interaction with other people, especially in spaces outside of the brothel. She is always looked down upon and judged for her actions, whereas here in the brothel she can visit with her friend without worrying about being judged by a hypocritical society. Much like Juana Lucero, Nacha forges friendships with her fellow prostitutes and feels much more comfortable in their company than with women outside the brothel.

After arriving at Madame Annette’s house and being reincorporated into the world of prostitution, Nacha thinks about Monsalvat and wonders why he does not come to save her: “¿Cómo no adivinaba que ella necesitaba su protección y que, sin él, sucumbiría? ¿Por qué no se apareció en la casa del vicio, como ella esperaba, para salvarla?” (87). Nacha obviously feels that she, a woman, does not have the resources to save herself, and expresses the hope that Monsalvat, a man, will come to help her. Because he does not come, Nacha is forced to do her job, and often falls ill as a result. She does not yearn to be well again, for she knows that when she gets better, she will have to “dedicarse a lo que tanto temiera. Y creía enfermarse de nuevo si intentaba recomenzar ‘la vida’” (97). The effects of prostitution on Nacha are both physically and mentally devastating. She wants more than anything to live a decent life, all the while thinking of Monsalvat as her savior and her inspiration for reaching this goal.

Nacha becomes obsessed with locating Monsalvat as he, meanwhile, tries desperately to find her. During this time, Nacha oscillates between alternately earnestly trying to stay out of prostitution, and falling back into it out of the need to pay her rent. According to José E. Puente, Nacha is the “símbolo de la mujer que lucha contra las
Nevertheless, because of her need to be decent for Monsalvat, the man she loves, Nacha is finally able to break free from the chains of prostitution and begin to lead an honorable life working in a store. She tells Monsalvat’s friend of the suffering she endured in order to be respectable, “me gano la vida trabajando. Pasé días de miseria. Después entré en la tienda. Once horas por día y treinta pesos de sueldo […] Y las once horas parada, sin poder descansar un minuto […] Es una vida penosa, la mía. Y todo por él […] para ser digna, aunque de lejos, de ese amor que me tiene…” (123). Nacha wants to feel that she deserves to be loved by Monsalvat, even if she is not with him.

Unlike Juana Lucero, Nacha Regules has a happy ending, as the unfortunate prostitute eventually reunites with Monsalvat and they share “un beso puro” that unites “a aquellos dos seres como a dos hermanos” (124). Obviously, the connection that Nacha and Monsalvat share is not based on raw physical attraction, but rather on a pure and spiritual love, which is essentially the only thing that can save Nacha from her life of victimization. Myron Lichtblau comments on the idealistic portrayal of Nacha’s redeemer by stating that Monsalvat is a “heroic figure of romantic idealism in a milieu of sordidness and misery” (74). Much like the relationship between Hipólito and Santa, Monsalvat and Nacha live in a world of chastity, in which they offer their souls to each other in place of their bodies. Monsalvat and Hipólito do not abandon or look down upon Nacha and Santa when everyone else does. They are the means by which the women are able to be redeemed. In spite of Monsalvat’s undying devotion, Nacha still questions whether she deserves to be with such a good man: “Mujer de la vida, como he sido, no tengo derecho a anularlo para siempre” (140). Monsalvat wants to marry Nacha, but she
is hesitant because she believes she is inherently corrupt, and does not want to ruin this noble man. Out of spite for Monsalvat, Arnedo kidnaps Nacha, and Monsalvat is again obsessed with finding her. He becomes a ruined man, losing his job and becoming ill, both mentally and physically, as a result of his preoccupation with locating and saving Nacha. It is only when Nacha runs away from Arnedo and sees Monsalvat in this wretched state that she decides to marry him and care for him. She now feels that she deserves to be with him, as she can help him to get better. Through her feelings for Monsalvat, Nacha becomes what Pierre Horn has named the “saved prostitute,” […] “essentially a virtuous woman who is redeemed from her profession […] usually brought about by a man who risks his reputation to save her” (4). Eventually, Monsalvat does regain his physical health but, little by little, he goes blind, thus creating another parallel between him and Santa’s redeemer Hipólito. Alberto J. Carlos comments on this connection: “Tanto en Nacha Regules como en Santa a las protagonistas un hombre de corazón noble y de ojos ciegos las quiere, las persigue, las cuida, se sacrifica por ellas, pero ellas al principio no le corresponden con el debido amor” (304). That both of these women are ultimately saved by men who cannot see their physical appearance is significant and indicative of the fact that Hipólito and Monsalvat possess a pure love for Santa and Nacha, a love that is not based on lust or physical attraction. Santa and Nacha eventually reach the point where they believe in the possibility of their own redemption and allow these decent and selfless men to help them, thus becoming reintegrated into the society that had previously rejected them. They successfully pass from the liminal world of the brothel to the realm of social normalcy.
The fact that Santa and Nacha are able to attain salvation, in contrast to Zola’s characters who are consistently offered no hope for salvation, brings up an interesting difference between Zola’s strict ideas on naturalistic determinism and the naturalism oftentimes adopted by Spanish-speaking authors, both in Spain and in Spanish America, whose Catholic values and ideals prevent them from fully embracing Zola’s determinism. For example, Emilia Pardo Bazán who, classified as naturalist author, has a strong Catholic upbringing that leads her to find fault with some tenets of naturalism that limit the concept of free will. In Chapter three of her La cuestión palpitante, Pardo Bazán expounds on the contrasts between the Catholic doctrine of free will and the narrow determinism of Emile Zola’s naturalism. She is in favor of a wider conception of naturalism that does not do away with free will, as she criticizes Zola’s naturalism in the following way: “Yerra el naturalismo en este fin útil y secundario a que trata de enderezar las fuerzas artísticas de nuestro siglo, y este error y el sentido determinista y fatalista de su programa, son los límites que él mismo se impone, son las ligaduras que una fórmula más amplia ha de romper” (153). Like Pardo Bazán, Gamboa and Gálvez are devout Catholics, and perhaps it is for this reason that they offer their fallen protagonists the chance for salvation. Indeed, Myron Lichtblau comments on the similarities between the opinions of Gálvez and Pardo Bazán when he says that “their strongly religious beliefs made them unwilling to reject free will entirely in favor of a deterministic philosophy” (76). Of Gamboa, Ana María Alvarado states that, in allowing Santa to be saved by Hipólito, “le presenta a Santa oportunidades” and “mantiene una

---

19 In contrast to novels such as Santa and Nacha Regules, where the female protagonist is offered the chance of redemption are novels such as Zola’s L’Assomoir (1877) and Nana (1880), in which Gervaise and Nana, respectively, are utterly degraded and corrupted with no chance for salvation. Gervaise becomes an alcoholic shell of her former self, while Nana suffers a miserable death from smallpox following her life as a prostitute.
fibra sin contaminación en la vida de Santa” (68). Nacha and Santa are the targets of a great deal of victimization, but they go through a process of purification that allows them, unlike Juana Lucero, to become reincorporated into society. Nacha, unlike Santa and Juana, is the only woman studied here to avoid suffering a permanent elimination from society as a result of her victimization.

Nacha Regules, like Juana Lucero and Santa, exemplifies the devastating effects that a judgmental and hypocritical society can have on the life of a young woman who, after falling from grace, finds herself the victim of social marginalization and economic limitation so unforgiving that her only option is to enter the liminal space of the brothel. Although the circumstances of their first sexual experiences are not identical, each of the three young women finds herself violated to some degree during the loss of her virginity. These sexual scenes are laced with violence and brutality whether the women are raped brutally like the innocent and naïve Juana, or pressured into having sex by a man they love like the weak and impressionable Santa and Nacha. Regardless of the circumstances of their deflowering, the loss of their virginity leads each of these women to the brothel. Although the brothel is primarily a space of victimization and sexual exploitation, it at times becomes a place of acceptance and tolerance for these unfortunate young women, as they will not be discriminated against for being sexually active and are at times capable of forging friendships with other women. The victimization inflicted upon the women is often worse outside of the brothel than inside it. The women are victims because of their status as fallen women; once they initially lose their virginity, they are labeled as immoral and corrupt and pushed to the margins of society. Therefore, regardless of what space the women inhabit, this stigma trails them and makes it very
difficult to change their social situation. The fate of becoming a prostitute and consequently suffering elimination from society strikes various types of women regardless of origin, moral character, or economic background. Although emphasis is not placed on the social class from which Juana, Santa, and Nacha come, we can assume that Juana comes from a lower class than the other two women as her mother was a seamstress. Nacha, whose mother owns a boardinghouse, and Santa, whose family exhibits great concern with social appearances and will not tolerate the possibility of having their reputation tainted by an “immoral” woman, perhaps come from middle-class families. Despite the differences in the women’s origins and the variations in their first sexual experiences, these female characters all end up in the same place, the brothel, as a result of their inability to live up to the rigid social standards that “respectable” women must uphold.
Venus was decomposing; the germs which she had picked up from the carrion people allowed to moulder in the gutter, the ferment which had infected a whole society, seemed to have come to the surface of her face and rotted it (425).

Emile Zola, Nana

Chapter 3: Contaminating Spaces: Woman and Illness

I. Introduction

Like prostitution, illness, both physical and mental, is a common theme in the naturalist novel, oftentimes targeting women as its victims. For many of the same reasons that women in these novels often fall prey to prostitution, they also frequently suffer from debilitating illnesses. As a result of the strict social regulations that women around the turn of the twentieth century were expected to follow in order to be considered decent and the extreme pressure imposed on them to embody the pure and virginal female, many women were not able to live up to these expectations and consequently fell from the pedestal of feminine idealization. This fall, oftentimes initiated by a sexual experience and, therefore, the loss of virginity, frequently lead these less-than-perfect women to a life of prostitution. In many of the novels of this time we are able to see that society’s punishment of these women for their sexually deviant behavior does not stop with prostitution. In her book, Illness as Metaphor, Susan Sontag considers how illness and disease can be interpreted as a form of punishment, stating that “a disease could be a particularly appropriate and just punishment” (43). In this chapter, I will discuss Augusto D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero and Federico Gamboa’s Santa as naturalist novels where
illness is used to signify women’s punishment for their transgressive behavior. Illness therefore represents society’s way of dealing with women whose actions go against their accepted role in life. Illness eliminates both Juana Lucero and Santa, thus ending their “contamination” of society: Juana ultimately retreats into a world of insanity and Santa dies from cancer. In both cases, the effects of determinism, both environmental and biological, are explored throughout the novels.

Interestingly, illness strikes not only women who become sexually active of their own accord, such as Santa, but others, such as Juana Lucero, whose sexual purity is violently taken from her without her consent. The victimization of women seen in the naturalist novel therefore affects various types of women, not only those whose conscious actions go against socially acceptable behavior, but also inherently pure and virtuous women whose suffering begins as a result of simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The women afflicted by illness are not necessarily inherently good or bad, but rather females whose actions are, for one reason or another, seen as being socially unacceptable. Lorna Duffin discusses the connection between illness and women of the nineteenth century in the following way: “Generally female disorders were traced to one of two sources: first, women were ill because of their inherent female defectiveness, or put more simply, women were ill because they were women; and secondly, women became ill if they tried to do anything outside the female role clearly defined for them” (31). According to Duffin, the nineteenth-century woman is seen as the weaker sex who will be struck by illness because, precisely, she is weak, and even more so if she steps out of the acceptable boundaries established for her by the male-dominated society of which she is a part. This theory is indeed demonstrated in both Juana Lucero and Santa, as both
of these women become ill after becoming prostitutes, degradation that logically ends in madness or death. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar comment on the repressive social situation that surrounds the nineteenth-century woman and its effects: “It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (53). Indeed, studies have shown that “patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally” (53). Both Juana Lucero and Santa validate this statement, as these women suffer devastating illnesses as a result of the judgmental, hypocritical treatment they receive. In this chapter, I will discuss the circumstances under which these unfortunate women become ill and the resulting consequences of these illnesses.

II. Juana Lucero

In his book, Subjects of Crisis: Race and Gender as Disease in Latin America, Benigno Trigo discusses the connection often made during the nineteenth century between the woman’s body and crisis, which frequently takes shape in the form of hereditary infirmities (48-49). Trigo states that “separation from that body is the inexorable solution to the crisis that it ‘naturally’ brings about” (49-50). In Juana Lucero, and also in Santa, which will be discussed in the next section, we see the desire expressed by society to separate itself from a woman viewed to be not only sexually immoral, but consequently contagious as well. Even before Juana begins to show signs of mental illness, she has already been ostracized as a sort of leper when she is disposed of in the brothel. As was discussed in Chapter one, Juana is believed to have inherited some sort of sexual degeneracy from her mother Catalina and, as such, she must be separated from
mainstream society in order to prevent further contamination. Thus, the unfortunate girl lands in the brothel, a hotbed of corruption, an environment that certainly contributes to the illness she later develops.

As a result of her sexually active lifestyle, Juana is viewed even before becoming a prostitute as being mentally ill. The narrator describes her lover Arturo Velázquez’s calm reaction to Juana’s hysterical state in the following way: “Así la veía Velázquez a su regreso: pálida, con los ojos extraviados, diciendo cosas incoherentes, tan pronto riéndose como llorando. Él no se alarmaba, atribuyéndolo todo eso a los nervios; porque son muy marcados los efectos que produce en las mujeres la pérdida de su virginidad” (114). Velázquez finds it perfectly normal that Juana would be displaying this sort of behavior as a result of the fact that she has lost her virginity. Jann Matlock supports Velázquez’s reaction to Juana’s behavior, as she writes that some nineteenth-century “theorists of the body argued that sexual indulgence bred idiocy and mental illness” (5). This idea is certainly validated in Juana Lucero, as Juana appears to be completely sane and healthy before becoming sexually active and turning to prostitution. After becoming integrated into the brothel, Juana begins to show signs of a mental illness that grows progressively worse until it entirely claims her sanity. In their 1895 book entitled The Female Offender, Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero discuss the connection between prostitution and madness, as they describe a study in which they analyzed a group of one hundred Russian prostitutes and found that they were physically very attractive, but that in all of them, they found “the characteristics of madness as well as of criminality,” including “wild eyes and perturbed countenance” (100). The findings of Lombroso and Ferrero’s sociological study can be applied to fictional prostitutes such as
Juana Lucero, whose life in the brothel seems to contribute to her mental instability and eventual madness. Further Jann Matlock comments that prostitution was believed to cause “sickness in the body and mind” (5).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the importance of the space of the church in this novel. In this religious space, Juana not only realizes that she has lost the faith that she previously possessed, but also that she first shows symptoms of the split personality that she will display for the remainder of the novel. Her mental illness first begins to take hold of Juana in the church scene (172-73). The way Juana views the church is completely different here than the way in which she saw this religious space when she was a healthy, pure, and innocent young woman. Before beginning her life of prostitution, Juana saw the church as “[un] templo claro y alegre en la esbelta elegancia de su estilo gótico, iluminando radiosamente por altas ventanas ojivales…” (72). In her innocent and healthy state, the church is a happy and comforting place full of light, a place that contrasts sharply with the church that Juana enters with her prostitute friend Bibelot, a place that is “helado y solitario,” a space from which Juana is eager to flee: “¿Para qué permanecer más de rodillas en esa iglesia vacía y glacial…?” (173). The young woman is beginning to separate herself from “Juana,” the pure woman she had been, and embrace the fallen prostitute she has become. Here, she receives the name “Naná,” and fully accepts this change, believing that this name now suits her better than the name given her at birth. Nancy Saporta Sternbach comments on the significant name change that takes place within the church in the following way: “In this act, which significantly takes place within a church, Juana undergoes a metamorphosis from her identification with her mother […], the woman who named her Juana, to a father-based
one upon taking the name of the famous prostitute of literature also created by a male
novelist” (58). From this point on, Juana begins to identify more and more with her new
alter ego, as society has imposed on her the belief that, as a result of her actions, she
cannot hope to rehabilitate herself and be a decent woman.

Just prior to entering the church with her friend Bibelot, Juana pauses to look at
herself in a mirror, an action that is repeated throughout the novel at significant moments.
As discussed in chapter one, mirrors play an integral role in the novel, as Juana
repeatedly uses the mirror as a medium through which to communicate with her dead
mother. Interestingly, the mirror appears not only in the brothel and during contact with
her mother, but in other places as well. Just before the church scene described above, in
which Juana’s personality splits into two alternate personae, Juana looks into a mirror and
feels that she does not recognize her image: “En la continuada galería de espejos, Juana
se contempló infantilmente, pareciéndole que no era suya esa imagen que le asomaba al
paso” (169). Juana does not recognize this woman she has become, and feels she is no
longer the same person she once was. These disconcerting sentiments can be seen as
manifestations of the mental illness festering inside her that will make itself known in the
church.

Juana’s mental illness is expressed not only through the creation of “Naná,” but
also through hysterical behavior, a detail that, according to her gender, would be widely
accepted as the norm during this time. According to Lombroso and Ferrero, hysteria is
much more common in women than in men (218). Gilbert and Gubar point out, however,
that rather than fact, it was a common belief that hysteria was a “female disease” as a
result of the fact that it occurred “mainly among women in turn-of-the-century Vienna,
and because throughout the nineteenth century this mental illness, like many other 
nervous disorders, was thought to be caused by the female reproductive system” (53). Mental illness was not only observed in many women at the end of the nineteenth 
century, but actually expected of them, simply as a result of their gender (55). In 
Sigmund Freud’s work on psychoanalysis and hysteria, he perpetuates this idea that 
hysteria is a woman’s illness by focusing exclusively on cases involving women, such as 
his analysis of a woman he refers to as “Dora.”¹ Elaine Showalter further confirms that 
hysteria has traditionally been associated with women as she discusses the origin of the 
word, stating that it derives from “hystera,” which means “uterus” in Greek (15). Juana 
does indeed exhibit signs of hysteria at various times throughout the novel. For example, 
shortly after Juana finds out that Adalguisa, the madam of the brothel, will force her to 
abort the child she is carrying, her former lover Velázquez comes to visit and Juana 
becomes hysterical as she begs him to take her away from the world of prostitution: “No 
te incomodaré. Con mi trabajo mando a criar al niño y me quedo contigo…¡di que sí! 
¡di que sí, ah!” (163). Although the child Juana is carrying was conceived by an act of 
violence, it is the only remaining vestige of her life as “Juana la purisimita” and she is 
obviously desperate to hold onto the baby.

Juana eventually agrees to the abortion, feeling as if she has no choice in the 
matter, as she expresses that she feels abandoned by both God and Velázquez, and this 
decision proves to be fateful in terms of her mental health. Not only does the male-
dominated society in which she lives put her in the position of being an unmarried, 
pregnant prostitute, but it also forces her to end her pregnancy against her wishes, as she 
is needed as a prostitute and pregnant women are not lucrative in this profession.

Additionally, as Nancy Saporta Sternbach points out, Juana knows that “it is her lack of a male protector” that prevents her from being able to keep her child (75). The narrator states of Juana’s dismal situation: “Nadie será tan Quijote que cargue, por misericordia, con una prostituta encinta” (174). Juana realizes that she will not be able to return to her life as an honest woman and, therefore, will not find a man who is willing to care for her and her child. Only in her dreams is Juana permitted to give birth to her baby and live as she wishes she could: “En sueños se veía cosiendo junto a su cuna, trabajando como mujer honrada otra vez” (161). The patriarchal society of which she is a part does not allow women to be redeemed without the help of a man; Juana knows that, without masculine support and protection, it is impossible to have her child.

As the date of the abortion draws closer, Juana’s moments of hysteria grow more frequent and more intense, and she also begins to suffer hallucinations. In her bedroom days before the procedure, Juana imagines she hears “gritos lejanos de socorro, una vocecita aguda, que llama, que implora piedad: ‘¡Mamá…! ¡Mamá…!’” (175). Juana is obviously anguished and disturbed by the fact that she must abort her child, and these feelings manifest themselves in the form of mental illness, thus supporting Susan Sontag’s claim that in the nineteenth century disease was thought of as “a product of will…Disease is the will speaking through the body, a language for dramatizing the mental” (43-44). According to this line of thinking, Juana’s hallucinations are the dramatization of her mental anguish. The mental torment she is experiencing needs an outlet and is hence expressed in this disturbing manner. In her confused state, Juana actually begins to speak to the voice, which she imagines to be her unborn child, as she says, “¿Estás loco? ¿No sabes que eres hijo de la otra, de la que murió…? Ciertamente,
¡murió!” (emphasis in the text; 175). By identifying here with Naná instead of with the woman she used to be, Juana breaks all connection with herself as the mother of this unborn child, perhaps because she cannot bear responsibility for what she is about to do. The traumatic situation that Juana faces produces a split in her inner self. Naná is not the one who is about to let her child be killed, so she suits her better from now on. In his book *Difference and Pathology*, Sander L. Gilman comments upon this idea of double identities: “When […] the sense of order and control undergoes stress, when doubt is cast on the self’s ability to control the internalized world it has created for itself, an anxiety appears […] we project that anxiety onto the Other, externalizing our loss of control” (20). When Juana feels that she has no control over what is happening in her life, she takes on the persona of Naná, thus attempting to divorce herself from her problems.

Not only is Juana haunted by the imagined voice of the child in her womb, but she is also tortured by the image of her dead mother that continuously appears to her in the mirror. In this alternate world represented by the mirror, Juana sees her mother and is thus reminded of how far she has fallen. She is ashamed to face the one woman who gave her unconditional love and support, and so, acting as Naná, she rejects her mother. Just after she imagines hearing her child’s pitiful cry for help, Juana “ha creído ver pasar una sombra por delante del espejo” (176). Juana’s hallucinations continue as she believes she sees her mother’s figure reflected in the mirror. Where once Catalina’s appearances comforted her daughter in her times of loneliness and solitude, they now only serve to unnerve Juana and force her to recognize the fallen woman she has become. For this reason, Juana reacts to her mother by once again assuming the personality of Naná, as the narrator recounts: “¿Por qué la molesta siempre esa mujer extraña? ¿Qué tiene que hacer
con ella, Naná, la madre de Juana Lucero? ¡No, no quiero verla…! ¡Con qué derecho viene a mi cuarto…! Yo no permito que entre…” (175). Juana rejects Catalina because she cannot bear to be reminded of the pure young woman she was before. Her shame causes her to deny her mother and, in a sense, to deny herself or at least her former self, as well, as she proceeds to cover the mirror so as not to be haunted by any more images.

Even with the mirror concealed, Juana can still feel the ever-watchful eye of Catalina on her. When she finally looks into the mirror again, she sees not only Catalina, but herself as well: “¡Sí! ¡Allí está…trayendo a alguien de la mano […]! ¿Quién es, sino ella misma…? Es decir… ¡ella tampoco…!; ¡la otra…la que murió…la que tenía los ojos celestes y el cabello dorado…! Naná retrocede estupefacta… […] Sigue retrocediendo y la purisimita se aleja a su vez…Adiós…Adiós… […] Juana ha muerto…” (emphasis in the text; 176). Through the alternate space of the mirror, Juana looks into her past and sees a time when her mother was still alive and she was as yet unspoiled, appearing as a pure and innocent child. In his 1910 essay entitled “The Origin of Psychoanalysis,” Sigmund Freud writes: “Our hysterical patients suffer from reminiscences. Their symptoms are the remnants and the memory symbols of certain (traumatic) experiences…they cannot escape from the past and neglect present reality in its favor” (emphasis in the text; 7). Here, Juana’s hallucinations take her back to a point in time before she had suffered the traumatic experiences of her mother’s death and her own personal departure from the world of the socially acceptable following the sexual violation she suffers at the hands of Absalón. The symptoms of Juana’s mental illness, here demonstrated by what she sees in the mirror, reflect the victimization she has suffered from a society that not only condones the violent rape of a young virgin, but
finds a way to blame the incident on her by disposing of her in a brothel. Juana possesses the unconscious desire to live in the past, to forego her present situation and return to her happy, untainted childhood.

The death of “la purisimita” is made complete when Juana goes through with the abortion. As she returns to the brothel following the procedure, she goes back “a su existencia normal, sin ningún asco, como si hubiesen muerto con la criatura los pudores de Juana Lucero…” (181). Juana now feels that all traces of her old self are gone, and the only thing remaining is the prostitute Naná, whose lifestyle she now sees as perfectly normal. She has, in a sense, aborted herself and given birth to “Naná.” Indeed, she does not even respond to her friend Mercedes when she calls her Juana. Society has effectively stamped out all traces of Juana “la purisimita” with its sexual hypocrisy and intense judgmental scrutiny. For Juana, “the idea of having a child evoked a sense of well-being absent from the other relations in her life” (Saporta Sternbach 77). Thinking about becoming a mother to her unborn child is the one thing that seems to offer Juana some semblance of happiness and solace in her dismal world, and when that too is taken from her, it proves to be too much for the young woman to bear and she sinks quickly and irrevocably into madness. From that day forward, “las compañeras le notaron algunas extravagancias incomprensibles, achacándolas a su reciente operación” (181). Juana begins to act very differently and her friends notice this new strangeness with growing concern. In her eagerness to permanently divorce herself from her past in order to avoid the feelings of shame and disgrace she constantly experiences, Juana breaks the amulet given her by her mother on her deathbed in the hopes of consequently putting an end to Catalina’s ghostly appearances in her mirror. Unfortunately for Juana, Catalina
appears once again and this image is perhaps the most disturbing one yet: “Llegaba siempre con su vestido blanco, y en los brazos sostenía, apenas, una gran muñeca, un muñeco muy grande, triste como un hombre su cara de cera, arrastrando pesadamente su cuerpo lacio de muertecito” (182). Catalina now appears not only as a reminder of Juana’s loss of purity and innocence, but also to haunt her about the pregnancy she was forced to terminate, as here she seems to play the role of Juana’s conscience.

Juana’s mental illness spirals deeper and deeper out of control, as she repeatedly “respondía a una pregunta cosas absurdas” and suffers “frecuentes abandonos de la memoria o nerviosos accesos de risa” (186-87). She lives in a constant state of confusion, identifying almost always with “Naná,” and much of the time, she moves about the brothel as if she were in a trance. When the young man for whom Juana had experienced a pure and innocent love while staying with her aunt Loreto comes to the brothel and sees Juana, he does not recognize her, as she is quite a different person than the wholesome girl he once knew: “Es el mismo individuo y, sin embargo, ¡qué cambio! El alma ya no es la misma” (190). Her decadent, fast-paced life has not only changed Juana’s physical appearance, but it has altered her soul as well. Juana, acting as “Naná,” talks with the young man, who is referred to only as “el Ahijado,” and when he reveals that he had loved Juana, the sense of loss when she realizes what could have been is too great for the young prostitute to handle. She turns to alcohol in order to “desechar recuerdos inoportunos” and drinks herself into oblivion (193).

In the following days, Juana’s condition continues to worsen and the images she sees in the mirror continue to haunt her. During one episode, Juana becomes hysterical in the middle of a dance when she looks into the mirror in the room: “Rompió a gritar como
histérica: ‘¡Allí! ¡allí…! ¿Hasta aquí vienen a perseguirme…? ¡No! ¡No!’” (195).

Each time that Juana looks into the mirror, the reflection staring back at her, whether it be her mother, herself, or some other disturbing image, is something that upsets her greatly. Although she has quite successfully created an alter ego, “Naná,” the mirror prevents Juana from forgetting who she really is and forces her to experience again and again the shame and disgrace that follows her because of her profession. Juana can attempt to change who she is but she can neither hide from herself nor from the memory of her mother. She knows that her present situation is one that, were her mother still alive, would cause her indescribable pain and suffering. Knowledge of the disappointment that her life would cause her mother contributes to Juana’s descent into madness.

In her confused and anguished state, Juana is desperate to find some way to free herself from the mental torture she endures each and every time she sees her mother in the mirror. Therefore, she decides to visit the cemetery where Catalina is supposed to be buried and place flowers on her grave, confident that this gesture will put an end to Catalina’s disturbing appearances. Juana, in the persona of Naná, receives quite a shock in the graveyard when she cannot find Catalina’s grave, but instead stumbles upon her own, as she sees a headstone that holds “el nombre de la otra: Juana Lucero, de 20 años” (204). Here Juana realizes that Catalina’s corpse is not where it should be as her body has been exhumed and disposed of in a “human garbage dump” (Saporta Sternbach 79). As a result of her profession, Juana has, in a sense, become a disposable woman just like her mother, a fact that exemplifies strongly the tenets of biological determinism (Saporta Sternbach 79-80). Just as nobody cared about maintaining Catalina’s grave, so most likely the same will happen to Juana. “Naná” proceeds to place flowers on Juana’s grave,
as she thinks, “Era su piadosa ofrenda a la otra que fue ella misma, y si no fuese la purisimita, ¡qué importaba! Siempre sería una Juana Lucero que sufrió en sus veinte años lo que algunos no sufren en una existencia completa” (207). Here we see a commentary on the extreme suffering that this unfortunate young woman has endured. The only thing Juana wants from other people is their pity and compassion, something that she has never been able to acquire: “¡Piedad para mí que he sufrido tanto! ¡Para mí que soy una sombra de la que reposa tranquila!” (206). “Naná” realizes that her entire being has changed radically from her innocent days as Juana Lucero, and that through death, Juana’s torment has ended and she now experiences tranquility, while “Naná” continues to struggle with her inner demons. Death here represents peace and serenity, thus contrasting with “Naná’s” daily life and state of mind.

The scene in the graveyard brings about the final, and most disturbing, bout of madness discussed in the novel, as Juana’s mental illness takes a terrifying turn. Back at the brothel, “Naná” continues to be tormented by the mirror, in which she sees not only Catalina who speaks of Juana’s childhood, but also the dead people with whom she had come into contact in the graveyard. “Naná” becomes more and more hysterical as she cannot convince the apparitions to leave her alone, and finally “cayó de rodillas, sollozando, pidiendo el perdón de la muerte, si no podía obtener el olvido de su vida […] Se retorcía los brazos, se mesaba los cabellos, rasgaba sus ropas […] ¡Un poco de perdón y de olvido!” (210). In this very disconcerting scene, Juana’s mental illness reaches its climax as she realizes that perhaps death is the only true escape from her anguish. Juana finally takes matters into her own hands as she takes a gun and fires it at the mirror, thus attempting to finally free herself from her tormentors: “[A]ntes que puedan huir las
apariciones encerradas en el fondo del infinito del cristal, hace fuego sobre ellas, dos, tres veces…¡Por fin! ¡Ya nunca volverán a perseguirla!” (210). According to Vicente Urbistondo, Juana’s behavior has been interpreted by some critics as a suicidal action (28). Sigmund Freud states in his “A Note on the Unconscious” (1912) that “the mind of the hysterical patient is full of active yet unconscious ideas […] It is in fact the most striking character of the hysterical mind to be ruled by them” (48). Thus, Juana may have had thoughts of suicide in her mind at the time of the shooting, albeit perhaps not fully acknowledged, which prompted her to action. Perhaps Juana unconsciously feels that she must kill herself in order to defeat her inner demons. Lombroso and Ferrero comment that there is indeed a connection between suicide and mental illness, specifically hysteria, but that “suicide is more often attempted or simulated than put into execution” (225). Following this line of reason, it is quite possible that Juana’s action symbolically represents the desire to hurt or kill herself, but that the deed is not actually carried out. Jaime Concha remarks: “Después de su frustrado intento de suicidio, contemplamos su inmersión definitiva en la locura” (13). From this point on, there is no chance that Juana will emerge from the depths of madness.

After shooting the mirror, “Naná” expresses the desire to go to sleep and never be awakened, as she once again alludes to Juana’s death: “¿A quién buscan? ¿A la purisimita…? Esa murió hace mucho tiempo, y la enterraron, y la olvidaron. Yo soy la otra…¡Chit! ¡No me despierten! Estoy durmiendo en un lecho de flores y tengo un sueño muy bonito…¡No me despierten…!” (211). Juana can only achieve relief from her mental torment by retreating into an alternate world in which she is cut off completely from society and lives only in the fantasy world she has created in her mind. Juana will
never regain her sanity but, ironically, by becoming completely insane, she is at last able to find tranquility, as she finally manages to free herself from the society that has judged, exploited, and victimized her.

In order to separate itself from a woman seen as contagious and contaminating because of her sexual behavior, society ostracizes Juana Lucero by placing her in a brothel, where she consequently becomes a prostitute and develops a mental illness that will eventually claim her sanity. As a result of the fact that Juana is different from the model of feminine propriety because of her loss of virginity, she is seen as being sick and abnormal. The men and women of this judgmental society do not give second chances to women like this, but instead find ways to “purify” themselves by removing the source of contamination. In Juana Lucero, disposing of Juana in the brothel is the first step to social purification while the mental illness she develops completes the process, as Juana is effectively punished for her “abnormal” behavior. Not only is this fallen woman physically separated from mainstream society, but she is also rendered completely incapacitated by the end of the novel so that she can never again pose a threat to society. This pessimistic, hopeless ending is quite characteristic of naturalism as a whole, as naturalist characters are rarely afforded the opportunity or the means to rise out of debilitating circumstances. Juana’s situation demonstrates perfectly the basic tenets of the naturalist experimental novel, in which “man is merely an animal responding to environmental forces and drives over which he has no control and which he cannot understand” (Sedycias 78).
III. Santa

Much like Juana Lucero, the unfortunate protagonist of Federico Gamboa’s naturalist novel Santa is a fallen woman who, after becoming a prostitute, begins to suffer from a debilitating illness and is eventually eliminated from society when her disease claims her life. Santa’s illness, like that of Juana Lucero, could be interpreted as a form of punishment. In fact, Gamboa comments on this very idea of illness as punishment when he discusses the ways in which Santa attempts to get better and the subsequent lack of improvement: “Todo lo hizo Santa y su mal persistía, inatajable, insidioso, progresando, como castigo venido de lo alto por culpas endurecidas y que mina un organismo sometiéndolo a padecimientos crueles y sin cura” (317). Santa’s illness is seen as a punishment (“castigo venido de lo alto”) that she must endure without being granted the possibility of regaining her previous good health. Unlike Juana, Santa’s illness is physical and one that eventually takes her life. Santa actually suffers from two illnesses, alcoholism and cancer, which work together to drag her down into the lowest depths of degradation and shame. As in Juana Lucero, Benigno Trigo’s aforementioned views on the connections between contagion and the female body can be applied directly to Santa. As a result of losing her virginity to Marcelino, her first love, Santa is seen as socially abnormal and her corruption is viewed as contagious. Santa not only faces discrimination and judgment from society at large, but also from her own family, as they want nothing to do with her after learning of her dishonor; they feel they must separate themselves from her “diseased” body in order to preserve their family honor. Consequently, Santa’s mother and brothers want nothing more to do with the young woman and banish her from their home. Santa’s mother states that a young woman such
as her daughter, who can no longer be considered sexually untainted, “apesta cuanto la rodea y hay que rechazarla” (122). Even before becoming physically ill, Santa is seen as carrying an infectious disease based on her sexual activity that, if permitted to remain in contact with “pure” people, will contaminate everyone with whom she comes into contact. The seemingly harsh reaction of Santa’s family to her situation exemplifies perfectly the utmost importance placed by society on a woman’s sexual purity.

As in Juana Lucero, Santa’s first sexual experience results in a pregnancy that will not come to fruition. Unlike Juana, who is forced to abort her child, Santa suffers a spontaneous miscarriage outside the home of her mother and brothers. In both cases, these women do not get to reproduce, thus exemplifying Benigno Trigo’s assertion that in the nineteenth century there was believed to be a connection “between degeneration and the reproductive body of women” (67). By placing Juana and Santa’s situations in the ideological context of their time, it comes as no surprise that these two women, who are seen as diseased bodies socially speaking, are not permitted to reproduce. According to the idea of hereditary determinism, one of the basic tenets of naturalism, people’s fate is determined by the blood running through their veins. Therefore, by eliminating Juana and Santa’s pregnancies, the possibility of their illness being transmitted to their children, and consequently risking further danger to the nation, is avoided. Gabriela Nouzeilles comments on this situation of fruitless pregnancy by stating that in both Juana Lucero and Santa we have a case of “una sexualidad improductiva que corrompe la función social de la maternidad, y por lo tanto de la familia como fundamento biológico de la nación” (16). Woman’s natural social role of mother is subverted in these novels, as Juana and Santa are women who, far from being able to raise a family in a pure and wholesome
household, live in brothels, surrounded by unhealthy behaviors. This sexually charged, decadent lifestyle, so different from the lives mothers are expected to lead, certainly contributes to the development of both Juana and Santa’s illnesses. Nouzeilles goes on to discuss the great emphasis placed in nineteenth-century society on the health of women. According to late nineteenth-century physician Justino Ramos Mejía, woman was thought to be the hereditary nucleus of the family, as her genes were believed to influence more greatly the health of her children than the father’s hereditary makeup (Nouzeilles 42-43). The fact that neither Juana nor Santa is permitted to transmit their genes, which were seen as faulty and sexually corrupt, to a child exemplifies the nineteenth-century preoccupation with maintaining the health of future generations by first ensuring the health and positive physical and mental well-being of the mother. According to these standards, Juana Lucero and Santa clearly do not satisfy the requirements for suitable potential mothers.

Like Juana, Santa’s illness develops only after she enters the brothel. Before turning herself over to a life of decadence and depravity, Santa enjoys perfect physical health in the home she shares with her mother and brothers. The fact that Santa, like Juana, only suffers poor health after turning from an innocent life to one of vice lends strength to Susan Sontag’s aforementioned discussion on illness as a form of punishment. Although Santa eventually succumbs to her illness and dies, Gamboa offers her the possibility of redemption. Even before she begins to show signs of illness, Hipólito, the piano player at the brothel who is deeply in love with Santa, states that he has faith in her ability to be redeemed: “Santa se bañaría en el Jordán del arrepentimiento y saldría más blanca que los armiños más blancos…” (269). Hipo’s faith in Santa’s salvation conveys
a glimmer of hope to the reader, as he goes on to think about Santa leaving the brothel
and her life as a prostitute behind her. Santa is not yet ready, however, to leave behind
the hard-partying lifestyle to which she has grown accustomed, and so her personal
salvation will have to wait. Shortly after Hipo expresses his hopes for Santa’s future, the
young prostitute shows the first signs of the physical illness, cancer, that will eventually
claim her life: “Inopinadamente atacó a Santa un escalofrío agudo. Se echó a temblar sin
poder reprimirse…” (285). Hipo is immediately alarmed and concerns himself with
keeping her comfortable. While it cannot be said that most types of cancer are directly
caused by any environment, certainly the hard-partying lifestyle Santa leads at the
brothel, including her excessive drinking, cannot be beneficial for her health, and so we
can see Zola’s theories on environmental determinism at work here as we consider her
environment as an important contributing factor to Santa’s illness.

Although Santa’s illness is a physical one, it triggers mental disturbances as well,
as the fever Santa suffers causes her to experience disconcerting hallucinations, as in the
following instance: “Santa rompió a hablar, desvaríos de fiebre, reconstrucciones
trágicas de su niñez, trastocamientos de fechas y sucedidos…” (294). Santa experiences
delusions that transport her back to her childhood, thus exemplifying, in much the same
way as the aforementioned examples of Juana Lucero’s hallucinations, Freud’s theories
expressed in his “The Origin of Psychoanalysis,” which state that in a fit of hysteria,
patients will often find themselves tethered to the past and mentally relive experiences
and moments (7). Santa, like Juana, mentally travels back to a time in which she was still
a legitimate member of both society and her family, as she speaks to her brothers of
ordinary things: “¡Fabián! ¡Dame agua del pozo, que está helada!...¡Esteban!, no dejes
que Cosme galope al retinto...!” (295). Obviously, Santa’s expulsion from her maternal home is an experience that causes her a great deal of pain and here, in this altered state of mind brought on by her physical illness, she attempts to deny reality and relive a moment in which she still has a relationship with her family and has not yet been socially ostracized. In Illness as Metaphor, Susan Sontag states that in the nineteenth century, cancer was often thought to be brought on by an excess of emotions (52). Thus, in that context, the intense grief Santa has suffered as a result of her social situation could have contributed to her development of cancer.

Surrounded by the everyday debauchery of a whorehouse, Santa continues to decline physically as she suffers severe aches and pains and vomits blood. At this point, it is not yet known exactly what is wrong with the unfortunate young woman, but her symptoms are becoming more and more severe when she decides to leave the brothel to live with one of her lovers, Rubio, who “represents for Santa the alternative of a refined and sensitive lover who, in addition to economic stability, offers her independence from Elvira” (Martín-Flores 133). After leaving the brothel, Santa’s health improves for a time as she “renació a la vida en las mejores condiciones […] abandonando el burdel y sus antihigiénicas esclavitudes…” (296). Here, the effect of the brothel on Santa is apparent, as she begins to get better after freeing herself from the space of decadence. Santa’s temporary physical improvement seems to validate the medical advice given by doctors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for patients ill with diseases such as tuberculosis, which included “cheerful surroundings, isolation from stress […] and rest” (Sontag 64). Although Santa suffers from cancer and not tuberculosis, it is interesting to note that she does indeed experience a temporary reprieve from her agonizing symptoms.
when she relocates to a place that is less stressful and more wholesome than the brothel. Susan Sontag speaks of the connection between environment and disease when she likens “the metaphor of cancer” to the space of the city, which can be seen as “a place of abnormal, unnatural growth and extravagant, devouring, armored passions” (73). This description of the city can certainly apply to the space of the brothel, a place of unbridled lust, passion, and corruption. It is no coincidence that Santa’s youthful purity and innocence disintegrate as soon as she leaves her beautiful home in the country for the corruption of Mexico City. Elzbieta Sklodowska comments on this transition from country to city life: “Expulsada del jardín edénico de su aldea natal, Santa encontrará un refugio sui generis allá donde su cuerpo vicioso no será una disonancia – en la ciudad igualmente pecaminosa” (emphasis in the text; 123). Because of her sacrificed virginity, Santa’s tainted body no longer belongs in the pure and wholesome environment of her maternal home; hence, she is placed in an atmosphere where her lack of sexual purity will not set her apart. Places such as the city and the brothel can be likened to invasive diseases that seep into the very being of their inhabitants; this is precisely what has happened to Santa during her stay in the brothel. The cancer that invades her body is a metaphor for the destructive nature of the environment of which she is a part. When Santa is able to break free of the contaminating space of the brothel by becoming Rubio’s kept woman, she enjoys a brief taste of what the happy life of a decent woman would be like by becoming “dueña y señora de una casita, con criadas de ella y muebles de ella y todo de ella, en cuenta” (297). Santa’s happiness with Rubio is short-lived, however, as she quickly realizes that he does not hold any respect or genuine affection for her because of her debased status. Rubio is one of the “hombres egoístas y desalmados” created by
Gamboa: “[un hombre] que propicia y mantiene el degradante oficio de la prostitución, y que impide el arrepentimiento de aquellas que, por una u otra razón, se ven en la necesidad de practicarlo” (Ordiz 41-42).

Further worsening Santa’s situation and adding to the rapidity of her physical decline is the second disease that she develops as a result of her decadent life in the brothel and her desire to forget certain things: alcoholism. From the moment of her initiation into the brothel, Santa is surrounded by alcohol and often pressured to imbibe; in fact, during her very first interaction with Pepa, one of the madams, Santa is offered a drink: “¿Quieres beber un trago conmigo? […] toma, no seas tonta; esto es lo único que nos da fuerza para resistir a los desvelos… ¿No?...Bueno, ya te acostumbrarás” (77). In this scene, Santa demonstrates her still partially intact purity and naivete as she refuses the drink and is in no way eager to begin her life of vice. However, Pepa knows that Santa’s resolve will eventually disintegrate, and she will eventually turn to alcohol as a way to cope with her worries and despair. Pepa does indeed prove to be right, as Santa begins drinking heavily during her stay with Rubio to assuage the aches and pains she experiences as a result of the physical illness that is invading her body and to combat the unhappiness that she feels as a result of Rubio’s shabby treatment of her. Santa makes up her mind to get back at Rubio by sleeping with numerous other men, but she ends up hurting only herself for when Rubio discovers what she has been doing, he throws her out of his house. Santa is unwilling to play the part designated for her by society, that of lowly concubine who need not be treated as a human being, but rather appears solely as a nameless, faceless source of sexual satisfaction for men who find themselves unable to quench their sexual thirst with their wives. For her defiance, Santa must be punished.
She finds herself drunk and alone to battle the multiple illnesses from which she now suffers. Santa is caught in a downward spiral that will get much worse before it gets better. After her departure from Rubio’s house, she makes several attempts to find a job in brothels of much lower caliber than that to which she has become accustomed at Elvira’s house. Santa’s descent is described as being “rápido, devastador, [y] tremendo” (306). João Sedycias comments on Santa’s situation after her stint with Rubio: “[H]er life disintegrates. She descends from the most luxurious to the most squalid of brothels in Mexico City and ends up totally devastated, physically as well as psychologically” (61).

When Santa arrives at the first brothel and inquires about working there, the owner takes one look at her and replies: “¡Tú andas enfermita, créeme a mí, se te ve en el semblante, criatura! ... […] Vete a casita, no seas tonta […] y mañana me darás las gracias” (309). Not only is Santa extremely haggard and sickly in appearance from the cancer that is devouring her little by little, but she is also obviously under the influence of alcohol. The very institution that has caused Santa to become such an ill and wretched creature now rejects her because of her condition. The brothel, once a space that welcomed Santa and offered her acceptance and a respite from the judgmental and critical eyes of society, now becomes a space of rejection, as Santa is turned away. Her body has become even too contaminated and diseased to exist in the very place that bred her illnesses. In her ravaged and sickly state, Santa can no longer be a productive prostitute and hence does not represent economic gain for the brothel. After this sharp blow to her ego, Santa stumbles away in a drunken stupor, only to wake up the following morning with an unknown young man: “Santa jamás recordó la terminación de la noche
aquella. ¿Dónde se encontró al mocito entre cuyos brazos despertó después del mediodía siguiente, en un hotel pésimo...?” (311). Her companion is a sixteen-year old boy, who has had eyes for Santa for quite some time, but never had the courage to act on his feelings. These words of adoration are exactly what Santa longs to hear at this point when her self-esteem is suffering greatly and she feels the need to “establish an alliance that will allow her to recover herself as an active subject of desire” (Martín-Flores 134). Hence, she aggressively initiates a sexual relationship with the young student: “Echósele encima, como loba que era…” (314). Not only does Santa give herself freely and easily to the boy, but she performs the sexual act free of charge. Although Santa briefly enjoys herself during this sexual encounter, her contentment is very short-lived, as her illness grows steadily worse. Santa assumes she has syphilis, the “mal que aterroriza a las prostitutas” (316), but will later find out that it is cancer instead.

The stronger the physical pains associated with Santa’s illness, the more she drinks, thus sinking deeper and deeper into her dependency on alcohol. Throughout these difficult times, Hipólito is the one person who consistently stands by Santa and picks her up each time she falls. Because of the deep love Hipo feels for her, it is very difficult and painful for him to maintain such close contact with her, as she not only does not return his romantic feelings, but continues to break her promise to abandon the decadent life she is leading. He ultimately decides he must leave Santa to her own self-destructive devices, as he tells her, “Ni nunca me ha querido usted ni nunca me querrá […] Día a día vengo a sacarla a usted de estos hoteles de Satanás y usted se me queda, me promete que mañana se irá conmigo…y ese ‘mañana’ […] jamás amanece” (323). As difficult as it is for Hipo to abandon Santa in her sick and alcoholic state, he can no longer stand by and watch as
she destroys herself. Santa, in an alcohol-induced daze, responds to Hipo’s heartfelt goodbye by replying that she will see him the next day, not realizing the severity of what he has just said to her.

As discussed previously, the debilitating illnesses from which Santa suffers leave her little options for employment. Nevertheless, Santa is eventually able to find a job in a run-down brothel that is described as a “fementido burdel de a cincuenta centavos; nido de víboras, trono del hampa, albergue de delincuentes, fábrica de dolencias y alcázar de la patulea” (324). It is at this point in the novel when Santa truly hits rock-bottom, as she ends up in this unequivocally disgusting place, a space that is “deforme y disforme,” where her illnesses fester to the point where she knows that her death is imminent (324). In this environment, it is not only Santa’s diseased and infirm body that suffers, but her soul as well. When, after being admitted into the brothel by an old woman and asked for her name, Santa is informed that she will have to change it, the woman replies, “Pues desde hoy te llamas Loreto, ¡qué Santa ni qué tales!” (328). The one pure thing Santa still retains after all the degradations and tribulations she has suffered is her beautiful name that evokes the wholesome and untainted young woman she once was, and in an instant she loses this as well: “Y hasta el nombre encantador se ahogó en la ciénaga” (328). Like Juana Lucero, Santa is pressured to change her name. However, while Juana embraces her alter ego “Naná” and fully takes on the new persona, Santa never identifies with “Loreto,” as her time in this brothel is quite short-lived due to the rapidly growing intensity of her illness. Soon enough, Santa becomes so weak and full of pain that she is no longer able to do her job. She expresses her anguish to her clients: “¡No me toques, que me estoy muriendo!...¡Y no me acuses con la vieja, porque me correría y no tengo
adónde irme!...” (330). The desperate woman knows that she is approaching death, but also that she cannot afford to lose this job, as she has nowhere to go. When her physical illness grows so severe that she even stops drinking, Santa knows that she does not have much time left. Her only hope is that Hipólito will come to her, “amante y noble, sacaríala de ahí y la ayudaría a bien morir, la enterraría, y, sobre todo, la perdonaría” (331). Santa thinks only of being rescued from this horrible place by her one and only friend, Hipo.

Hipo does indeed come to Santa’s rescue and takes her home with him. At this point, Santa is at last free from the chains of prostitution, but her life is nearing its end. She finally begins to redeem herself, as she at last feels true love for Hipo: “¡Sí, Hipo, sí te quiero, te juro que sí te quiero! - le dijo Santa, al fin cautivada y de veras queriéndolo” (337). Hipo, Santa’s noble redeemer, is at last repaid for the constant love and support he has provided for her since her arrival at Elvira’s brothel. Santa sees a strange beauty in Hipo’s physically deformed face that she never before noticed, as they live together in a comfortable, platonic companionship. Hipo does have physical desires which he expresses to Santa, but her illness is so advanced that she cannot possibly perform sexually, as she cries out, “No puedo, Hipo, no puedo…¡Mejor mátame!...” (340). Since the day Santa met Hipo, her entire persona had been defined by her sexuality, but now that her life as a sexual being has been cut short due to her devastating illness, Santa has the opportunity to return to a pure and wholesome life: “Indudablemente fue aquella noche la más casta que nunca tuvo Santa, purificada por el dolor, que no le daba punto de sosiego, y saturada por el amor de Hipólito…” (341). Although Santa is in excruciating physical pain, her soul seems at last to have found some peace, as she is able to return to
a chaste lifestyle she has not enjoyed in a very long time. The inner peace she feels does not, however, take away the physical pain associated with her illness, as Santa’s health continues to decline. When a doctor comes to examine her and diagnoses terminal cancer, Hipo is determined to do everything in his power to save Santa. Although the doctor informs the devastated blind man that an operation to prolong Santa’s life is very risky and expensive, Hipo does not hesitate before setting up the date for the procedure. While Hipo is extremely distraught at Santa’s prognosis, the victim herself accepts the news in a very matter-of-fact way: “Estoy de muerte, ¿verdad? [...] ¡Dimelo, Hipo, dimelo, que yo ya me lo sé!... Me siento mala, como si me desarmaran a tirones para guardar mis huesos... Lo que no me gusta es que tú te pongas así, pues qué, ¿no sabes que todos hemos de morirnos?...” (349). Santa expresses no fear, as she has obviously accepted the fact that she is nearing death. Her only request of Hipo is that, upon her death, he bury her next to her mother in the cemetery of her hometown, thus allowing her to finally return to her beloved home in the countryside.

Shortly after this conversation between Santa and Hipo, Santa enters the hospital for her procedure and dies on the operating table. Death seems to be the final step in Santa’s process of redemption, as she is purified through passing from this world to the next: “After having subjected Santa to extreme suffering and a brutal cleansing of her sins, Gamboa turns his protagonist to death, to the transcendence of the actual world, as the only way out of her torment” (Sedycias 94). The abundant physical and emotional suffering endured by Santa throughout her life could only come to an end upon her death. The young woman died not a corrupt and lascivious prostitute, but a purified woman, redeemed through the wholesome love of a noble man. Upon Santa’s death, Hipo keeps
his word of burying Santa in her hometown, and faithfully visits her grave every day. Unlike most naturalist writers, Gamboa includes a religious scene at the end of the novel, as Hipo prays for “nosotros, los pecadores” at Santa’s final resting place (362). The final message of the novel is that “no hay pecado ni pecador a quien no perdone la infinita misericordia divina” (Ordiz 50). The reader is left with a sense of hope that Santa has moved on to a better place, free of the suffering and torment that plagued her throughout her life.

Although Santa, unlike Juana Lucero, is afforded a certain degree of personal redemption at the end of the novel, it is only through her death, and with the help of a man, that she can truly be purified. Because of the deviant sexual behavior that places both Santa and Juana outside of the realm of socially acceptable behavior, society sees them as dangerous to the dominant social order and must find ways to quarantine and quiet them, or eliminate them altogether, to eradicate the threat they pose. Both women are first disposed of in the only acceptable space for fallen women, the brothel. Consequently, in great part due to this socially-imposed decadent environment, Juana and Santa both become victims of destructive illnesses: Juana is left mentally crippled to the point of being unable to function normally and Santa becomes a degenerate alcoholic who also suffers from cancer and eventually dies. Through illness, which can certainly be seen here as a form of punishment, the separation between these women and the society that judges and rejects them is made complete. Illness provides the tool for punishing these women by rendering them helpless and incapable of ever again posing a threat to the social norm. By ridding itself of these kinds of contagious and contaminated
women, society is able to purify itself of elements they see as undesirable, while never expressing any regard for the young women whose lives they ruin along the way.
Chapter 4: Violence and Women: Spaces of Victimization

I. Introduction

In his book, The Subjection of Women (1869), philosopher and advocate of woman’s rights John Stuart Mill claims that “from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman…was found in a state of bondage to some man” (5). Mill states that that the social situation of women in nineteenth-century society is a form of slavery in which the female is dependent upon and subservient to the male (5). In Spanish America around the turn of the twentieth century, we can clearly see the ramifications of this patriarchal, male-dominated society, as women, both real and fictional, are repressed and forced to conform to the strict social roles assigned to them.

In the Spanish American naturalist novel, a disturbing consequence of this bias is often demonstrated in a violent manner. Brutal measures are frequently utilized by men to either ensure that women stay in their socially designated role or to punish them if they stray from acceptable behavior. In these novels, women are often the victims of violence, as they are taught that their place in society is that of the submissive female who should succumb at all times to male needs and desires. Therefore, in the naturalist novels I have selected for this chapter, we will see that Emile Zola’s theories of environmental
determinism play a central role, as the fate of the female protagonists is determined largely by the society in which they live. Interestingly enough, violence against women is not limited to a certain race or social class, but is rather “a particularly insidious crime against humanity” that can strike any woman regardless of her social position or ethnic background (French, Teays, and Purdy 2). Virtuous and untainted young women, as well as fallen prostitutes, are the objects of violence in these novels. In this chapter, I will examine the forms of violence inflicted upon the female protagonist and the spaces of violence in Augusto D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero (1902), Manuel Gálvez’s Nacha Regules (1919), and Javier de Viana’s Gaucha (1899). Whether a form of punishment for sins committed or an attempt by men to demonstrate their power and control, violence is expressed in extreme forms upon the female protagonists of these novels. In all three cases, the male victimizer, by flaunting his physical superiority, is able to keep intact the reigning patriarchal attitude that establishes the man as virile and powerful and the woman as submissive and compliant.

In the novels under study, men utilize violence to control and manipulate the women with whom they come into contact. The violence inflicted on the female protagonists in these novels ranges from sexual violations, such as rape, to other forms of physical abuse, such as battering. The female victims at times respond to the violence inflicted on them in a manner described by psychiatrist Natalie Shainess in her study Sweet Suffering: Woman as Victim as being masochistic, as they passively accept the abuse instead of actively fighting back (71). Although Shainess’s study does not focus

---

1 I have found Shainess’s observations often applicable to the situations of my protagonists. Shainess explains that masochistic tendencies are more common in women than in men “because women in our society bear such liabilities as inferior social and economic status, lesser biological strength, and reproductive handicaps that masochism is a special problem for them. Both women and men may have
specifically on the situations of nineteenth-century women, she does provide a “historical context of masochism” in which she states that “throughout much of history, women have lived as a devalued subgroup” (26-27). She proceeds to analyze the roots of masochism and trace its development through the centuries, including pertinent commentary on the situation of women in the nineteenth century with a discussion on John Stuart Mill. She states that “Mill’s description of relations between the sexes reads like a blueprint for the development of masochism” (31). She goes on to comment on the relationship between the nineteenth-century attitude, criticized by Mill, that expected women to be submissive to men at all costs, and the situation of women today:

“Acceptance of a heritage of brutality to women and wives has played a major formative part in shaping our modern societies. And women, traditionally, have responded to their subjection by accepting it and attempting to fit into the expected passive mold in order to avoid trouble” (31-32). This mindset is relevant to my discussion of the works selected for this chapter and has tragic consequences, as it contributes to the women’s acceptance of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Because of women’s subservient place in society during the turn of the twentieth century, they have no choice but to accept abuse in order to avoid further harm. The victimizers in the chosen novels are men who see it as their social right to exert their physical supremacy over any woman they please, and as such, expose them to a world of suffering and abuse. Sue Mansfield discusses Mill’s criticism of the nineteenth-century attitude that men are superior to women, and thus should act as their masters: “If men have no inherent right to rule other men, they also have no right to

early experiences that dispose them to masochistic behavior, but the cultural elements that continually reinforce masochistic behavior in women are largely absent for men” (3). By utilizing the term “masochist,” Shainess is not suggesting that these people “take pleasure in their suffering,” but rather that they simply do not know any other way to live […] they have developed an all-pervasive defensive style that is based on suffering…” (3).
rule women…” (xvi). Yet the works under examination in this chapter exemplify the attitude that Mill criticizes, as the men attempt to rule women by exercising physical force. In these cases, violence is at times used to ensure the submission of the “weaker” sex while at other times it is applied as punishment for actions that society deems inappropriate and sinful. Punishment should be regarded, according to Michel Foucault as “a complex social function” and he points out that, with punishment, “it is always the body that is at issue” (Discipline 23, 25). The body will be a focus of attention in the analyses that follow.

II. Juana Lucero

In Augusto D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero, the young protagonist Juana is repeatedly victimized throughout the book in multiple ways, some of which have already been discussed in previous chapters. Here, however, I would like to focus not on Juana’s status as a prostitute as in Chapter one, or on her debilitating illness, as in Chapter two, but rather on the various forms of violence that are inflicted on her by men. Not only is Juana the victim of a society that pushes her into prostitution and contributes greatly to her eventual plunge into madness, she is also the target of brutal sexual violence at the hands of a married man, as she is viciously raped in her own bedroom. After Juana’s mother Catalina dies, Juana is sent to live with her cruel aunt Loreto, who later goes out of town, sending Juana to live with her friend Pepa until she returns. Not only is Juana dealing with the death of her mother, but she also has to cope with being tossed from person to person and home to home like a piece of unwanted property. In Pepa’s home, Juana’s downfall from a pure and virginal young woman is initiated as a result of Pepa’s
husband Absalón’s sexual violation of her. Although men at times suffer some of the same violations as women, sexual violence is an area in which women are targeted almost exclusively (MacKinnon 44). In light of this fact, we can safely make the assertion that sexual violence is gender-specific as the victim is almost always a woman. Therefore, the fact that sexual violence in D’Halmar’s novel is limited to female characters, specifically the protagonist Juana, is quite realistic. Also realistic, according to Rodrigo Cánovas, is the appearance of violence in the Chilean household in general, as he states in his article “A cien años de Juana Lucero, de Augusto D’Halmar, guacha más que nunca” that “violencia y erotismo letal son las marcas de la casa chilena…” (35).

René Girard discusses the connection between sexuality and violence in his book _Violence and the Sacred_, affirming that sexuality can lead to violence just as violence can lead to sexuality (35). In _Juana Lucero_, Juana rebuffs her victimizer’s advances and he responds by later raping her. Girard states of this kind of behavior that “thwarted sexuality leads naturally to violence” (35). After being rejected by Juana, Absalón exercises his sexual lust in a violent manner, taking from her what she would not willingly give him.

When Juana enters Pepa and Absalón’s house, her rape and subsequent fall from the good graces of society seem inevitable. From her first day in the house, Absalón and his son Daniel circle Juana and clearly lust after her, a fact that makes her extremely uncomfortable as she attempts to rebuff and avoid the two men. Daniel and Absalón are both accustomed to sleeping with whomever they please, so it is only natural that they begin to approach Juana shortly after her arrival. At the beginning, Daniel insinuates himself by doing such things as brushing her foot with his own: “[P]or debajo de la mesa
sus pies se alargaban con deslizamientos de reptil, hasta coger entre ellos una pierna de Juana” (81). D’Halmar’s comparison of Daniel to a reptile suggests a certain criticism of his behavior, but at the same time it forecasts the inevitability of his success at violating her space.

From Daniel’s violating presence we turn to Juana’s violator, Daniel’s father Absalón, who treats Juana not only with disrespect but also with violence. He starts his inappropriate and damaging behavior by staring at Juana with “ojos que recorrían su cuerpo, haciéndole enrojecer la frente de vergüenza” (81). Juana does not welcome the attention of the older man. In fact, she does all she can to discourage him. Caught in a difficult situation in which she feels she cannot confide in Pepa for fear of her rejection, Juana is forced to silently endure the unwanted sexual advances of Absalón. It does not take long for Absalón to move past smoldering glances to more aggressive forms of physical abuse. When Juana informs him that if his behavior does not stop, she will tell his wife of his advances, Absalón “rió a morir y […] a espaldas de la señora dióle un agarrón en los pechos, tan repentina y tan salvaje, que no pudo contener un grito doloroso” (82). Absalón is obviously completely unfazed by Juana’s threat and responds by first humiliating the young woman when he laughs in her face and then physically attacking her. Absalón takes it upon himself to discipline Juana for minimizing his authority. Michel Foucault explains that punishment should have a didactic character, that it should “teach a lesson” (Discipline 113). Absalón seems to be doing exactly that, trying through violence to teach Juana not to question his authority. This incident is a power play for Absalón, as he feels the need to demonstrate his strength and supremacy over Juana. For Foucault, who is of course not speaking of reprehensible behavior such
as Absalón’s, punishment should be of a corrective nature, and that seems to be what Absalón is hoping to accomplish, to correct Juana’s behavior and force her to become submissive and docile (179).\(^2\) Pepa sees what Absalón is doing to Juana and accepts his behavior as habitual and inconsequential: “¡Ya está [Absalón] Caracuel con sus pesadeces!” (82). Shocked by Pepa’s indifference, Juana sadly realizes that she is truly alone and completely defenseless against Absalón. Her brief moment of rebellion against Absalón’s actions has been promptly squelched. As befits a naturalist novel, Juana’s fate and victimization are determined largely by the environment in which she lives. In her book-length study on Spanish American naturalism, Sabine Schlickers affirms that in Juana Lucero, the “autor implícito trata de presentar su historia como una degradación continua que se debe a la sociedad que la produce” (El lado oscuro 272).

From the time Absalón begins sexually harassing Juana, the young woman lives in a constant state of fear: “De noche su terror la mantenía en vela, con el oído puesto en los rumores de la casa” (82-83). During this period of sleeplessness and apprehension, she turns to the one person who can offer her comfort in this difficult time: her dead mother Catalina. As discussed in Chapters one and two, Juana communicates with Catalina through the mirror, an object that allows her to contact the spirit world. Up to this point, Catalina has consistently provided Juana with comfort and reassurance in her times of loneliness and despair, but when Juana goes to her mother with news of Absalón’s disturbing behavior, the dead woman seems to foresee the tragedy that awaits her daughter, as she looks sadly at Juana and will only utter these words: “¡Hija mía…!”

\(^2\)Along these lines, John Stuart Mill attests in his The Subjection of Women (1869) that “all women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will and government by self-control, but submission and yielding to the control of others” (15). This description of the nineteenth-century “ideal” woman fits with the view that Absalón has of the ways in which women should behave in order to be socially acceptable.
¡Pobre mi purisimita!” (emphasis in the text; 83). With that, Juana realizes that the worst is yet to come, and it does on the night Absalón rapes her. As is common in the naturalist novel, Juana is unable to change her fate by escaping her circumstances and must succumb to this ultimate act of violence. Nineteenth-century physician Richard von Krafft-Ebing defines rape as “coitus, outside of the marriage relation, with an adult, enforced by means of threats or violence; or with an adult in a condition of defencelessness or unconsciousness…” (526). Krafft-Ebing further comments on the moral character of men who commit this deplorable act by saying: “It is highly improbable that a man morally intact would commit this most brutal act” (526).

Throughout Juana Lucero, we can see that Absalón’s character is in fact immoral as he constantly sleeps with women other than his wife, and is not above preying on the young and innocent Juana, electing to rape her even though she rejects his advances.

On the night of the violation, Juana opts to stay home alone when everyone in the house goes out, a decision that she soon regrets: “Juana quiso gritar, decir que no la dejasen sola… Entonces tuvo el arrepentimiento de no haberlas acompañado” (92). Juana goes to bed, thinking of the young man, consistently referred to simply as “el Ahijado,” with whom she fell in love while living at her aunt Loreto’s house. Suddenly, she hears footsteps outside her room and reacts with horror when Absalón enters the room and approaches her bed. The young woman becomes panic-stricken and repeatedly begs for Absalón to leave her room. Instead, he sits on her bed and begins to tell her that he loves her. She reacts by asking him once again to leave. He proceeds to rape her: “Fue una lucha cobarde y breve; el miedo, debilitando las fuerzas de la niña, quebrantó su resistencia” (95). By using an adjective such as “cowardly” to describe Absalón’s
actions, the narrator expresses his disgust at this behavior. Juana is so frightened and shocked by what is happening that she loses the ability to fight back and accepts the situation with resignation. The struggle between Absalón and Juana is a power play in which Absalón easily triumphs. Laura E. Tanner comments that “acts of intimate violence […] transform human interaction into a struggle for power in which the victim is stripped of the ability to define and control his or her participation” (3). At no time is Juana in control in this sexual encounter. Absalón exerts his control by invading Juana’s innermost being, her body, but he also shows his complete dominance when he can enter her room without impediment. Juana literally has no place of safety in that house. It, and she, belong to the owners completely.

As the rape continues, Absalón is described as the “triunfador,” as he “alargaba envanecido el placer siempre nuevo de sentir entre sus brazos una virginidad agonizante…” (96). The emphasis on Juana’s virginity is important here, as it betrays both Absalón’s depraved predilection and society’s interest in a woman’s virginity. Juana’s nickname (la purisimita) will from now on serve as an ironic reminder of her loss of innocence. As John Stuart Mill states: “[T]he inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest” (emphasis in the text; 6). Absalón gets what he desires from Juana simply because he is physically stronger than she is. Mill goes on to discuss the unlikelihood of women in the nineteenth century rising up against the power of men, as male domination is the dominant social structure (14). Juana does initially fight Absalón at the beginning of the rape, but very quickly her rebellion turns to resignation as she surrenders to her victimizer. Natalie Shainess discusses a phenomenon called “passive masochism” that frequently affects women
which “often consists of silent submission to a difficult or painful situation” (71). Juana struggles against Absalón briefly during the sexual attack, but she soon gives up and becomes unresponsive, silently accepting the violation and submitting herself to the painful encounter: “Cierto que aquel cuerpo aletargado en el desmayo no respondía a sus sensaciones, aunque fuese con la palpitación rebelde del dolor” (96). Manuel Prendes comments on the prevalence of this kind of passive behavior on the part of the woman in the Spanish American naturalist novel, stating that “el asedio sexual por parte del varón acaba triunfando por la anulación de la voluntad femenina […] que entrega su cuerpo con poca o ninguna resistencia” (186). Juana’s behavior during the rape scene certainly exemplifies Prendes’s observation, as she allows Absalón to get his way.

During the rape, Juana seems to turn inward, as she attempts to find some way to deal with what is happening. Her body goes limp and it is almost as if she has died: “Cierto que era así como violar un cadáver” (96). Juana’s lack of response does not dissuade Absalón from his mission and he leaves her in the bed, broken and ravaged. The episode is described appropriately by the narrator as an “escena brutal” in which “Juana parecía haber muerto” (96). In Chapter one, I discussed the way in which Juana deals with her life in the brothel by retreating into herself and behaving as if she were in a trance much of the time. Her dazed state appears to be a defense mechanism that allows her to deal with the stressful and disturbing situation she faces. We now see that this behavior has its origin in the rape scene. Nancy Saporta Sternbach comments on Juana’s trance-like behavior during the rape, stating that although Juana does not die, a part of her does perish that night, as she suffers a spiritual death that helps her to “keep whatever remnant of her sanity that is left intact” (67). By disconnecting herself from her body and
the violation that is taking place, Juana attempts to protect herself in the only way she can. A part of Juana does indeed die during the rape, as it is here that the young woman loses her virginity and her innocence.

After the rape, Absalón does not say a word to Juana, instead opting to sneak from her room without making a sound “con deslizamientos furtivos de ladrón […] él cerró la puerta suavemente, alejándose en puntillas”, leaving Juana “de espaldas en el lecho revuelto, sin conciencia de sí misma…” (96). Absalón is indeed a “robber” as he has just stolen something very valuable from the young woman: her virginity. At first Juana does not seem to understand fully what has happened, but as the realization of her violation slowly dawns on her, she becomes very distraught and begins to cry. On the morning after the rape, Juana makes an interesting discovery: her mirror has been shattered, a fact that can be interpreted in several ways. The mirror represents Juana’s connection with her past, with her mother, and with the pure and virginal girl she once was. As a result of Absalón’s violation, the image of this untouched young girl has been shattered and no longer exists. Just like the mirror, Juana’s body is broken and splintered. Dieter Oelker comments on the symbolism of the mirror being broken during Juana’s rape when he states that it is associated with the “despojo de la virginidad” (19). The device that allows Juana to communicate with her mother has been destroyed, but Juana is relieved by this: “[N]o lamentaba esta pérdida porque la hacía temblar la idea de presentarse, después de la caída, ante el rostro severo de la muerta…” (97). Instead of lamenting over the loss of the mirror, which is her only connection to her mother, Juana instead feels a sense of relief that she will not have to face the dead woman in her impure state (Saporta Sternbach 67). Juana seems to have internalized society’s prejudices

110
regarding her status as a fallen woman and now sees herself as society sees her. Saporta Sternbach observes that Juana begins here to think of her mother as a “severe, punishing and judgmental deity” (67). Juana does not want to disappoint her mother, whose last piece of advice was that she should retain her purity above all else.

In the days following the rape, Juana attempts to keep her distance from Absalón, screaming when he comes to her door at night in order to protect herself from another encounter. In her essay, “Surviving Sexual Violence”, Susan J. Brison states that “all women’s lives are restricted by sexual violence” (23). After the rape, Juana’s actions are certainly limited, as she virtually barricades herself in her room by placing furniture in front of the door to keep Absalón away. Juana feels hatred towards this “viejo lascivo” and cannot comprehend how this man who is a husband and a father can commit such a deplorable act (98). Her bedroom has been transformed from a space of comfort and safety to a place that “se le había hecho antipático” (99). Juana longs not only to leave her bedroom in the Caracuel household, but also to escape from the entire family. Unfortunately, when she is finally able to break free from this place, she ends up in a space that continues to exploit her until the novel’s end: the brothel.

Juana’s flight to the brothel is one of the devastating consequences of Absalón’s sexual violation of her, but it is not the only one. In her book *Maternity, Mortality, and the Literature of Madness*, Marilyn Yalom makes the statement that a possible consequence of rape is madness (105). This affirmation is particularly apt when we consider a novel such as *Juana Lucero*, in which the female protagonist loses her virginity by being raped at a young age, an event that ultimately sends her to the brothel where she completely loses her sanity. Rape may not be seen as the direct cause for Juana’s descent
into madness, but it is certainly the catalyst for her downfall into the world of prostitution that ultimately results in total mental incapacitation. Additionally, the rape causes Juana to feel disgust for her own body: “[Q]uisiera escaparse de aquel cuerpo desflorado y puerco…” (96). The words utilized here to describe Juana’s thoughts about her body reveal an interesting association; most likely, her body is “repulsive” because of her loss of virginity. The sexual violation Juana suffers causes her to experience a sense of self-loathing and the desire to distance herself from the person who was raped; she wants to escape from her own skin (Saporta Sternbach 66). Eventually, Juana does accomplish this goal to some extent when she creates the alternate personality “Naná” after becoming a prostitute.

The suffering to which Juana is subjected as a result of her experience as a rape victim is tremendous. Not only does she lose respect for herself and her body, but she finds herself thrown into a world of alcohol and prostitution and eventually loses her sanity. The male-dominated society that surrounds her greatly contributes to the situation where rape is almost a certainty, and therefore to her entire downfall. Nobody in the novel, neither man nor woman, lifts a hand to help Juana; she is truly alone in a world where women find themselves useful only for child-bearing and for satisfying the sexual urges of men. Natalie Shainess attests that “the victim of a violent crime […] is riddled with fear and overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness and lack of control” (126). Juana’s reaction to the violent crime of which she is a victim fits Shainess’s description perfectly, as she constantly fears that she will be victimized again and fully understands that nobody, including herself, can prevent the situation from repeating itself. Susan J. Brison confirms that rape victims often fear another violation because “if a victim could
not have anticipated an attack, she can have no assurance that she will be able to avoid one in the future” (18). For this reason, Juana feels extremely vulnerable as she sits awake at night and hopes she will not be raped again. The young woman manages to avoid Absalón and eventually leaves the Caracuel household, but her status as victim is far from over, as she is now pregnant and thus marked visibly by her rape. The intervening events, which were described in Chapter one, eventually lead her to the brothel, where she will have a tragic end.

III. Nacha Regules

Like D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero, Nacha Regules also presents us with a female protagonist who not only suffers as the forced victim of prostitution, but is also the target of physical violence. In Juana Lucero, the protagonist is a virtuous young woman who is still untouched sexually when she becomes the victim of violence. In Gálvez’s novel, however, Nacha is a prostitute who, despite her best efforts to stay away from the profession, repeatedly falls back into it as a result of her financial situation. At the time of their violent victimization, Juana, an innocent virgin, and Nacha, a prostitute, seem to have little in common save their status as victims, which proves the point that violence against women does not have a certain type of female as its target; her gender alone makes her a victim. Unlike Juana, Nacha is not raped, but she is repeatedly physically, emotionally, and verbally abused by her lover, Pampa Arnedo, for whom she leaves the brothel.\(^3\) In an attempt to dominate her, Pampa frequently resorts to violent measures.

\(^3\)Although Nacha is not sexually violated in Nacha Regules, we do see her first sexual experience described in Gálvez’s earlier novel El mal metafísico described in rather brutal terms that connote, if not rape, at least some level of sexual violation. While this description of her loss of virginity is important, El
While in *Juana Lucero* the only space of violence is Pepa and Absalón’s house, in *Nacha Regules* there are several spaces of violence, the first of these being the cabaret. As the novel opens, the reader is immediately made aware of the abusive relationship that exists between Nacha and Pampa. The novel commences in a cabaret where the patrons witness a sensual tango while Pampa cruelly pressures Nacha to partake in the dance against her wishes: “El dueño de Nacha se levantó para bailar con ella. La infeliz resistía, y él, tomándola de los brazos con violencia, la plantó en medio de la sala” (9). Mill states that the relationship between men and women in the nineteenth century is much like that which exists between a master and a slave, with women being expected to serve men and please them at all costs (5). In this early interaction between Nacha and Pampa, he is explicitly described as being Nacha’s “owner”; he plays the role of master in their relationship and expects his “slave” – in fact, Luis A. Jiménez refers to Nacha as an “obrera esclavizada” – to do whatever he commands of her (66). When she resists him, he, like the aforementioned Absalón in *Juana Lucero*, resorts to violence.

Pampa forces Nacha onto the dance floor, but when she does not stay long, Pampa’s rage is ignited. He begins to speak forcefully to her and demonstrates his extreme rage: “hablaba adelantando la mandíbula inferior, apretando los dientes y haciendo, con los labios, muecas de enojo y desprecio” (10). Pampa then threatens the frightened girl openly when he says, “¡Me las vas a pagar esta noche!” (10). Nacha is completely at Pampa’s mercy and his menacing words make it clear that inflicting violence on Nacha is nothing out of the ordinary for this man. He is appalled that she has the nerve to stand up to him in public and question his authority. After all, the narrator

mal metafísico is not under study in this chapter, therefore, I will focus solely on the violence inflicted on Nacha in *Nacha Regules*. 

114
comments on the treatment of “[hombres] que abundan entre la gente porteña” towards women in the following way: “A las mujeres las tratan sin delicadeza, ni ternura, ni simpatía humana” (10). But women succumb anyway, as the narrator observes: “[S]in embargo, las mujeres se ligan fuertemente a ellos, tal vez porque les consideran ‘muy machos’, […] y porque la violencia del instinto es tan grande en ellos que les hacen inagotables en el amor” (10). According to Pampa, and society in general, it is the man’s duty to rule over the woman at all costs, even if he must use violent measures; this is expressed as the right given by his gender. This way of thinking, the ideology that men are superior to women and are expected to rule over them like masters, is precisely what John Stuart Mill was fighting against as he sought to liberate women from this state of bondage. The situation is obviously acceptable for the man who is in charge, but Mill seeks to free oppressed women from this suffering. He states: “The yoke is naturally and necessarily humiliating to all persons, except the one who is on the throne” (10). In this case, Pampa is enjoying his power over Nacha, while she suffers not only humiliation and shame, but violence as well.

In the cabaret, Pampa continues to abuse Nacha, threatening her and becoming more and more angry when he sees that she is crying. When one of Pampa’s friends asks Nacha to dance and she refuses, Pampa’s anger reaches a fever pitch, and he pulls her from her chair and violently thrusts her towards the dance floor. He pushes her with such force that she falls to the floor. Luckily for Nacha, her future redeemer, Fernando Monsalvat, is at the cabaret and witnesses Pampa’s brutality. He stands up for Nacha and admonishes Pampa for his abusive behavior. Unlike Juana Lucero, Nacha has a protector, and Pampa is immediately intimidated by Monsalvat’s strong presence and
steady gaze. However, his bravado returns when he calls Nacha over to meet Monsalvat. In an arrogant manner, he asks Nacha to describe for Monsalvat the life she shares with Pampa, confident that she will answer that she is happy with him. Nacha is so subservient to Pampa that she will not even look at Monsalvat, instead fixing her gaze solely on her lover. Monsalvat is saddened by this obvious intimidation on Pampa’s part, and the latter leads Nacha into saying exactly what he wants her to say: “Nacha comprendió que debía declararse satisfecha. De otro modo, el enojo del patotero contra el intruso rebotaría hacia ella. Y soltóse a hablar, a borbollones, casi incoherente” (13). Nacha goes on to lie to Monsalvat, telling him that she lives in a wonderful house with servants and she has everything she needs to be quite content with her life. At this point, Monsalvat realizes there is nothing else he can do in the cabaret and leaves, while Nacha sadly watches his departure.

The second space of violence in the novel is the home Nacha shares with Pampa. She, like Juana, lives in fear of a man with whom she resides. When Nacha and Pampa return home from the cabaret, Pampa goes to bed without saying a word to her. Nacha stays awake, unable to sleep because of this “mudez de indio” (28). Not only is Nacha afraid of Pampa because of his violent tendencies, but she is also afraid of “ser abandonada y tener que refugiarse en ‘la vida’” (28). It is precisely this fear that keeps her with an abusive man who continuously mistreats her. In a society where a fallen woman has few options for a decent life, Nacha must choose between evils and she elects Pampa’s physical and verbal abuse over the sexual exploitation of the brothel as the lesser of the two. However, Nacha’s home is not a space of comfort and tranquility, but rather one of apprehension, fear, and hatred: “Ella odiaba al Pampa, pero no podí
dejarlo. La insultaba, la abofeteaba; y ella, más sumisa que nunca” (28-29). Nacha obviously feels no love for this man, but still she tolerates his abuse simply because in her eyes it is better than the alternative. Nacha would rather silently endure Pampa’s brutality than confront him about his behavior and risk further abuse. She despises him but, realizing that she cannot afford to stand up to him, she silently accepts his violent behavior.

While waiting for Pampa to awaken the morning after the scene in the cabaret, Nacha paces the house anxiously and fearfully, dreading the moment when he might scold her for her behavior the night before, beat her, or, worst of all, kick her out of the house. When Pampa finally makes his entrance, he watches Nacha “con una dura sonrisa perversa, complaciéndose en turbarla y afligirla” (31). Pampa exhibits sadistic behavior, as he abuses Nacha verbally and derives pleasure from making her anxious, nervous, and fearful. When he finally speaks to her, he uses violent language as he screams at her for making a fool out of him the night before and threatens to beat her. She begs his forgiveness and pleads with him to stop screaming. Nacha apologizes to Pampa, even though she believes she has done nothing wrong. According to Shainess, this willingness to accept the blame is another sign of masochistic behavior: “The masochist is quick to apologize because she assumes she is always in the wrong…The masochist chooses self-punishment in the belief that it will ward off a worse fate” (8). By submitting to Pampa and allowing him to scream at her and blame her for everything, Nacha hopes to avoid a scene of physical violence. In this case, she does escape without a beating, but the emotional scars continue to deepen.
Following the vicious argument, Pampa leaves the house, much to Nacha’s relief, and she receives a surprise visit from Monsalvat. He is determined to save her from her oppressive life, but she, while affirming that Pampa abuses her, explains that she is not eager to leave him: “Yo lo quiero al Pampa. ¡Ahí tiene lo que somos las mujeres! Me trata mal…Y bueno: yo no he de abandonarlo por cualquier monigote que se presente” (33-34). Nacha believes that because she is a woman, it is natural that she endure mistreatment at the hands of a male. She has internalized society’s abusive hierarchy and has traded her self-respect and sense of worth for the stability of living with a man, regardless of how dreadful he is. She stubbornly refuses to accept Monsalvat’s compassion and desire to help at first, but little by little, she begins to open up to the noble stranger, and tells him the story of how poverty and desperation pushed her into the world of prostitution. Pampa offered her a respite from life in the brothel and she accepted it. Nacha admits to Monsalvat that she would like to become a decent woman, but that “mi destino es ser una mala mujer” (39), a remark befitting of a naturalist novel, where determinism is the reigning principle. Just when she seems to be on the verge of accepting Monsalvat’s help, Nacha abruptly changes her mind, realizing she is not ready to leave Pampa and vehemently requests that Monsalvat leave her house: “¡No, no, no! ¡No puede ser! ¡Es una locura! Váyase, váyase ahora mismo […] He estado loca” (40). Nacha is so afraid of change and so certain of her deserved mistreatment that it will be very difficult for her to break the “sinister hold” that Pampa has over her (Lichtblau 74).

After Monsalvat leaves, Nacha begins to regret the harshness with which she treated him and wonders if she can indeed free herself from Pampa’s violent grasp and start her life over with her new friend’s help. She garners the strength to confront Pampa.
in front of a group of his friends, and tell him that she knows he has another lover. He is astonished and reacts with the anger that has become characteristic of him: “[I]ba a abofetear a Nacha, que se llevó las manos a la cara. Estaba hecho una furia” (62). As demonstrated by Pampa’s reaction, on the rare occasion that Nacha dares to confront him, his natural instinct is to abuse her physically. He seeks to punish her for her insolence. Foucault explains that punishment should be used in a corrective manner and “to teach a lesson,” ideas that were relevant to Absalón’s behavior in Juana Lucero and that can certainly be applied here to Pampa and Nacha’s situation (Discipline 113, 179). Pampa is in the habit of “correcting” behavior he sees as unacceptable with physical violence, in the hopes that he will teach Nacha how to behave. Women who stand up to men are seen as dangerous to the dominating social order, and they must be controlled. A popular dichotomy of the nineteenth century affirms that women are seen as either “dependent on or dangerous to men” (Duffin 31). If a woman is not subservient and submissive to a man, general opinion is that she is dangerous and should be socially restrained.

On this occasion when Nacha confronts Pampa concerning his other lover, he threatens to strike her. He is not angry that Nacha knows about his sexual exploits, but rather that she has the nerve to humiliate him in front of his friends. Soon enough, Pampa comes to the realization that he does not want to be with Nacha anymore and asks her to leave the next day: “La sirvienta le entregó unas líneas de Arnedo. Decíale que no quería verla un minuto más en la casa, que podía irse con Monsalvat o con quien fuese […] Le incluía un billete de cien pesos” (65). The very thing that Nacha had dreaded for so long had finally happened and, rather than sadness or fear, she exhibits happiness to be finished with Pampa and to be able to move on to what she hopes will be a more
respectable life. She returns the money and happily leaves the house. The fact that
Nacha has no means of support, but still chooses not to accept Pampa’s money
demonstrates that she is serious about making an effort to change her life and become a
“decent” woman; she wishes to break every connection, even the financial one, that she
has with this man who has victimized her. Nacha has endured a great deal of suffering
and now feels infinitely lucky that Pampa gives her the opportunity to leave. According
to Wanda Teays, oftentimes battered women are terrified to leave their abuser because, in
rebelling against him by leaving him, they possibly “face even greater violence or death”
(58). In Nacha’s situation, although she desires to leave him, it is Pampa who ultimately
commands her to leave, effectively giving her the freedom she so desperately needs.
Although Nacha again falls into prostitution after leaving Pampa, as is detailed in Chapter
one, she is ultimately redeemed by Monsalvat when the two marry and live happily
together. By the time they finally get together, Monsalvat has been financially ruined and
is in poor health as a result of his unrelenting search for Nacha. Although he no longer
holds the social position he had earlier, by marrying Nacha, he shows his nobility of
purpose, as he is “risking further alienation from the middle- and upper-class society with
which he is still outwardly linked” (Lichtblau 79). Social appearances do not matter to
Monsalvat, who is presented as the polar opposite of Pampa, as his love for Nacha is
much more important to him; therefore, he is willing to sacrifice his social status to be
with her.

Unlike Juana Lucero, Nacha Regules has an optimistic ending for the female
protagonist who has suffered so much in her young life. Joseph E. Puente states that the
ending of the novel is unconventional for a naturalist novel in that “el determinismo de
los personajes es vencido por la voluntad libre de éstos” (54-55). Although Gálvez is considered a naturalist author, at times he demonstrates that he does not fully embrace Zola’s theories of determinism, as he allows his characters to exercise free will. Nacha is saved in the end; as a result of the compassion and kindness of Fernando Monsalvat, her experience as the victim of violence has ended. Although Nacha Regules ends happily, this does not erase the fact that both Juana and Nacha are the victims of physical violence. They are both victimized by men who see it as their social right to reign over them, resorting to violence when necessary, simply because they are females without options. Out of a desire to protect the patriarchal society of which they are a part, men exercise violence on women as a way to keep the system pure. Woman must be kept in her socially-determined place at whatever cost. Both Juana and Nacha are victimized in the very homes in which they live, as their victimizers take away from them the one space that should offer comfort and safety and transform it into a place of fear and repression.

IV. Gaucha

The presence and central role of violence and its effect on women in Javier de Viana’s Gaucha (1899) is summed up quite effectively by John F. Garganigo when he states that the protagonist, who is known simply as Juana, is a “misfit in a society dominated by violence” who “has no place to grow and subsequently must die” (Javier 64). Like Juana Lucero and Nacha Regules, Gaucha’s protagonist is an unfortunate young woman who becomes the victim of an unjust and violent society. Perhaps even more so than Juana Lucero and Nacha Regules, Viana’s novel demonstrates the tragic
consequences of violence inflicted on women, as Gaucha’s Juana is the only one of the three women discussed in this chapter who actually dies as a result of her victimization. As in Juana Lucero, the fate of Gaucha’s protagonist is set into motion with the death of her mother. The young woman, much like Juana Lucero, suffers from this loss, for her mother worries right up to the moment of her death about finding a home for her daughter: “Poco antes de expirar, y en medio del infinito dolor de dejar huérfana y abandonada a su única hija, la pobre mujer se acordó de Zoilo, el hermano ingrato y desamorado que […] había envejecido en pagos lejanos sin haberse acordado jamás de sus parientes” (19-20). Although Juana’s mother is obviously not close to her brother, she has no other family left to care for her daughter, and – much like Juana Lucero’s mother Catalina – the dying woman reaches out to her brother, the only possible person who can serve as guardian to her daughter.

Like Juana Lucero, Juana finds herself dealing not only with the death of her mother, but also forced to live with a relative she barely knows and with whom she does not feel at ease. While Juana Lucero is taken in by her cold and unfeeling aunt Loreto, Juana goes to live with her uncle Zoilo, a taciturn, gruff and aloof gaucho who lives all alone and prefers it that way. His very name, a word that is literally describes a “crítico presumido y maligno” (García-Pelayo y Gross 1086), has obvious negative connotations and foreshadows the fact that Zoilo will not be Juana’s saviour. The old gaucho lives in Gutiérrez, a remote place that is “cueva de perdularios, refugio de bandoleros y desesperación de policías” (13). In typical gaucho fashion, Zoilo has separated himself from mainstream society, lives off the land and enjoys communing with nature. He

---

4From this point forward, I will refer to the protagonist of Juana Lucero as “Juana Lucero” and to the protagonist of Gaucha as simply “Juana” to avoid confusion.
exemplifies the characteristics of the gaucho expressed by John F. Garganigo in his book-length study of the legendary figure in literature: “Careció de un concepto de la vida familiar; era ‘guacho’, o hijo de nadie […] Fuera de sí mismo no reconoció autoridad alguna, tendiendo a llevar una vida solitaria al margen de la sociedad” (10). Zoilo is certainly not a family man; he has in fact virtually cut off all relations with his relatives, thus he is far from enthusiastic about opening his home to his niece, but reluctantly agrees. As in Juana Lucero, Juana lives in a home that is not her own and that will become the setting for the violent sexual violation she suffers at the hands of the cruel gaucho Lorenzo.

In her article “La novelística naturalista-criollista uruguaya: Beba de Carlos Reyles y Gaucha, Campo y Gurí de Javier de Viana,” Sabine Schlickers discusses the way in which “a mediados de los años 90 del siglo XIX, la novelística uruguaya experimentó una suerte de ‘autoctonización’ que puede entenderse como reacción a la nota cosmopolita y aristocrática de la novela hispanoamericana de fin de siglo, muchas veces situada en un ambiente decadente en Europa” (177). This interest in maintaining one’s own identity and writing about one’s own land and people as a way in which to combat the process of modernization that envelops Spanish America in the nineteenth century is seen clearly in Gaucha, specifically in the characterizations of the gauchos Zoilo and Lorenzo, who will be dealt with later in the chapter. Both of these men live off the land, do not answer to anybody but themselves, have no respect for authority, and live as far from modern society as possible. For example, Juana’s new guardian Zoilo is unrefined and almost barbaric; he exudes an animal-like quality and is often described by the narrator as being like a beast: “[T]rabajaba en una admirable conformidad e
indiferencia de bestia […] don Zoilo tenía un aspecto feroz de bestia huraña y peligrosa” (16-17). On the day of her departure, Juana bids farewell to her childhood friend Lucio, who John F. Garganigo characterizes as “la figura sensitiva del joven gaúcho,” and sets out with Zoilo for the ramshackle, dilapidated old house that will be her new home (El perfil 38). Juana settles into her new life with Zoilo, cooking and cleaning for the reticent old man. Zoilo is virtually the only human being with whom Juana has any contact as a result of her isolated surroundings, “altas y ásperas sierras, por una parte, campos bajos, salpicados de ‘bañados’ intransitables… dilatadas selvas de paja brava…” (13). The location of Zoilo and Juana’s home is far from conducive to making friends and entertaining visitors. Juana’s life is monotonous and dreary and she is therefore thrilled when, after several years, Lucio comes to visit her. Lucio is happy to see Juana and it quickly becomes obvious that the young gaúcho’s feelings for her are not purely platonic: “Juana se le aparecía más bella, más bondadosa, más pura y más tierna; su voz más suave y armoniosa…” (42). This quotation serves to show the emphasis placed on the purity of the young woman, and prefigures her eventual fall from that state. Much like Juana Lucero, Juana is presented as a chaste and defenseless adolescent, a characterization that makes the sexual violence that will be inflicted on her all the more tragic. Also, like D’Halmar’s protagonist, Juana experiences a wholesome and pure love for a young man who returns her sentiments. However, unlike Juana Lucero, who is never given the opportunity to explore the love she feels for “el Ahijado”, the young man she met while staying at her aunt Loreto’s house, Juana and Lucio are permitted to begin a pure courtship that, unfortunately, will end all too quickly in violence and tragedy.
The multiple sexual violations that Juana suffers and her subsequent death are initiated by Lorenzo, a cruel, strong, and violent gaucho who serves as the antithesis to the weaker, kinder, and more sensitive Lucio. For a time, it truly seems that Juana has a chance at happiness with Lucio, as they reconnect on a romantic level after their two-year separation. After the suffering Juana has endured as a result of her mother’s death and her lonely life with Zoilo, she welcomes the loving words that are exchanged between her and Lucio. She expresses her newfound happiness in the following way: “[H]e sufrido mucho; pero cada vez que me he hallado muy desesperada, he sentido como una cosa que me salía de adentro, como un orgullo que me levantaba. Ya ve, ¡ahora estoy tan contenta!” (56). They profess their love for each other and begin to plan a future together. In these moments of tenderness, Juana experiences a happiness and contentment that she has never known. However, in spite of the love Juana feels for Lucio, when he gives in to a moment of burning passion and attempts to kiss her, she rejects him: “Sus labios buscaban los labios de Juana y la quemaba con su aliento de fuego. Intentó voltearla, y ella de un salto brusco se escapó de sus brazos” (63). Juana is devastated by the possibility that Lucio “no deseaba otra cosa que el placer brutal” and begins to sob, prompting Lucio to apologize profoundly for his ill-received behavior (64). The young woman is determined to preserve the purity of the love she shares with her future husband. Like Juana Lucero, Juana is an innocent young woman who does not wish to lose her virginity, but will have it forcefully taken from her by a man who feels that, because of his gender, he has the right to exercise his virility with any woman he pleases. By the time Lucio is ready to depart and begin the three-day journey home, he
and Juana have entirely reconciled their differences, and he bids her farewell with an appropriately chaste kiss.

After Lucio’s departure, Juana begins to suffer from the recurring melancholy that has plagued her in some way her entire life. As is customary in the naturalist novel, the narrator explains that Juana has inherited this condition from her ancestors: “Todo un pasado de melancolía – de ambiciones no satisfechas, de esperanzas tronchadas […] pesaba sobre ella y la envolvía como una niebla gris, densa y fría. Producto de aquel héroe frustrado […] y de aquella china viril […] resultó ella, por herencia atávica, un fruto exótico sin destino ni misión. ¡Nunca, nunca, había sido feliz!” (71). Juana’s inability to be truly happy is blamed on her hereditary makeup; according to this rationale, she has no control over her own fate, as it is determined by the blood that runs through her veins. During this time of sadness and disillusion, Juana first meets Lorenzo, the man who will brutally rape her. This first meeting takes place in Juana’s own kitchen. Like both Juana Lucero and Nacha Regules, Juana’s home becomes a place of victimization and violence as a result of a man who violates that space. Whatever hope and illusion Juana once had for a happy future is shattered as soon as Lorenzo enters her life. The fearsome “bandolero célebre” is described as “un rubio pequeño y fornido, de fisonomía audaz y de ojos insolentes” (74).

When Juana enters the kitchen one afternoon and finds Lorenzo having drinks with Zoilo, she is immediately uncomfortable in the young gaucho’s presence and unnerved by his persistent and penetrating gaze, a situation that recalls the way Juana Lucero is violated by Absalón’s intrusive stare prior to his raping her. Lorenzo’s “mirada de bestia feroz” causes Juana to experience an “indefinible malestar” each time he looks
at her (81). In spite of the fact that Juana is scared of Lorenzo and does not wish to be around him, she cannot help but feel a strange sense of fascination for this virile and violent man: “Y por un fenómeno de su extravagante naturaleza, no podía menos de admirar aquel hombre infamamente grande, aquel rebelde cuyos actos vandálicos eran ejecutados sin misericordia…” (81). Although the narrator earlier described Lorenzo as being physically a small man, his presence makes him seem large and formidable. The gaucho’s blatant masculinity both terrifies and intrigues Juana. Regardless of the fact that Juana may be attracted to Lorenzo on some level, she certainly does not ask for the fate that befalls her. Before leaving Zoilo’s house, Lorenzo fixes on Juana one more sexually charged stare, “una de esas miradas que equivalen a la más lasciva de las caricias” (82). Juana, visibly upset by Lorenzo’s lewd glances, seeks comfort from her reticent uncle, who reluctantly allows her to cry briefly on his shoulder.

Lorenzo’s history is one full of crimes and violence; by learning about his past actions, the reader begins to expect that his role in the novel will be that of a perpetrator of violence. The aggressive behavior he will soon direct at Juana will not be the first time he has behaved violently towards a woman. Lorenzo was once in love with Encarnación; when he discovers her unfaithful behavior one day, he erupts in a violent rage. He first directs his anger towards her lover, whom he kills, and then turns his wrath on her. Instead of killing Encarnación, he decides to do something that will hurt her even more: he cuts off both her ears, as he says, “te voy a dejar más fiera, como pa que te juyan hasta los perros, ¡apestada!” (80). Lorenzo chooses to physically maim the woman as, in doing so, he hopes her deformity will be spurned even by dogs. Although Lorenzo feels that his actions against Encarnación and her lover are justified, his reaction to the
situation demonstrates the violence that this man is capable of inflicting on others, as he exhibits his status as a violent gaucho. Lorenzo is accustomed to living by his untamed instincts as he has been a wandering vagabond, shunning authority, living off the land, and fending for himself for as long as he can remember. Unfortunately, the young and innocent Juana, who has done nothing to incur Lorenzo’s rage, will soon become his next victim. Like Juana Lucero, Juana is seen as nothing more than an object to be possessed to satisfy a man’s sexual appetite and violent behavior.

Some time after their first meeting, Juana again encounters Lorenzo, this time in the forest. Lorenzo takes her by surprise and she reacts with the same fear and apprehension that he earlier instilled in her: her “primer impulso fue huir, gritar, pedir socorro” (116). This episode marks the first time the young girl has had a one-on-one encounter with Lorenzo and her reaction to seeing the gaucho in his natural environment is one of absolute terror. She sees Lorenzo as an animal, a “puma hambriento” who is closing in on her: “Imaginóse al monstruo feroz, incapaz de clemencia, cuyos apetitos sanguinarios no conocían ni el obstáculo ni la saciedad” (117). Lorenzo tries to reassure Juana and assuage her fear by telling her that he is not going to hurt her, but she will not be convinced. Juana’s panic does indeed later prove to be warranted, as Lorenzo will not only rape her, but he will be responsible for her death as well. Juana is right to fear this complex and enigmatic “bebedor de sangre” (117), whose attitude towards women seems to encompass love and hatred at the same time. The young woman wonders about his concept of women: “¿Qué concepto tenía de las mujeres aquel hombre que deseaba a todas sin amar o sin poder amar a ninguna? ¿Las odiaba? ¿las despreciaba?...En el cinismo de sus relatos había un fondo de amargura…” (117). Juana knows that being
alone in Lorenzo’s presence places her in danger, so she says that she has a boyfriend and attempts to escape, thus invoking the anger of the gaucho. He grabs her hand and she does not struggle against him, instead becoming quiet and submissive. She insists that she does not love Lorenzo nor does she wish to engage in sexual activity with him and he eventually releases her.

Some time later, Lorenzo arrives at Juana’s house to find her all alone. Interestingly, this time Juana is not afraid of the gaucho and reacts calmly and with indifference, “sin demostrar turbación ni miedo” (emphasis mine; 126). She looks at Lorenzo “sin espanto […y] con curiosidad” despite his “ojos feroces inyectados de sangre, y aquellos labios gruesos, entreabiertos, trémulos y quemados por el vapor ardiente del deseo” (emphasis mine; 126). The young woman seems to be outside of her own body, “como si asistiera desde lejos a una escena en la cual no desempeñaba ningún papel” (126). Lorenzo reacts to Juana’s passive attitude swiftly and brutally. Each of his actions is fraught with violence as he rips off Juana’s clothing, grabs her brutally and throws her down on the bed as he prepares to take away her virginity. Juana’s response to Lorenzo’s actions is one of indifference and unresponsiveness. She stays silent and essentially goes completely limp in his arms; she does not fight against him, but becomes entirely submissive and subservient to his desires. Her pure and virginal body in no way responds to his lustfulness: “Su boca purísima, que revelaba la virginidad y la inocencia, parecía no sentir el calor y el contacto de aquellos labios groseros y lascivos; y su cuerpo […] permanecía insensible a la presión de aquel otro cuerpo” (126). Juana’s response to Lorenzo’s violence is much like that of Juana Lucero during her violent encounter with Absalón. Although Juana Lucero, unlike Juana, at first physically fights against her
attacker, she quickly gives up the battle and allows Absalón to proceed while she seems to enter into a trance. Likewise, Juana’s body becomes completely unresponsive and her mind seems to be elsewhere as Lorenzo violates her body. When the violent encounter comes to its conclusion and Lorenzo leaves his victim in a state of disarray on the bed, she is in a daze, as revealed by her eyes, “los ojos, de pupila azul pálida como flor de camalote, abiertos e inmóviles, cual si miraran al infinito!” (127). Juana’s eyes reveal her desire to be elsewhere, just as Juana Lucero often enters this kind of dazed state to cope with difficult events in her life. During the rape scene, Gaucha’s Juana seems to behave in much the same way. While she allows the rape to occur without fighting back, she reacts with indifference and calm in order to cope with what is happening to her. Juana’s behavior can be described, like Juana Lucero’s, as passively masochistic as she becomes completely submissive and endures the suffering that Lorenzo inflicts upon her. Juana does not initiate interaction with Lorenzo, but perhaps because she realizes that struggling against him would be futile, she allows herself instead to be sexually violated without a fight. The fact is that she silently submits to Lorenzo’s desires and does not speak up for herself or make her “wishes or feelings known” (Shainess 71).

Juana’s withdrawal into herself during the rape is encouraged by the high degree of power and strength that Lorenzo exudes. Juana is intimidated by his authority and control, and in turn, becomes helpless and powerless against such a formidable adversary. By raping Juana, Lorenzo is flaunting the power that comes with being a male. Not only is he satisfying a sexual urge by possessing Juana, but he is also demonstrating his need for control. According to Kathleen Wall, this “desire for control” is “at least a secondary, if not a primary motive” for rape (173). When he rapes Juana, Lorenzo demonstrates that
he acts without regard to her feelings, firm in his conviction that women should exercise submission to men.

As in Juana Lucero and Nacha Regules, Juana suffers as the victim of violence in the space of her own home. After the rape, she experiences “una angustia sin nombre” and feels shame as “llevaba en el alma una mancha infamante que no se borraría nunca” (127). Nevertheless, Juana attempts to comfort herself by realizing that she is not to blame for Lorenzo’s violence; she did not choose to be violated and is disgusted and revolted by his actions. Because of her lack of consent, she, in fact, still considers herself to be “la virgen de antes de la caída” (127). Since her mother’s death, Juana has experienced a total lack of control over her own life, as she is first told where and with whom she will live, and then forced to lose the purity and innocence she values so much. Because of her loss of innocence, Juana is reluctant to contact Lucio for fear that he will no longer love her, but she does recognize that she is not to blame for Lorenzo’s actions: “¿Es culpable la virgen a quien un desalmado agarrota y viola? … Y ese era su caso. Lorenzo la había poseído indefensa, ligada […] por la absoluta falta de voluntad, que no le permitió ni siquiera una protesta contra la brutalidad del bandolero” (129). Although she feels that she is not to blame for what has happened to her, Juana nevertheless worries about the way people will react when they learn that she is no longer a virgin. Like Juana Lucero, Juana knows that society will not find fault with the man for he is expected to exercise his sexuality freely and openly, but rather with the woman who allows him, whether her participation be voluntary or not, to do so. Juana is so distressed and concerned over her fate that she even asks her friend Casiana to kill her. Casiana enters Juana’s kitchen to find the girl toying with a knife, her face “densamente pálida”
and her eyes “secos y enrojecidos” (129). When Juana requests that her friend kill her, Casiana reacts with a laugh and downplays Juana’s somber appeal by changing the subject. Juana watches her friend flit happily around the kitchen, not understanding how someone can be so happy. As a part of the melancholy that has plagued Juana since her childhood, the girl has always demonstrated a strange fascination with death, an interest that now, as a result of her overwhelming situation, begins to manifest itself in the desire to die. Juana, like Juana Lucero and Federico Gamboa’s Santa, sees death as an escape from the suffering she has endured in her life.

When Juana finally faces Lucio, she opts to end her relationship with him instead of telling him of her dishonor. She would rather lose the man she loves than have him see her as the fallen woman that she has become. When he refuses to leave her and insists that he loves her, she tells him that she was with another man, Lorenzo, but not that she was raped. As soon as Lucio hears the name of the untamed gaucho, he assumes that Lorenzo forced himself on Juana and forgives her immediately. Because she did not fight and resist Lorenzo forcefully, Juana experiences feelings of culpability here: “[E]lla se había entregado sin resistencia, sin lucha y sin protestas, aunque sin gusto y sin amor” (136). She does not tell Lucio of her submission to Lorenzo. Lucio’s reaction to Juana’s news is much like that of Monsalvat in Nacha Regules. Although Nacha, like Juana, is a fallen woman, Monsalvat continues to love her and wishes to marry her. Likewise, Lucio is unconcerned with the fact that Juana is no longer a virgin. Instead of seeing her as a tainted woman, he maintains the ideal vision that he holds of her. This forgiving, unjudgmental attitude is quite unusual for the nineteenth century, when respectable women are expected to be pure and untouched until marriage. Lucio and Juana make
plans to marry and Juana feels reasonably happy. However, her happiness proves to be short-lived, as Lucio, determined to avenge Juana’s dishonor, stabs Lorenzo. The wounded gaucho determines to seek revenge against Lucio, but his violent behavior will once again find Juana as its victim, this time leaving her not only sexually ravaged but dead.

At the end of the novel, Lorenzo and his group of bandits invade Zoilo’s house, viciously kill both Lucio and Zoilo, and set the house on fire. In the commotion, Juana manages to escape unnoticed and disappear into the forest. She runs blindly through the trees knowing neither where she is nor where she is going. When she finally exhausts herself and collapses, she ruminates on what has happened to Lucio and Zoilo and comes to the conclusion that they are most likely dead. She recognizes that Lorenzo and his group of bandits have triumphed by sheer physical strength and cruelty: “Ellos quedan, los fuertes, los representantes de la raza indomable […] Lo que desaparece es lo débil, lo muy viejo como el huraño trenzador […] lo insignificante como Lucio y ella…” (152). In a society where only the strong survive, Lorenzo and his men have proven themselves to be the most capable. Juana wonders why she, “lo más extraño, lo más inútil, lo más sin objeto,” is still alive (152). She begins to experience a strong sense of fear and becomes hysterical, running and shouting Lucio’s name. Unfortunately, her cries attract unwanted attention from the barbaric Lorenzo, whose thirst for bloodshed has not yet been quenched. As soon as Juana sees the gaucho, she begs him to help her but he simply smiles cruelly and looks at her with “una expresión bestial, fría, dura, amenazante” (155). Descriptive words alluding to the beast-like nature of Lorenzo are employed here and his actions are indeed savage as he informs Juana that he plans to
allow each of his bandits to rape her. She is understandably horrified and attempts to
distance herself from the cruel man. Lorenzo behaves as if what he is saying is nothing
out of the ordinary and justifies his actions by saying that “los pobres muchachos andan
con hambre y hay que dejarlos pulpiar…¡No te asustes!…” (155). The most important
thing for Lorenzo is that his men achieve sexual satisfaction; he is not concerned in the
least about Juana, her feelings, or her safety. After all, this man has already violently
raped Juana once; he now sees Juana as his property that he can use as he pleases.

For Juana, this mindset signifies more violence and suffering, as Lorenzo is not
satisfied with the emotional pain he has caused her by killing her fiancé and her uncle.
He continues his earlier physical abuse of her by not only allowing his men to rape her
one by one but actually encouraging this behavior: “Y una infame y repugnante escena
se realizó en seguida, en medio de las risas y palabrotas de aquellos desalmados a quienes
Lorenzo […] observaba y dirigía, espoleando su salvajismo con frases cínicas y atroces
consejos” (155). The narrator comments on the grotesque nature of Lorenzo’s actions
and refers to the gaucho not as beastly as in previous passages, but as “savage.” When
the repulsive orgy concludes and the savages are sexually satisfied, Lorenzo’s torture of
Juana at last reaches its gruesome end, as he instructs his men to tie her broken and
ravaged body to a tree and leave her there. Lorenzo’s last words to Juana are the
following: “Mujer que ha sido mía, nunca más debe ser de otro […] vas a quedar aquí,
pa que los caranchos te saquen los ojos, y los tábanos y los mosquitos te chupen la
sangre, hasta que los zorros hambrientos vengan a concluir tu osamenta!…” (156).
Lorenzo deliberately and heartlessly leaves Juana to die in a grotesque and violent way.
He views her as nothing more than an object to be used and thrown away, a possession
that, having once belonged to him, should never belong to another man. In such a violent and horrific scene, Juana ironically at last achieves inner peace. Death frees her from the suffering she has endured throughout her life. She dies serenely: “Un bienestar nunca conocido comenzó a invadirla […] La muerte llegó al fin, portadora de la paz eterna, besando con respeto aquella pobre alma atormentada…” (156).

Juana’s fate is at least in part a result of her refusal to obey Lorenzo when she escapes from the house during the fire. By eluding the gaucho, Juana strips him of his authority and power and he must take steps to restore his damaged male ego. He not only wants to control her actions in the present time, but he desires to rule over her future as well. In order to keep Juana from being with other men in the future, he decides to kill her. According to Catherine A. MacKinnon, the idea that rape can lead to a woman’s death can be especially exciting and sexually stimulating to a rapist as he realizes that “there are no limits on what they can do […] the rapes are made sexually enjoyable, irresistible even, by the fact that the women are about to be sacrificed, by the powerlessness of the women…” (50). Being in control of a woman’s life gives a rapist a supreme sense of control and authority, and this is precisely what Lorenzo desires. Therefore, instead of releasing the weakened and broken young woman after the rapes, he leaves her to die alone and naked in the forest, and in so doing, he reaffirms his power over her. Gaucha is permanently eliminated from society at the hands of a violent man when she dies in the final scene of the novel.

Although Gaucha ends on a pessimistic note with the violent death of its protagonist, there is a note of optimism and contentment, as Juana is at last able to find relief from the sadness and brutality that have plagued her. Although she suffers greatly
as the victim of violence, she is able to obtain tranquility at the end of the novel. Like Juana Lucero and Nacha Regules, Juana is controlled by a man who resorts to violence to keep her in the place designated for her by society. All three women are taught to be submissive and compliant at the hands of a violent man. They are treated as nothing more than a possession. Whether in the Uruguayan countryside where Juana is raped and left for dead, or the hustling cities of Santiago, where Juana Lucero’s innocence is brutally taken from her, and Buenos Aires, where Nacha is physically abused by her lover, violence targets all kinds of women: prostitutes, innocent orphans, and virtuous young women. Violence at the hands of ruthless men determines their existence, and violence leads to their undeserved situations and circumstances.
Chapter 5: Marriage as a Victimizing Space

I. Introduction

As discussed in the previous three chapters, women in the Spanish American naturalist novel are victimized in a variety of ways. The very society in which men and women live, and their mindset, not only contributes greatly to the oppression of women, but is oftentimes the primary cause of their subjugation. The women’s fictional situations reflect quite accurately what is observed in the society of the time, as Davida Pines notes in her study of modernist novels.¹ Women in the nineteenth century often find themselves pressured to get married, albeit to men they do not love simply because “not marrying left them vulnerable to economic and social ruin” (Pines 4). In a time when there were few professional opportunities open to women, they were often educated by their parents with the sole aim of finding a husband (Delamont 143). While it is true that women often achieved financial stability as a result of marriage, it also at times “effectively stripped them of their existence under the law” (Pines 4). Wives were thought of as inferior to their husbands and were expected to be subservient in every way.

¹Although Pines does not deal specifically with naturalist novels, her ideas are relevant to this study.
to the masculine head of the household. Along with this submissiveness, wives were expected to be pure before marriage and faithful to their husbands regardless of the nature of the relationship that existed between them. In the Spanish American naturalist novel, marriage is often portrayed as a victimizing space for women. In these novels, women often marry men they do not love simply to gain a sense of economic well-being and in order to achieve “domesticity, marriage, and motherhood” (Fuentes Peris 36). The importance of upholding and maintaining these roles assigned to females was firmly instilled in the woman and going against these socially-determined expectations was viewed negatively. The female was oftentimes pressured by her family, above all her mother, to marry in order to move up in society and not for love. Appearances were of the utmost importance in the nineteenth century, and young women frequently felt an obligation, or were forced, to protect the reputation of their families by marrying.

By marrying, the female protagonists under study often enter a loveless space of victimization that eventually, in one way or another, leads to their elimination or disappearance from society. In this chapter, I focus on three female protagonists who enter into loveless marriages that offer them little happiness and much suffering, and the negative consequences of these marriages such as death, degradation, and marginalization. As a result of marriage, the voice of the woman, her self-respect and, in some cases, her very physical existence are effectively stamped out or stifled. The novels discussed in this chapter are Herencia (1895) and Blanca Sol (1889) by Peruvian authors Clorinda Matto de Turner and Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, respectively, and Beba (1894) by Uruguay’s Carlos Reyles.
Up to this point, this dissertation has focused on the representation of women in naturalist novels by male authors. In this chapter, I discuss, for the first time, the portrayal of female characters by two female novelists, the aforementioned Matto de Turner and Cabello de Carbonera. Both in Europe and in Spanish America, there is a noticeable lack of female authors taking part in the naturalist movement. In her book-length study on Matto de Turner, Ana Peluffo discusses the possible reasons for this, though she focuses on Europe in particular. According to Peluffo, in the previous Romantic movement, it was more natural to have female writers as “la autoridad del sujeto literario estaba anclada en formas de subjetividad asociadas con el campo semántico de ‘lo femenino’ (las lágrimas, el corazón, el alma)” (Lágrimas 208). She goes on to describe the change that takes place between the Romantic movement and naturalism, as in the latter movement “el escritor-flâneur derivaba su autoridad intelectual de la libre circulación por espacios urbanos ‘problemáticos’ (los bajos fondos, las tabernas, los teatros, los cabarets, los prostíbulos). Esta asociación del naturalismo con lo anti-doméstico permite explicar la casi total ausencia de escritoras en el canon naturalista europeo del siglo XIX” (Lágrimas 208). There were of course exceptions. For example, in Spain, Emilia Pardo Bazán stands out as a notable and renowned naturalist. Likewise, in Spanish America there are several important female novelists writing in the naturalist vein, two of which will be discussed in this chapter.

In each of the novels under study in this chapter, marriage is seen as a victimizing, socially-imposed, loveless institution, whether it be enforced as a punishment for sins committed or as a way to comply, albeit unhappily, with society’s expectations for women. The female protagonists find themselves “trapped by an
implicit marriage imperative” in a society where living happily as a single woman is not an option (Pines 49). Like violence, which was discussed in Chapter three, marriage as a victimizing institution strikes many different kinds of women: sexually impure, upper-class adolescents, young mothers, and naïve and virtuous women misguided by society. Regardless of social class, economic background, and sexual experience, the women under study all suffer victimization through marriage. The submissiveness that these young women demonstrate by marrying “stems from their willingness to bend to the conventions of a society structured by the stubbornness of a tradition in which decisions are determined on the basis of gender” (Aarons 143). The three protagonists under study enter into the institution of marriage because of social pressures instead of for love and suffer tragic consequences such as physical abuse, prostitution, or suicide. In the end, each of these women is to some degree eliminated from society, thus controlling and eliminating her deviant behavior.

Conservative social opinion held that “the woman who deviated from the retiring domestic ideal was in constant peril: at any moment she might become one of the threatening, dangerous, unsexed, monsters incarnate” (Delamont and Duffin 16). Fear that women would assert themselves and rebel against societal norms elicited rigid and repressive rules. As a result, women often became scapegoats, as they were irrationally blamed and held responsible for the actions of others. The portrayal of woman as scapegoat will be especially relevant to my analysis of Matto de Turner’s Herencia, where René Girard’s theories will offer support.
II. Herencia

In Clorinda Matto de Turner’s Herencia (1895), the author scrutinizes the superficiality of life in Peru’s capital city, as she “depicts and analyzes the falsity, the pretentiousness and the ostentatious display of the aristocratic social climbers of Lima” (Miller 27). As a writer, Matto de Turner battled for social reforms, constantly fighting to improve the society in which she lived. In her novels, she exposes the evils in her own Peruvian society at a time when this kind of open social criticism was not readily accepted, especially from a woman. According to Mary Berg, “Clorinda Matto de Turner may have been the most controversial woman writer of nineteenth-century Latin America” (“Writing” 80). As her novels adopt a strong tone of social criticism, they were often met with intense opposition: her first novel Aves sin nido (1889) was “burned, the author’s house was sacked, her printing press was destroyed and she was excommunicated and exiled” (Brushwood, Genteel Barbarism 140). Indeed, the controversial nature of Matto de Turner’s writings led to her exile to Argentina in 1895, where she continued writing and remained until her death in 1909 (Cornejo Polar, “Foreward” xlv-xlvi). Fighting on behalf of oppressed groups often led Matto de Turner to crusade for women, a group she saw as the victim of unfair social treatment. In many of her writings, there is an overriding sense of the importance and value of women, a characteristic that makes this female author of utmost importance and relevance when discussing the victimization of women in the Spanish American naturalist novel. Matto states in her Tradiciones cuzqueñas (1884) that a fundamental bond exists between women: “Las mujeres ilustres se acercan entre sí” (181). Susana Reisz further elaborates on this idea, claiming that Matto believed that “women are capable of
endowing with value their gender identities above all other differences and establishing unbreakable alliances in favour of themselves as women, in favour, too, of their families and society as a whole” (86). Given Matto de Turner’s interest in the situation of women in her society, it comes as no surprise that her novels often focus on females.

While *Herencia* possesses a wealth of central female characters, in this chapter I will focus primarily on Camila, the daughter of a well-to-do Peruvian couple who finds herself forced by her mother into marrying a man she does not love. Camila has no voice of her own and becomes a victim of a superficial society that values reputation and appearances above all else. Tragically, the victimization that Camila suffers comes not only from male characters but also, and primarily, from her own mother. The young woman enters into marriage only to be physically abused and degraded. In the novel, Camila’s mother Nieves is a prime example of the shallowness and superficiality of nineteenth-century high-class Peruvian society, as she goes to great lengths to protect herself from shame and public humiliation when her unmarried daughter becomes pregnant. The only solution in Nieves’s eyes is to force Camila to marry the father of the unborn child, regardless of her daughter’s wishes. Teresita Parra explains that woman’s expected role as mother and wife is the norm of behavior for the nineteenth century: “For a woman of that time, the only way to achieve fulfillment was to marry and to be a mother regardless of the class to which she belonged” (132). In her seemingly unfeeling treatment of her daughter, Nieves is merely following the requirements of the society that surrounds her.

For Camila, marriage is at once the cause and the result of victimization. Her marriage to an unstable and cruel man is the cause of verbal and physical abuse, while it
is also the punishment, enforced by her mother, for having had pre-marital sex and becoming pregnant. Camila grows up in a household with an extremely domineering mother whose primary concern in life is that of maintaining social status and protecting her image at all costs. Inside the domestic sphere of the home, Nieves possesses a great deal of power, over both her children and her ineffectual husband. Camila’s mother and father do not have a functional, happy marriage as, according to her father Pepe, “casarse era suicidarse […] fue sabio […] el que dijo que el matrimonio era la tumba del amor y la cuna de los celos, de las impertinencias y del hastío” (39). This model of marriage is not a positive one for Camila, and she will soon follow in the unhappy footsteps of her parents as she herself becomes a despondent wife. Nieves is obsessed with the idea of marrying off Camila, as well as her other daughter Dolores, to a rich man: “Engolfada en el principio de que no hay caballero más poderoso que don Dinero, aspiraba a casar a sus hijas con personajes acaudalados” (40). From the moment the reader encounters Nieves, her values are made explicit: she concerns herself with money, social status, and material possessions, never taking the time to consider the happiness of her children. Marriage to her is much like a business deal and she is determined to find the best, meaning the richest, possible candidates for Camila and Dolores. Marriage need not involve passion and sentiment for these women, but rather economic stability and security of social position. As an unnamed friend of Nieves states of the difference between wife and mistress: “Para la querida son los cariños y los mimos, y para la esposa las cargas de la casa y las responsabilidades del nombre y el qué dirán de la posición” (60-61).

According to this woman, sexual passion and tenderness are found outside of marriage, and the wife is limited to household duties and upholding the honor of the family.
Interestingly, in this novel it is Nieves, and not her husband, who makes a habit of entertaining lovers as a substitute for her loveless marriage.

As is consistently demonstrated by the behavior of the superficial Nieves, there is an emphasis placed not only on socially acceptable marital unions, but also on material possessions, such as clothing. The members of the high-class society to which Camila’s family belongs wish to demonstrate and flaunt their wealth with extravagantly expensive clothing. At Camila’s birthday party at the beginning of the novel, the narrator spends a great deal of time describing the lavish clothing worn by Camila and Nieves: “Doña Nieves lucía vestido de terciopelo color heliotropo, cuyo escote resguardaban ricos encajes valencianos […] Camila había elegido el crema […] y en sus cabellos estaban diseminados diminutos lazos de cinta…” (57). Because of her mother’s influence, Camila is caught up in this man-made world of artifice that will eventually claim her happiness. Nieves’s main concern in life seems to be deceiving people. She is much more concerned with keeping up appearances than establishing and maintaining meaningful and lasting relationships with her family, and her extreme concern for protecting her image as well as her family name eventually brings about the undesirable marriage between her daughter and Aquilino Merlo, an immigrant from Italy who owns a “pulpería” in town. He is a greedy, lustful, opportunistic man who is instantly attracted to Camila not only for her sexual innocence and purity but also for her enviable social position. Camila becomes entangled in Aquilino’s murky web the first time she interacts with him. He comes to her house with “fuego en su sangre” and behaves in an overtly sexual manner, as he grabs her and kisses her roughly (80). He catches her quite off guard and the young virgin “no rechazó ni se dio cuenta; todo pasó con la rapidez del
rayo que ilumina, hier y mata!” (81). In this brief encounter, Aquilino awakens Camila’s until-then dormant sexuality and sets the stage for the seduction that will follow. Predictably, Camila becomes pregnant when Aquilino returns some days later prepared to take her virginity. While Aquilino leaves her house exhilarated and exultant after his latest conquest, Camila’s reaction to her first sexual experience is quite the opposite: “llegó a su alcoba y se dejó caer temblorosa y pálida sobre su albo lecho, tapándose con ambas manos, sollozando…” (181). The use of the word “albo” to describe Camila’s bed is ironic as it contrasts with the loss of her virginity, her pureness. By allowing Aquilino to seduce her, Camila falls from the realm of the perfect, virginal woman and reacts to her new situation with misery and sorrow.

The text accentuates that Camila is the product of a bad mother, as the title of the novel aptly shows, thus bringing to mind the ideas of naturalism that state that one’s fate is dependent on heredity and surroundings (Heller 188). Even before Nieves discovers that Camila is pregnant and arranges her marriage to Aquilino, the narrator is careful to emphasize that she has played a major role in her daughter’s eventual misery by stressing that Camila’s downfall is her mother’s fault. Initially, Camila is depicted as pure and virginal. Indeed it is Camila’s untouched nature that originally draws the despicable Aquilino Merlo to her. He finds her virginity irresistible: “la bella Camila, probablemente virgen, fresca, nueva para el placer; llena, suave, mórbida para los sentidos” (51) and “está hermosa como las vírgenes de mi país” (80). He is tempted and enticed by her innocence, and she seems not to fully understand what is happening in her body when she has physical contact with Aquilino for the first time: “Ella no rechazó ni se dio cuenta; todo pasó con la rapidez del rayo que ilumina, hier y mata! […] sintió en
su cuerpo virgen, al rozarse con el cuerpo de él, algo que la conmovió de una manera extraña…” (81). Camila’s reaction to Aquilino’s overt sexuality is similar to the way Gaucha’s Juana reacts to Lorenzo, as both women seem to be outside of themselves during their first sexual encounter. Eventually, Camila gives in to Aquilino and the narrator emphasizes that the fault of Camila’s downfall lies squarely on the shoulders of her mother: “La vida íntima de la madre había dejado grabadas en la mente infantil de la hija; citas misteriosas en ausencia del señor Aguilera, más sigilosas presente él; y, un cosmos hereditario, con tendencias irresistibles, actuaba en la naturaleza preparada de Camila. La impulsaba aquella herencia fatal de la sangre” (102). The narrator seems to suggest that Nieves’s sexual corruption has overpowered Camila’s naïve innocence and unwittingly caused her to behave like her mother. Nieves appears to have passed on nothing but negative qualities to her daughter. Fanny Arango-Keith observes: “El destino de Camila es marcado por la herencia de promiscuidad que recibe de su madre” (436). Camila seems to have no control over her actions, as she is driven, in accordance with the laws of determinism, by the qualities she has inherited from Nieves. As previously mentioned, Nieves is not only portrayed negatively in terms of her falseness of character and caustic nature in dealing with her husband, but she is also an adulteress as well. From the time Camila was a young girl, her mother carried on numerous affairs, a fact that does not go unnoticed by Camila. The questionable actions of Nieves have been observed by her daughter from a young age and it seems that her promiscuous nature has been inherited by Camila: “En el organismo de Camila comenzaba en aquellos momentos la gran batalla entre lo cierto y lo incierto, presentándosele vivos y latentes los cuadros clandestinos de doña Nieves, de su madre que durante las ausencias de don Pepe
recibía visitas misteriosas, observadas por Camila con la avidez que engendra la curiosidad de los ocho años” (emphasis in the text; 150). This passage describes a moment in the novel in which an internal battle is raging inside Camila, as the bad seeds planted in her are beginning to bloom.

It is not only the narrator who casts the blame for Camila’s loss of virginity on Nieves, but Camila’s father as well, as he demonstrates his frustration and grief over the situation in the following way: “¡Perra!...¡perra!...sí señor...la madre...y se me entregó a mí...la hija; es natural que se entregue a otro...¡la ley hereditaria!...¡perra! ¡perra!...” (181). Pepe obviously holds Nieves responsible for the promiscuous behavior of his daughter. When Nieves realizes what has happened, she responds in a rather predictable manner; she believes that her money can make any problem disappear: “Si tal ha sucedido, Pepe, mi plata lo remediará todo, ¿oyes, Pepe? ¿O acaso dudas, como niño inexperto, de que la plata todo lo tapa, lo disculpa, lo abrillanta, lo rectifica, lo ennoblecé?” (193-94). Nieves has absolute faith in the power of money, especially in a superficial society such as the one that surrounds her. Instead of concerning herself with the state and condition of her daughter, Nieves immediately begins brainstorming for ways in which to cover up the scandal that has the potential to bring shame and humiliation to her name. When Aquilino offers to marry Camila, Nieves answers, “[s]i, sí, pero en esta sociedad hay que dorar también las cosas” (218). She will only allow her daughter to marry someone of high social standing and has her own plan in mind: she will order Aquilino to leave the country and come back with a new, upper-class identity. She is ecstatic when Aquilino responds by telling her that in his country, he is a very important man, that his father is a count.
Nieves happily relays the good news, whether it be true or not, to her husband: “Ese mozo tan bien plantado no era un cualquiera, es hijo de un Conde y se casará con nuestra hija después de hacer un viaje a Tacna, de donde vendrá con otro nombre, el nombre del Conde, su padre. Estoy, pues, como dices triunfante en toda la línea, ya ves” (219-20). Nieves believes she has found a solution to the problem by once again building a false image and deceiving those around her. She does not seek to improve the man her daughter is to marry; she only wants to better his image. She seems to concern herself less with what her daughter wants or how her daughter feels, and more with how she can repair her daughter’s mistake without staining the family name and reputation. Marrying Camila to Aquilino as quickly as possible to make the pregnancy seem legitimate is the only course of action that Nieves considers. Indeed, Nieves does not even think of looking into Aquilino’s background or trying to find out more about him. According to John Stuart Mill, “men are not required, as a preliminary to the marriage ceremony, to prove by testimonials that they are fit to be trusted with the exercise of absolute power” (34). So we see that in the novel Aquilino is not required to prove himself to be a good man before marrying Camila and Nieves never questions his story. Later, after being granted power over Camila by becoming her husband, Aquilino does indeed abuse that authority by mistreating her physically and emotionally.

While Nieves takes great pains to cover up her daughter’s indiscretion, she never consults Camila to find out how she feels about the situation. Camila has absolutely no voice in the matter and even before the wedding takes place, one can already note that this young woman is beginning to disappear. Nieves proceeds to spread the word of Camila and Aquilino’s wedding, never once asking her daughter if she desires to marry
the man who impregnated her, thus demonstrating what Davida Pines terms the “inability of women…to break free of the social forces driving the marriage imperative” (28). This idea is demonstrated in Camila’s situation as she is pressured, both directly by her mother and indirectly by society in general, to marry. Camila is forced into marriage not only because of her status as a woman, but especially because she is unmarried and pregnant. When the ceremony takes place, we are finally given entry into some of the emotions of the new bride: “Se detuvo por segundos contemplando las flores de naranjo, y todas las emociones de su corazón, condensadas en dos lágrimas, resbalaron, silenciosas y cristalinas sobre los vidriosos pétalos sin perfume” (235). It finally becomes explicitly clear that Camila did not wish to marry Aquilino. Instead of celebrating her newlywed status, Camila instead seeks solitude to cry, an action that prompts her puzzled sister to ask Nieves: “¿y por qué Camila se ha ido sola, los que se casan no se van juntitos?” (236).

Before becoming Aquilino’s wife, Camila has already suffered a great deal of victimization: she is raised in a loveless house with a promiscuous mother and an ineffectual father, is given little education, becomes pregnant, and is forced to marry a man she does not love. Upon entering into marriage, Camila becomes the victim of physical and emotional abuse, as Aquilino takes to mistreating his new wife. Instead of spending time with her, Aquilino wastes away his nights drinking and gambling with his friends until all hours of the morning. In one instance, he has a dispute with one of the men at the bar and immediately sets out for his house. Arriving there drunk, he finds Camila sleeping and wakes her up to abuse her: “[A]rrancando de su sueño a la mártir la derribó sobre el aterciopelado alfombrado de Bruselas exhibiendo un esfera de marfil
bruñido en cuya redondez estampó dos palmadas cuyo sonido repercutió en el silencio de la madrugada” (242). Camila has no chance to defend herself or protest. The only sound we hear is of his beating her, as she accepts his abuse in silence, demonstrating the ways in which she has been forced to retreat into herself, to emotionally disappear. In her book *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*, Lisa Surridge discusses the connection between male violence and alcohol, stating that, according to a newspaper from 1852, it is natural for a man to get drunk, and instead of fighting with his drinking buddies, to return home and abuse his wife (110). Alcohol leads to marital abuse in this novel too, and once Aquilino beats Camila, he then returns to continue drinking with his friends.

In this brutal scene, Camila is described as a martyr, thus perhaps suggesting the inevitability of violence and the implication that she will accept it without protest. There is a great contrast between the lush and luxurious description of the rug and the brutal and disgusting actions of Aquilino. Interestingly, the narrator focuses not only on the abusive behavior of Aquilino, but juxtaposes it with a beautiful description of Camila’s opulent surroundings. This underscores the difference between beautiful appearances and the ugly reality within, namely Aquilino and his violent behavior which lurks under the surface. Camila’s happiness has been sacrificed in order to maintain social appearances. Mill comments on the ease with which husbands can abuse their wives in the nineteenth century as a result of the power they hold over them: “The vilest malefactor has some wretched woman tied to him, against whom he can commit any atrocity except killing her, and, if tolerably cautious, can do that without much danger of the legal penalty” (34).

---

2This information comes from *Times*, August 20, 1852.
In Aquilino’s and Camila’s situation, this statement is quite valid, as he inevitably takes advantage of his wife.

In his violent frenzy against his new wife, Aquilino can only repeat these words, “Cochina, ayer conmigo…hoy con quién…con quién” (242). He seems to suspect that she will follow in her mother’s footsteps by sleeping with other men. As the novel ends soon after this scene and Camila does not partake in any adulterous affairs, we do not know if his suspicions will be justified in the future or not, but he certainly believes that Camila, although she has not committed the crime for which she is being punished, deserves this brutal treatment. After Aquilino beats Camila, he returns to the bar and proceeds to drink, letting his friends know that Camila “ya está castigada” (243). Aquilino seems to think there is nothing wrong with his brutal behavior, that it is his right to exercise his power over his wife. After Aquilino’s departure from the house, the narrator in Herencia wonders why Camila is being punished and questions the motive behind the man’s behavior towards her: “¿De qué? Habríale preguntado un observador imparcial. ¿De haber sido tonta e incauta; lasciva o desgraciada, cediendo a la herencia de raza sin rechazar ésta con las virtudes de la educación del hogar?” (243). Here, the narrator seems to take on an ironic tone by suggesting that Camila could have utilized the “virtuous” education she received in her home to fight against her faulty heredity. Camila’s education, far from teaching her virtue and morals, has facilitated her downfall, as she has observed her mother’s adulterous and lustful behavior since she was a child. provided by her superficial and adulterous mother, has taught her nothing about virtue and morals. Whether Camila allowed Aquilino to seduce her out of naiveté resulting from lack of moral education, or sexual corruption inherited from her mother, Aquilino
believes that Camila will flaunt her sexuality by taking on other lovers during their marriage. Ironically, it is Aquilino who first prompted Camila’s ruin by seducing her, but he then, in a hypocritical fashion, proceeds to punish her for not remaining a virgin. Although he was directly responsible for her loss of virginity before marriage, Aquilino seems instead to blame Camila for this act.

Not only is Camila portrayed as, and actually described by the narrator as a martyr, but her situation at the end of the novel also depicts her as a scapegoat. In his book *The Scapegoat*, René Girard states that it is quite common for a persecutor to focus on his victim by choosing people that are “particularly susceptible to persecution rather than because of crimes they have committed,” as he goes on to state that women and children often find themselves victimized as scapegoats: “The weakness of women, children, and old people […] becomes weakness in the face of the crowd” (17, 19). In Camila’s situation, her persecutor Aquilino seems to have convinced himself that his wife will break the bonds of marriage by cheating on him and thus disgracing his authority. She has not in fact been unfaithful to Aquilino, but Aquilino sees the possibility of Camila’s sexual waywardness as a threat to his dominion over her, and as such chooses to exercise physical force on her to ensure her submission to him. Camila is in a position of vulnerability and defenselessness, not only because of being a woman facing a man who is drunk and enraged, but also because Aquilino attacks her while she is sleeping in her bed. He demonstrates an irrational hostility towards her based on a hypothetical situation that may or may not come to fruition. Although she has done nothing to invoke Aquilino’s wrath, Camila is punished simply because of the fact that other married women in her society take lovers. Camila is essentially blamed for the actions of others,
as she is punished for the sins of other women. The novel ends in a rather ambiguous and abrupt manner in terms of what will happen to Camila. This violent scene is, in fact, the last time she appears and, as such, her future looks extremely bleak.

III. Blanca Sol

Like Clorinda Matto de Turner, fellow Peruvian author Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera also demonstrated, both in her novels and in her life, an interest in feminine topics. Matto de Turner and Cabello de Carbonera both attended literary gatherings organized and hosted by Juana Manuela Gorriti in the late 1800s. Like Matto de Turner, Cabello de Carbonera expressed an interest in and concern for the situation of women in Peru; at one of Gorriti’s gatherings in 1876, Cabello de Carbonera presented for the group her essay entitled “Estudio comparativo de la inteligencia y la belleza en la muger,” in which she stresses the importance of intelligence over physical beauty. She recognizes the attractiveness of beauty, but ends the short piece with these words: “[A]sí, no creo equivocarme reconociendo la superioridad que tiene la inteligencia sobre la belleza de la muger” (212). Like Matto de Turner, Cabello de Carbonera at once acknowledges the value of maintaining traditionally feminine qualities such as beauty, but also strives to allow the nineteenth-century woman to flaunt her mind as well as her figure. As Gertrude M. Yeager attests, “doña Mercedes was openly dissatisfied with the role society assigned to women and she used [Gorriti’s] salon to articulate a feminist agenda. She refused to accept the inequality of men and women” (26). As such, it comes as no surprise that some of Cabello de Carbonera’s novels, such as Blanca Sol, whose subtitle is Novela social, take on a strong tone of social criticism. Blanca Sol centers on
a woman who, like Camila, has been raised to value material possessions and wealth over all else. The novel includes a prologue written by the author in which she discusses the significance of the social novel: “Siempre he creído que la novelas social es de tanta o mayor importancia que la novelas pasional. Estudiar y manifestar las imperfecciones, los defectos y vicios que en sociedad son admitidos, sancionados, y con frecuencia objeto de admiración y de estima, será sin duda mucho más benéfico que estudiar las pasiones y las consecuencias” (27). Before even turning the first page of the novel, the reader is already informed that this work will be one with a strong social message. Like Matto de Turner’s *Herencia*, *Blanca Sol* is a naturalist novel in which the principal female character is the victim of a loveless marriage that ultimately leads to her downfall as a prostitute. Blanca Sol marries a man she does not love simply because he is wealthy. Of this emphasis on money and material possessions inherent in Cabello de Carbonera’s works, John C. Miller states that her novels “illustrate the excesses of money, the abuses of power and the consequences manifest in the society of Lima” (28). Much like Matto de Turner’s *Herencia*, *Blanca Sol* (1889) focuses on the superficial atmosphere in late nineteenth-century Lima, where everything revolves around social status and economic position.

*Herencia’s* victim of a loveless marriage, Camila, is a young woman from a wealthy family, while *Blanca Sol’s* victim is a woman whose family gives the impression of having money when in fact they are deeply in debt. While Camila’s mother forces her to marry Aquilino to save the family from public humiliation because of her pregnancy, Blanca Sol’s mother encourages her to marry the wealthy Serafin Rubio to protect the carefully-constructed façade of economic prosperity that she has created. Although Camila and Blanca marry for different reasons, they are both the victims of socially-
imposed marriages that, while designed to protect their social position, ironically serve only to bring about their downfall and leave them in a worse position than when they started. While Camila is dragged into the depths of physical abuse at the end of Herencia, Blanca Sol concludes when Blanca enters the world of prostitution, thereby effectively disappearing from the world of social respectability.

From her early childhood, Blanca is taught by society in general and her mother in particular the supreme importance of money and appearances. The advice that her mother gives Blanca as a child is the following: “[P]rocure que nadie te iguale ni menos te sobrepase en elegancia y belleza, para que los hombres te admiren y las mujeres te envidien” (33). Blanca’s mother instills in her the desire to be physically beautiful in order to attract the admiration of men and the jealousy of women, but mentions nothing about developing character, intelligence, and integrity. The girl takes her mother’s advice to heart, as she enjoys flaunting her beauty and revels in provoking jealousy in other girls. Blanca’s superficial education continues as she “aprendió […] a estimular el dinero sobre todos los bienes de la vida: hasta vale más que las virtudes y la buena conducta” (emphasis in the text; 33). As a result of Blanca’s upbringing and education, she begins to adopt the superficial mindset of those around her and values money above all else. Even the nuns at the girl’s school treat the wealthy children better than the poor ones, thus setting an example for children like Blanca to follow. The girl dreams of some day marrying a rich man who will shower her with luxurious clothing and objects. She knows that she would choose to marry a “viejo con dinero, mejor que […] un novio pobre” (emphasis in the text; 35). At a young age, Blanca already demonstrates an obsessive interest in money and material possessions, an interest that will ultimately lead
her to misery and loneliness. She exhibits a willingness to marry solely for social status and finds nothing wrong with this type of behavior. The emphasis on marital status is largely generalized, as JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward observe that “almost everyone is interested in marital status, our own and that of others […] marriage has remained an integral part of our lives, not only as individuals but also as a society” (1). According to them, marital status tells a great deal about a person and that applies to Blanca, who is determined to marry a man who will improve her social standing and provide her with an attractive and comfortable lifestyle.

When Blanca begins dating a young man, her ideas on marriage are put to the test, as she is forced to decide between love and economic stability. Her boyfriend is a fine man who loves her and treats her very well, but Blanca’s mother “demostrábale con frecuencia que una fortuna por formar no vale lo que una fortuna ya formada y trataba de alejarla de sus simpáticos sentimientos” (39). Because the young man is not yet financially established, Blanca’s mother encourages her to move on. According to Sara Delamont, women in the nineteenth century are often brought up being educated on how to attract a husband and therefore secure a stable future (143). She further states that “an education including any useful skills was believed to drive potential husbands away […] Parents educated their daughters in showy accomplishments and hoped – hoped they would catch husbands” (143). Blanca’s mother certainly exemplifies this mindset, as she schools her daughter in little more than the ways in which to dress and present herself so as to attract a rich husband. To the older woman’s delight, Blanca chooses to abandon her boyfriend despite her feelings for him and seek a rich man, believing that “el amor puede ser cosa muy sabrosa cuando llega acompañado de lucientes soles de oro, pero
amor a secas, sábeme a pan duro con agua tibia” (39). She quickly sets her sights on the wealthy Serafin Rubio, but plans to maintain an intimate relationship with her boyfriend as well: “Para consolar a su desventurado novio y, quizá también para consolarse a sí misma […] díjole: ‘Calla cándido cuando yo sea la esposa de Rubio, podré darte toda la felicidad que hoy ambicionas” (40). Blanca openly recognizes and makes explicit to her boyfriend the fact that she wishes to marry Rubio only to take advantage of his enviable social position, while offering to continue covertly her relationship with her boyfriend. This attitude mirrors the behavior seen in my analysis of Herencia, in which married women, such as Camila’s mother Nieves, often seek love and passion outside of their socially-regimented marriages. Blanca’s boyfriend refuses to be a part of this type of scandalous arrangement and leaves her life forever.

After bidding farewell to her former love, Blanca focuses on making Serafin, who inherited a great deal of money from his father, her husband. Blanca’s mother and aunts have a great interest in Blanca’s impending marriage as they desperately need someone to pay off their debts so that they can maintain the false picture of wealth that they have constructed; Serafin will be that person. Blanca is in no way physically attracted to the strange-looking Serafin, “un hombre feo de cara, rechoncho de cuerpo,” but she determines to marry him anyway (43). She recognizes Serafin’s physical drawbacks and is in fact somewhat repulsed by him as she realizes that his faults “no alcanzaban a desaparecer, ni en los momentos en que ella se sentía más deslumbradora por los respandores del oro” (45). Even the glitter of Serafin’s riches cannot erase the repulsion that Blanca feels. Nevertheless, the young woman elects to marry him to uphold her family’s social reputation and further her own personal desires for wealth. As mentioned
earlier, it was very difficult for women in the nineteenth century to find jobs (Pines 28-29); Blanca solves this dilemma by marrying a rich man she does not care for, thus sacrificing her chance at attaining real love and happiness. Like Herencia’s Camila, Blanca, upon marrying, enters a loveless space of victimization that ultimately culminates in her downfall into degradation. Blanca is not physically abused like Camila, but is simply not content with her married life, as she feels no love for her husband. Her only source of contentment with Serafín are the countless gifts he showers on her and the fact that he has his house converted into a palace for her. When in the presence of such luxury and extravagance, Blanca’s disgust towards Serafín is momentarily forgotten and she is “ebria de placer y de contento. Lucir, deslumbrar, ostentar, era la sola aspiración de su alma” (50). However, this elation does not last.

Blanca’s behavior as a married woman and mother perhaps contributes to her eventual downfall. In his book entitled Love and Marriage: Literature and its Social Context, Laurence Lerner discusses the Victorian ideal of mother and wife, the “angel in the house;” according to this “patriarchal ideology,” women should be submissive to and respectful of her husband, pure, good, virtuous, and domestic (130, 136). Further, Judith Rowbotham states in Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction that “a good girl’s behaviour was always modest, indicative of unselfish submission to those in due authority over her” (23). Blanca, far from embodying the ideal of the wife and mother, or of the good girl, quite portrays the opposite. She does not display unselfishness nor does she respect the role that a wife and mother is expected to play. Instead of honoring and caring for her husband and six children, she “continuó su vida de soltera, repartiendo su tiempo entre las fiestas, los saraos y las tertulias íntimas
Blanca does not stay in her socially-designated realm, the domestic sphere of the home, but rather behaves as would a single, independent woman. The narrator underscores the differences between Blanca and the ideal woman as seen by society: “Ser virtuosa a la manera de la madre de familia que vive en medio de los dones de la fortuna […] cuidando de la educación de sus hijos y velando por la felicidad de su esposa […] hubiera sido para Blanca algo que ella hubiese encontrado muy fuera de tono y de todo en todo impropio a la mujer del gran mundo” (53-54). The nineteenth-century mindset of what a married woman should be does not agree with Blanca’s views for her future. Like Camila, who strays from acceptable social behavior by sleeping with a man before she is married, Blanca also deviates from the social norm by shirking her domestic duties, even leaving the space of the marital home to attend parties without her husband, and for this she, like Camila, will be punished.

As her marriage to Serafín progresses, Blanca becomes more and more bitter regarding her situation and exudes growing hostility towards her husband. On one occasion, she goes so far as to lock Serafín out of the bedroom after he expresses a desire to be intimate with her. Rather than perform her wifely duties, she chooses to lock him out and goes to bed alone, thinking to herself that “el matrimonio sin amor, no era más que la prostitución sancionada por la sociedad; esto cuando no era el ridículo en acción, como era su matrimonio ridículo que para ella era ya tortura constante de su corazón” (144-45). Here, Blanca expresses the suffering she has endured as a consequence of marrying for money, as she begins to feel like a prostitute in her own home, a fact that prefigures her eventual entry into the profession. Engaging in sexual relations with
Serafin is an act that is forced upon Blanca because she is his wife. Nathan G. Hale, Jr. confirms that around the turn of the twentieth century, “many women came to regard marriage as little better than legalized prostitution” (31). Blanca’s misery extends from her role as wife to that of mother, a responsibility that she fails to embrace. She dislikes everything about motherhood, starting with the fact that carrying her children has wreaked havoc on her figure: “Blanca quejábase amargamente de esta fecundidad que engrosaba su talle e imperfeccionaba su cuerpo, impidiéndole ser como esas mujeres estériles…” (54). While Serafin thoroughly enjoys being a father and loves his children, Blanca is neither nurturing nor loving towards them and in fact spends very little time with them. Blanca sees motherhood as a restriction on her independence, and she is in no way interested in devoting her life to raising her children. Duffin explains that many women in the nineteenth century felt restricted by their expected role as mother: “[W]omen were trapped: by reproducing, by fulfilling their maternal function, they perpetuated the system which constrained them and would continue to constrain their female offspring” (88). Blanca rejects the responsibilities of motherhood and expresses more concern with activities such as buying clothes and attending parties. The reason for Blanca’s indifference towards her children may not be, however, her lack of motherly instincts, but rather the fact that they remind her of Serafin: “[E]ran extraordinariamente parecidos a D. Serafin, es decir, eran feos, trigueños y regordetes. ¿Sería esta la causa por qué, Blanca, era tan poco cariñosa para ellos?” (68). When Blanca looks at her children, she is reminded of her miserable life with Serafin and as such she prefers to avoid them as much as she can.
Blanca’s situation becomes further complicated when she begins to fall in love with another man, Alcides Lescanti. Because of the contrast between Alcides and her husband, her disdain for Serafin escalates. Blanca thinks not only of Alcides but also of her former boyfriend, whom she truly loved, and realizes that she misses him dearly. In her ten years of marriage, Blanca, in spite of the fact that she does not love Serafin, has never been unfaithful to him, “no tanto por amor a su esposo, cuanto por falta de amor a otro hombre” (100). When Blanca meets Alcides, she is sexually attracted to him and is fully aware that she is in the presence of the type of passion that is absent in her bland marriage. After many years of indifference and coldness, Blanca finally begins to experience feelings of love: “Blanca quería dejar de ser el ídolo del amor de muchos hombres, para ser la adoratriz, esclava del amor de uno solo” (108). Although Blanca cares for Alcides, she cannot resist manipulating him and playing with his emotions and she proceeds to keep him at arm’s length. She is so accustomed to being the object of admiration and attention that she is hesitant to lower herself from the pedestal upon which Alcides, and many other men, hold her. Her haughty pride prevents her from opening herself up to Alcides and he eventually tires of waiting for her, and falls in love with her poor, virtuous seamstress Josefina. Blanca is devastated and her perfectly constructed life begins to unravel quickly.

Alcides visits Blanca and tells her of his love for Josefina, a “mujer pura y virtuosa” who, when compared with Blanca, more than makes up for being poor by being virtuous (135). Blanca is overcome with anger and, in a jealous rage, fires Josefina and throws her out of the house. It is only after losing Alcides to Josefina that Blanca fully realizes the extent of her love for him and, as a result of her heartbreak, she begins to
consider improving her moral character: “Entonces pensó renunciar a la sociedad, al lujo, y vivir una vida aislada, modesta […] Y ¡cosa rara!, también a sus hijos, a los hijos de D. Serafín, principió a amarlos con ternura hasta entonces por primera vez sentida” (141). Blanca comes to the realization here that because she has been a slave to society her entire life, she has missed out on happiness with two men she loved. As soon as she expresses the desire to reject the superficial lifestyle she has always embraced, she begins to feel love for her children for the first time and spends time getting to know them. Blanca remains isolated in her house, only leaving to attend social gatherings where she knows she will see Alcides. While she now is able to embrace her children, she cannot do the same for her husband, and her marriage does not improve, much to Serafín’s consternation. As Blanca attempts to become accustomed to her life without Alcides, her cold and proud exterior begins to crumble and she starts to show real emotion. Serafín notices that she is “de continuo meditabunda, disgustada, muchas veces colérica y hasta alguna vez parecióle notar en sus ojos, indicios inequívocos de llanto” (156). Blanca’s emotional state is exacerbated by the fact that Serafín’s fortune has been rapidly diminishing – in no small measure due to Blanca’s outlandish spending – and “estaba a punto de desaparecer” (159). Earlier, Serafín had attempted to warn Blanca against her extravagance with words like, “mis rentas no son ya suficientes para sostener tus gastos” (95), but she ignored his warning and her carelessness and selfishness ultimately lead them to financial ruin.

Blanca’s downfall is made all the more poignant when she is rejected and despised by the very society that created her. At the end of the novel, she goes to a social gathering in a dress she cannot afford, and all the guests spurn her, fully aware that she
and Serafin are bankrupt because of her: “Ella tiene todos los vicios de un hombre corrompido y además, todos los defectos de la mujer mala [...] Los hombres casados y serios la miraron con desprecio e indignación alejándose de ella, como si les causara repugnancia; en cuanto a las mujeres, solteras y casadas, la miraban con extrañeza…” (178-79). The hypocrisy and snobbishness of this superficial society is blatantly obvious here, as the people around Blanca look down their noses at her and explicitly demonstrate their feelings of superiority towards the ruined woman, thus exposing the “class structure based on hypocrisy” that Cabello de Carbonera criticizes in the novel (Miller 25).

Serafin is forced to mortgage all his property and, in an ironic twist, Alcides, whose fortune has been slowly growing over time, becomes one of his biggest creditors, thus establishing himself as a key player in their financial situation. Blanca becomes hysterical about her impending poverty and casts blame on society for placing her in this predicament: “¿Quién era el causante de todo este brusco y horrible cambio? [...] en opinión de Blanca era la sociedad, esa sociedad estúpida que rinde homenaje sólo al dinero” (184). Here, man is not portrayed as the villain, but it is rather society that takes on the role of victimizer as Blanca holds it responsible for her downfall. In her hysterical state, Blanca makes one last-ditch effort to win back Alcides; she goes to his house and, not finding him there, leaves a letter expressing her love for him. After leaving Alcides’s house, Blanca does something quite out of the ordinary for her: she enters a church and prays. It is perhaps the first time in her life that she prays with fervent sincerity, as she pleads with the Virgin Mary to help her and to guide her to future happiness, whatever that might entail. Blanca leaves the church hopeful and somewhat uplifted.
The situation that Blanca encounters upon returning home shatters her illusions that her life might improve. She finds Serafin in a rage because he has discovered that she has gone to Alcides’s house and professed her love for him. He explodes with rage as he expresses the desire to kill her: “Sí, quiero matarte’ – decía él fuera de sí, encendido el rostro de furor. Era la explosión de sufrimientos largo tiempo comprimidos, era el amor siempre rendido y jamás correspondido […] Sí, aquello fue verdadera explosión de resentimientos, de penas, de celos, de todo lo que él había sufrido…” (193). The point of view is quite interesting here as we find the narrator to be understanding not of Blanca, but of Serafin’s plight. Blanca’s decision to marry a man she does not love results not only in her personal misery, but that of her husband as well, as she never manages to care for him. Although Serafin regains control of himself, he falls into a deep despair, feeling as though he has lost both his wife and his fortune, and plunges into madness: “Ocho días después, los médicos declararon que don Serafin era víctima de incurable enajenación mental, y pasó a ocupar una celda entre los locos furiosos de la casa de insanos” (198). At this point, Blanca finds herself truly alone; Alcides has scorned her in favor of Josefina, and her husband, who has always provided for her, has abandoned her albeit not voluntarily.

Blanca is now free of the shackles of a loveless marriage but, ironically, her life is in shambles and will never be repaired: “La caída de Blanca Sol fue sonada y estrepitosa como la caída de un astro, del astro más brillante y esplendoroso que lucía el aristocrático cielo de la sociedad limeña” (200). Although Blanca struggles against the forces pushing her down, she cannot find a way to support herself and her six children. She is forced to sell her beautiful house and all her possessions to provide for her family. Ultimately,
Blanca turns to alcohol as a way to ease her pain, as she struggles to understand how she came to this life of poverty: “¿Qué culpa tenía ella, si desde la infancia, desde el colegio enseñaronle a amar el dinero [...] ? ¿Qué culpa tenía de haberse casado con el hombre ridículo pero codiciado por sus amigos, y llamado a salvar la angustiosa situación de su familia?” (204). Blanca does not find fault with her actions, but rather blames society for her situation. She married Serafín because she had been taught to marry for money and social standing, and with these two things gone she reaches the conclusion that the only way to care for her family is to prostitute herself. Although Blanca seems to have become more reflective and humane over the years, she elects to enter into prostitution because she reasons that “la virtud no es un potaje que puedo poner a la mesa para que coman mis hijos!” (203). She organizes a gathering of “amigos íntimos” and thinks, “¿Qué pierdo esta noche? Y se contestaba a sí misma: ¡Nada; puesto que el honor y mi reputación los he perdido ya! [...] ¡Mañana habrá dinero para pagar mis deudas!” (211). Interestingly, Blanca chooses to prostitute herself in her own house rather than working in a brothel, perhaps in an attempt to keep her situation as private as possible.

Blanca has often been compared to Zola’s Nana, but Ana Peluffo argues that whereas the integration of Nana into the world of prostitution is quite characteristic of determinism as she is the “producto de una degeneración física provocada por varias generaciones de pobreza y alcoholismo,” Blanca “se prostituye no por amor al sexo o por degeneración genética, sino porque una vez que pierde todos sus bienes materiales ya no le queda nada que vender o empeñar” (emphasis in the text; “Las trampas” 40). Blanca does not possess the inherent sexual degeneracy that Nana exhibits, regardless of the less-than-desirable traits of superficiality and materialism that she has inherited from her.
mother, but her fate becomes much like that of Zola’s femme fatale. Blanca falls to the depths of alcoholism and prostitution, but interestingly Cabello de Carbonera “elige no matar a la prostituta para que ésta pueda vengarse de una sociedad materialista y corrupta, que le ha enseñado a amar el dinero por sobre todas las cosas” (Peluffo, “Las trampas” 49). Blanca explicitly blames society for instilling in her the traits that bring about her downfall and she states that “si la sociedad la repudiaba, porque ya no podía arrastrar un coche, ni dar grandes saraos y semanales recepciones, ella se vengaría, despreciando a esa sociedad y escarneciendo a la virtud y a la moral” (205). Blanca weakly attempts to turn herself from passive victim to active contender, one who avenges society’s wrongs.

Like Camila, who deviated from the realm of social propriety by sleeping with a man before marriage, Blanca too strays from acceptable behavior when she openly rejects her husband and ignores her children. She fails as a mother and a wife, openly entertaining thoughts of being with another man, Alcides. In the nineteenth century, according to Judith Rowbotham, it “was presumed to be the females that provided the cement which held the home together” (18). In Blanca’s situation, she does precisely the opposite, as she contributes greatly to the disintegration of her family and their eventual plunge into poverty. Once she reaches that state, Blanca becomes a prostitute both to provide for her children and to punish the very society that she worked so hard to please earlier in her life. Like Herencia, the novel ends without revealing Blanca’s ultimate fate, but not without depicting her fall into degradation and great misfortune.
IV. Beba

Much like Cabello de Carbonera’s *Blanca Sol*, Uruguayan Carlos Reyles’s *Beba* (1894) focuses on a woman who marries someone she does not love but is attracted to for superficial reasons. Like Blanca, Beba is unhappy in her marriage which leads her to partake in an adulterous and incestuous relationship with her uncle, resulting in disaster for the young woman. Because Beba does not receive the love and passion that she yearns for from her husband Rafael, she looks for it elsewhere and ultimately finds it in the arms of her mother’s brother Gustavo Ribero. As we saw earlier, Camila and Blanca Sol were victims of loveless marriages that ultimately lead to desperation and degradation. Beba, unlike these two women, takes her extreme situation further, as her despair over the birth of a stillborn child with Gustavo drives her to commit suicide.

Although Beba is not forced into marriage like Camila, she is attracted by her future husband Rafael Benavente’s elegant physical appearance and high social position. Although Beba is not portrayed as a selfish, opportunistic, superficial woman like Blanca, she is swept away by a man who looks good by society’s standards: “A ella le gustaba él por su elegancia, soltura de ademanes y desparpajo en el hablar […] ¡Qué bien se viste!” (24). Unlike Blanca Sol, Beba does not marry Rafael for his money, as she is quite comfortable financially, but for his physical appearance and elegance. Rafael is, on the outside at least, the kind of man that Beba feels she should marry, but at the time of their marriage, she really does not know him at all. She naively agrees to marry him, although she does not even know what love truly is. He asks her if she loves him and she responds that she does, to which the narrator adds, “sin saber lo que decía” (26). Rafael impresses Beba greatly with his sophistication and class and “[ella] se casó como se casan la mayor
parte de las mujeres, sin conciencia de lo que prometía al pie del altar, vendados los ojos
y oscurecida la razón por pueriles caprichos del momento” (24). Beba is no different
than many other women, the narrator tells us, and becomes a wife simply because society
has conditioned her to believe that this is what she should do and that Rafael is the right
kind of man to marry. As soon as the wedding ceremony is over, Beba begins to
experience feelings of regret, but at this point it is too late and she has to bear the
consequences of her impulsive action.

The novel opens in the Uruguayan countryside when we are introduced to
Gustavo Ribero, a rancher and breeder who is eagerly awaiting the arrival of his niece
Beba and her new husband Rafael and his family. From this very first scene, the reader is
made aware of the close relationship that exists between uncle and niece, as Gustavo has
taken great pains to keep Beba’s old room just as she left it and make everything perfect
for her. As soon as the young woman arrives, Gustavo immediately makes a negative
assessment about the effect marriage has had on her as he notes that “está más delgada,
no debe de ser feliz” (18). Beba proceeds to introduce the Benavente family to Gustavo,
but without a great deal of enthusiasm. Beba is very happy to be back in the familiar
surroundings of the Uruguayan countryside, but not quite sure how her new family from
Montevideo will adjust to the change of location. In the first conversation between
Gustavo and Beba, the reader is alerted to problems brewing between Beba and her new
husband. Beba is happy to have returned to the countryside, while Rafael loves living in
the city: “Aquí se respira, se vive…a mí me gusta mucho el campo. Créeme, Tito, si de
mí dependiera no volvería a la ciudad. Pero a él no le gusta el campo, cree que es cosa de
salvajes: en cambio a mí me revienta la ciudad con su vida frívola e insípida” (emphasis
in the text; 20). Since Beba married Rafael without knowing much about him, she is beginning to note the great differences between them. She is miserable living in Montevideo where she feels confined and restrained, and longs constantly to return to the countryside. Rafael, on the other hand, thrives in the city and despises the country. Gustavo reminds Beba that he warned her that she would be unhappy in Montevideo, and she answers that “a nosotras las mujeres, cuando tenemos un capricho, no nos detiene nada, sólo deseamos satisfacerlo” (24). She realizes sadly that her impulsiveness in marrying Rafael has brought about the misery that she now feels.

Beba’s unhappiness in her marriage to Rafael is demonstrated on various occasions after their arrival at Gustavo’s ranch. The very first interaction between the husband and wife exhibits the lack of communication between them. Rafael is eager to go to bed, while Beba, excited about her return to the countryside, asks him to keep her company and talk with her. She makes an attempt to draw him into conversation, but he answers her “con monosílabos” and she finally gives up as she “hizo un gesto de impaciencia y empezó a despojarse de sus ropas” (31). Rafael, unconcerned about her feelings, proceeds to go to bed without further discussion and his indifference becomes clear at this point. He does not demonstrate loving feelings towards Beba and in general seems to prefer that she leave him alone. Although she does not love him, she puts forth an effort to spend time with him, but her efforts are rejected. Their marriage lacks not only passion and tenderness, but interaction and companionship as well. After Rafael goes to bed that night, Beba begins reminiscing about her childhood, her mother’s death, and her subsequent education at the hands of her uncle, who always treated her
impeccably. Beba and Gustavo have always been close and she feels that he, and certainly not her husband, is the only one who truly understands her.

Beba’s unhappiness with Rafael perhaps stems from the idealism with which she views love. Her parents, Miguel and Berta, loved each other with explosive passion, so much so that, when their parents objected to their relationship and threatened to marry Berta off to a man of their choosing, Miguel and Berta ran away for one last secret meeting together. After making love, Miguel attempted to kill his pregnant lover and then killed himself. Beba herself is the product of this overwhelming passion, and she yearns to find a man who loves her with the same intensity her father exhibited: “[E]lla quería un hombre que la amara como Miguel amó a Berta capaz de morir por ella” (51).

Every man Beba has ever known, including her husband, falls far short of this romantic idealization. Growing up, she depended heavily on her uncle, and would tell him with “sincera ternura: “¡Ah Tito, Tito! sólo tú me entiendes” (53). When Beba impulsively marries Rafael, she has not found her ideal mate, but rather a spoiled and self-centered man who does not make any effort to understand and appreciate the things that are important to his wife. When he accompanies Beba and Gustavo on excursions into the countryside, he quickly becomes bored and begins staying in the car while they ride horses and participate in other activities. He expresses his sentiments in the following way: “La verdad es que no me divierto mucho’ se decía para su capote” (55). While Beba enjoys coming into contact once again with the Uruguayan countryside, Rafael longs to return to Montevideo and his “partidas de golfo o billar en el club” (55). He does not enjoy getting up early and yearns for the much less-active lifestyle he leads in the city. Beba spends a great deal of time each morning attempting to pry Rafael from
the bed and encouraging him to get ready quickly so as not to keep her uncle waiting. Rafael’s surly response is “¡Tito, Tito!...que se espere” (56). For Rafael, accompanying Beba and Gustavo is a chore and a sacrifice and he constantly demonstrates his discontent. He realizes that it would be better if he enjoyed the same things as Beba, but he cannot; he is lazy and “le temía al trabajo” (60). Their marriage, which never had a strong foundation, begins to disintegrate further when Rafael informs Beba, albeit politely, that he will no longer be participating in their excursions: “Tú, si quieres, sal al campo, por mí no te apures; yo me encuentro mejor aquí, en las casas […] Esto no quiere decir que no te acompañe algún día que otro, pero no siempre, porque, francamente, me canso” (62). Rafael no longer feels the need to accompany his wife when he would rather not, but she continues to ask him to take part in the trips, a fact that causes him to become annoyed. As is apparent here, there is a constant lack of understanding and communication between Rafael and Beba, and we, as readers, are never privy to even one moment of love or tenderness between the two.

After getting married, Rafael’s life does not change much: “De casado siguió haciendo, con ligeras variantes, lo que hacía de soltero” (65). Rafael, unlike Beba, is able to continue on with his life much as it was before he entered into marriage. Victoria Aarons states that nineteenth-century women often struggle more than men after marrying because “they are placed in a societal framework in which their psychological needs are continually denied” (141). Rafael is not attuned to the fact that Beba’s needs are not being met in Montevideo, and that she feels lonely and depressed there. Rafael, on the other hand, continues socializing and drinking with his friends and expresses annoyance when it comes time to return home to Beba: “[S]i era la hora de retirarse, el
When they move to the countryside, Rafael feels out of place and uncomfortable and Gustavo, the man who will eventually replace him as Beba’s lover, in particular unnerves him and leaves him with a general feeling of unease. Rafael’s parents are the first to point out that Gustavo and Beba spend a great deal of time alone together and that perhaps this constant interaction is not appropriate. His mother Pepa seems to insinuate the possibility of a romantic relationship between the two when she says, “Al fin él es un hombre joven y ella una mujer bonita, y aunque es su sobrina, casi su hija…” (75). Rafael reacts to his mother’s insinuation with the same indifference he had exhibited earlier. He opts not to say anything to Beba because he is happy not to have to accompany her: “Que haga lo que quiera, con tal que me deje en paz” (76). Rafael’s primary concern is not that he might lose Beba to another man, but that he not be inconvenienced. As Beba continues to spend a great deal of time with Gustavo, she begins to make comparisons between her uncle and her husband: “Y sin querer, también, admirando la generosa actividad de [Gustavo] Ribero, exclamaba: ‘Si Rafael fuera igual a Tito!’ e inmediatamente la invadía negra tristeza, la tristeza de los grandes desencantos” (91). Beba is obviously not happy in her marriage and she continuously demonstrates much stronger feelings of admiration and love for her uncle than for her husband.

Throughout the novel, we see that Beba often expresses her discontent with her marriage; she feels that Rafael is superficial, lazy, and selfish. While his physical appearance and sophistication is what initially attracted her to him, she now realizes that “es tanta su indolencia, que si le costara el menor trabajo ser bueno, dejaría de serlo en
seguida” (132). Beba is quite disillusioned with marriage and she dreads going back to Montevideo with Rafael. Gustavo comments on her loveless marriage with the following analogy: “Te ha pasado con tu casamiento lo que a los niños cuando rompen un juguete para ver lo que tiene adentro, y luego de satisfecho el capricho, exclaman entristecidos: ¡roto!” (136). Beba’s young marriage is indeed broken and she wishes more than anything not to return with her superficial husband to the city, and to the hours of boredom that await her:

¡Si yo pudiera dedicarme a una tarea que me ocupara todo el día! Pero no, las mujeres estamos imposibilitadas para toda suerte de empresas; nuestra única tarea consiste en procurar casarnos, y después tener hijos… y si no los tenemos, ¡pobres de nosotros! ¿Qué hace una mujer casada y sin hijos cuando no tiene que remendar la camisa del esposo y hacerle de comer? (139-40)

Beba’s comments extend beyond her individual situation and broach the subject of the limitations of women in her world. She cannot counter her boredom with a job other than domestic chores and the rearing of children. Women in the nineteenth century suffered from an overwhelming lack of freedom in their lives (Pines 26). In much the same fashion as Blanca Sol, Beba is not satisfied with the role society assigns to women and expresses her discontent. Furthermore, Beba has no children, and this fact contributes greatly to the boredom she experiences in Montevideo. Rafael and Beba spend very little time together, as he consistently leaves her alone in the house while he goes out with his friends.

When Rafael and Beba’s visit to Gustavo’s ranch is indefinitely prolonged due to an outbreak of “viruela negra,” (141) their marriage becomes even more strained as Rafael becomes more and more irritable and hostile due to his own boredom, as he finds nothing pleasant to do in the house. At this point, he becomes increasingly angry about
the amount of time that Beba spends with Gustavo and feels that she should pay more
attention to him: “¿la esposa a quién tiene que agradar sino a su marido?” (149). His
anger reaches a fever pitch one day and, as Beba passes by him, “la agarró de un brazo
violentamente, y mirándola con expresión feroz, acertó a decir: ‘Cuando una mujer no
obedece a su marido, ¿me quieres decir tú qué hace el marido, me lo quieres decir?’”
(149). Rafael’s general annoyance about being in the countryside for so long and Beba’s
obvious preference for spending time with Gustavo over him finally culminates in a fit of
rage, as he openly warns his wife about the consequences of her behavior. Up to this
point in the novel, Rafael had never demonstrated violence towards Beba, but here it
seems he has reached his breaking point and cannot control himself. His anger seems to
stem from a wish to assert his masculine rights over his wife and a desire not to look like
a fool in a society where a woman should be submissive and obedient to her husband.
Beba is so happy with her uncle, however, that she experiences an extreme urge to rebel
against the socially-assigned role of women:

[S]iento una voz interna que grita: ‘rebélate, rebélate […] no hay ninguna
razón humana ni divina que te obligue a ser víctima silenciosa del
egoísmo de los hombres […] Para ser mujeres, verdaderamente mujeres,
y lograr, sino la felicidad, al menos el casamiento, tenemos que
anularnos, que matar todo pujo de individualidad […] y no ver ni oir sino
por los ojos y oídos de los hombres […] el matrimonio es el único porvenir
que nos han dejado en la vida…(emphasis in the text; 156-57)

Beba expresses her frustration here with marriage and its concomitant requirement that
women suppress their individuality in the process. Beba’s words support Davida Pines’s
observation that, for women in the nineteenth century, “the only thinkable state is a
married one [and there exists an] inability to conceive of any sort of life other than one
defined by marriage” (29).
When Rafael patronizes Beba for lamenting the death of one of Gustavo’s horses, they enter into one of many heated arguments that leave them both feeling nothing but hatred for each other. Beba begins to really examine their marriage and comes up with very distressing conclusions: “[M]e confirmo en la sospecha que desde el otro día me viene torturando: nos aborrecemos […] ¿qué va a ser de mí?” (170). Beba worries about her future, as she realizes that only misery awaits her if she stays with Rafael. She thinks back on her wedding night and comes to the realization that her unhappiness and regret over her marriage began that very night: “[E]ntre todos los sinsabores que experimenté, ninguno me hirió tan hondo ni encogió tanto el corazón, como el sentimiento de haber perdido la libertad” (174). As soon as she becomes Rafael’s wife, Beba begins to feel like a different person, like she has lost a part of herself along with her personal freedom. Marriage for Beba, as for Blanca Sol and Camila, is not a liberating experience, but rather an oppressive and stifling one that functions in the end to strip her of her independence and freedom. Beba sees her future as being increasingly unhappy and full of suffering and wonders why she should remain in a loveless marriage: “¿Y esto es para toda la vida, no hay nada más, de modo que sólo me resta sufrir y sufrir siempre, siempre… […] en contra de todas las leyes, de todas las convenciones sociales…me hago esta pregunta: ¿Concluido el amor, qué junta a dos seres en el matrimonio?” (175-76). Beba questions the social convention of marriage without love here, and we begin to see that she is seriously contemplating taking steps to free herself from her husband in order to avoid a lifetime of misery.

In sharp contrast to the increasingly dysfunctional relationship between Rafael and Beba is the closeness she shares with her uncle. What has always been a close bond
is now beginning to transform into something romantic as Gustavo admits to Beba that he
did not want her to marry Rafael and that he wished she would always be by his side.
When the epidemic dies down and it is safe for Beba and Rafael to return to Montevideo,
Beba is overwhelmingly sad about leaving her uncle, while Rafael cannot leave the ranch
fast enough. When the group attempts to cross a dangerous river on their journey home,
Beba is separated from the others and is swept away by the current in a small canoe.
When Rafael hesitates to save her, Gustavo jumps into action and risks his life to do so.
While Rafael expresses regret over not being the one to help Beba, it is not out of concern
for his wife but rather because Gustavo is now alone with her: “[I]ba invadiéndolo, en
vez de sentimientos de compasión y ternura hacia Beba, una insana ira y hondo
despecho” (189-90). Rafael does not demonstrate the slightest concern for his wife, but
instead feels that Gustavo is stepping on his territory. Gustavo begins to suffer a fever
from plunging into the cold water to save Beba, who tenderly cares for him. During their
time alone, Gustavo finally expresses the immense love he feels for Beba, who is at first
overwhelmed but soon professes her love for him as well. Gustavo tells his niece that
they will never again be separated and comments on the society that they have left
behind: “¡Qué mundo estúpido aquél! ¡Cómo nos martirizamos para conservar el orden
doloroso de la vida falsa!” (201). For the first time, Beba is truly happy and optimistic
about her future, as Gustavo is the man of her dreams. As they reach land, they discuss
their feelings once again, as Gustavo looks at Beba adoringly: “[A]l volver la vista y
contemplar a su sobrina […] fijóse en que toda ella respiraba lozanía, hermosura y
juventud…” (210). They give in to their desires and make love. Since Beba is still
married this act constitutes not only incest, but adultery as well. However, she is so
content with Gustavo that she does not experience guilt as she expresses happily:

“[A]hora comprendo que esperaba ser tuya, porque lo encuentro muy natural, muy lógico […] no era mi esposo el amante de mis sueños, sentí por primera vez la amargura de no poder ser de él; ese él eras tú” (emphasis in the text; 213). Beba’s happiness is soon interrupted, however, when Gustavo reminds her that they must return and face Rafael. When Beba confesses to Rafael what transpired between her and Gustavo, he first erupts in a fit of anger, and then sinks into a chair and sobs. However, his anguish seems not to have much to do with losing his wife to another man, but with the social embarrassment he will suffer, as he states, “Engañarme así: ¿qué te hice yo para engañarme así? … Y ahora, ¿qué me espera? la risa de todo el mundo, la vergüenza … puedes gozarte de tu obra: en ridículo, ¡yo en ridículo! y para siempre, ¡ah!” (218). In despair, Rafael departs from the ranch, leaving Beba and Gustavo together.

Although Beba has finally managed to free herself from her loveless marriage to Rafael, she does not do so without consequence. She and Gustavo are happy for a time, but soon enough their life together starts to show signs of stress and Beba’s downfall, as well as that of Gustavo, begins. While Beba believes that “no podía haber mal en tanto amor” and “pertenecerle a [Gustavo] Ribero era cumplir su verdadero destino”, Gustavo suffers feelings of guilt over his relationship with his niece, as he thinks that “mi falta es de las que no tienen disculpa, que merezco el desprecio de todo el mundo… […] interiormente se consideraba culpable…” (239-40). When Ramón, Rafael’s brother-in-law, visits the couple, he notes that Gustavo’s appearance is quite haggard and Ramón hardly recognizes him as he “había enflaquecido, llevaba la barba descuidada, y sus facciones aparecían más angulosas y duras” (236). Gustavo is in the process of losing all
his money due to failing business ventures and is suffering greatly as a result of his misfortune and his guilt. When the livestock Gustavo depends on for his livelihood begin to get ill, significantly, as a result of breeding animals of the same family line, he loses control and kills his favorite horse in a fit of rage, exclaiming “¡Todo lo nuestro está maldito!” (244). He even blames Beba at one point for their unfortunate situation: “Las mujeres tienen la culpa de todo; si tú no te hubieras casado…” (240). Although he loves Beba and apologizes for his cruel words, there is a part of Gustavo that holds Beba accountable for his downfall. As a result of their adulterous, and incestuous, relationship, he sees their future together as cursed in a sense. His presentiment is proven correct when, after giving birth to a stillborn child, Beba commits suicide by throwing herself into the river. The product of the adulterous, incestuous relationship between uncle and niece is “un monstruo repugnante en cuya horrible cara se confundían los ojos, la boca y la nariz” (253). Beba believes that the dead child “parecía haber venido al mundo a echarle en cara su falta” (257). She cannot face Gustavo, who will surely reiterate his opinion that they are cursed, and so she opts to end her suffering by killing herself. Just before throwing herself into the river, Beba makes one last commentary on the lamentable situation of women in her society: “Si yo hubiera pertenecido al sexo fuerte, se dijo, a qué empresas, por difíciles que fueran, no habría dado feliz término, pero siendo mujer …” (264). The young woman sees her situation as hopeless because of her gender and sees no other option but to end her suffering by committing suicide. Beba’s death, according to Luis Menafra, is “el triunfo de la naturaleza, en su eterno pasaje entre la vida y la muerte” (86). Like several other women who have been discussed in this dissertation, for example Santa, death is the only escape for Beba, and ultimately offers
her relief from her anguish. Like Blanca Sol and Camila, her deviation from acceptable social behavior is seen as the leading cause of her downfall and, ultimately, her elimination from a society that would have never condoned her actions. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault describes sinful behavior as “debauchery (extramarital relations), adultery, rape, spiritual or carnal incest,” explaining that “breaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures” brings about “condemnation” (38). Beba is guilty of sinful behavior; her acts, specifically her incestuous relationship with Gustavo, are not only regarded as “contrary to nature,” but also “against the law” (Foucault, The History 38). Beba’s relationship with her uncle not only exemplifies a rejection of the sacred vows of marriage, but also goes against the social decree of marriage, an institution “which had been established for governing the order of things and the plan of beings” and to govern sexuality in a controlled manner (Foucault, The History 38-39). Beba’s violation of the rules of marriage leads to her failed attempt at procreation and, eventually, her death.

Loveless marriages affect women of all kinds in the Spanish American naturalist novel: naïve, idealistic, and financially comfortable young women like Beba, superficial and opportunistic women like Blanca Sol who falls from the height of wealth to the depths of poverty, and rich, innocent young women like Camila, who falls into vice as a result of the decadence of her mother. These women are victimized by their partners and are expected to accept “el yugo del matrimonio como única posibilidad de subsistencia normal en la sociedad” (Prendes 184). Nineteenth-century women, of whom three examples provided in this chapter offer a paradigmatic overview, act in accordance with rules laid out by a patriarchal society that does not allow them to take a profession, but
rather ties them to men and consistently places them in the home. Oftentimes, the loveless marriages into which the women enter lead them down devastating paths of self-degradation and destruction with consequences such as prostitution, suicide, incest, and physical abuse. One way or another, each of these women suffers a displacement in society, a downward turn whose origins can often be traced to her marriage.
Debemos ser bonitas y frívolas, y toda nuestra educación tiende a eso: a convertirnos en un primoroso juguete...¡pobres mujeres! (157).

Carlos Reyles, Beba

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The pessimism inherent in the naturalist novel can certainly be seen in its treatment of female characters. Although the literature of this period in Spanish America may not be quite as crushing or hopeless as that of France, female characters are still consistently subjected to difficult situations that lead inevitably to their downfall. According to Manuel Prendes, “en la novela naturalista no habrá individuo más inerme ante las pasiones propias o ajenas que la mujer” (La novela naturalista 183). Throughout this dissertation, this statement has indeed proven to be quite valid, as the female figure is invariably portrayed as a suffering victim of prostitution, illness, violence, or marriage. The study of victimization suffered by female characters led me to focus on spaces of oppression, some more predictable (the brothel) than others (marriage). And yet there were some spaces such as the brothel or the church that sometimes represented the very opposite of what they are construed to be.

By analyzing the various ways in which woman is characterized as victim in the Spanish American naturalist novel, I have provided an overview of her repressive situation in a male-dominated society that seeks to mold her to its stringent standards of appropriateness. I have demonstrated how various types of women are subject to the same kinds of victimization, thus emphasizing the point that women are victims primarily
because of their gender. While some women such as Clorinda Matto de Turner’s Camila and Carlos Reyles’s Beba are financially well-off, other women such as Augusto D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero, Federico Gamboa’s Santa, and Manuel Gálvez’s Nacha Regules struggle for money and suffer the consequences of poverty. Likewise, I have shown how essentially innocent and virtuous young women such as Javier de Viana’s Juana and D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero, sexually experienced women such as Matto’s Camila and Gamboa’s Santa, and materialistic, superficial feminine characters such as Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera’s Blanca Sol are all vulnerable in their own way. By assessing the victimization suffered by women who display varying degrees of morality, I have shown that their status as victim is not determined based on their virtuous nature or lack thereof, but rather by their gender. Very rarely, the female protagonist is offered a glimmer of hope in her ruined life and even more rarely, is she allowed to rise up out of her devastating circumstances to attain a normal lifestyle. Nacha Regules is the outstanding example of this type of salvation, as she is rescued from the depths of prostitution and filth by a man and permitted to marry him and create a happy life. Along the same lines, Santa is also saved from prostitution by a male character, though her redemption is soon followed by her death.

To be sure, the victimization of women in the novels chosen for discussion ultimately involves their downfall and personal ruin, and frequently results in their elimination from society in one form or another. Women who are seen as socially deviant or in any way dangerous to the prevailing social order are dealt with accordingly. Some of the women, such as Viana’s Juana, Gamboa’s Santa, and Reyles’s Beba, disappear altogether, as they each die at the end of their respective novels. Other women
such as D’Halmar’s Juana Lucero are both removed from mainstream society (by being disposed of in a brothel), and emotionally affected by their mental incapacitation or debilitating illness. Like Juana Lucero, Cabello de Carbonera’s Blanca Sol is pushed to the margins of society when she becomes a poverty-stricken alcoholic who turns to prostitution as the only way to support her six children. Although they find themselves in varying situations, each of these female protagonists suffers at the hands of a male-dominated society.

I have intended to draw attention to a somewhat neglected area of scholarship, the Spanish American naturalist novel, and focus specifically on the female figure in a representative group of novels. By choosing novels from various countries, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, and by analyzing works by both female and male novelists, I have attempted to present my argument based on a broad picture of the portrayal of woman as victim. Further, I have discussed how Spanish American novelists both conform to and adopt the characteristics of naturalism as set forth by French novelist Emile Zola, and the ways in which they at times stray from the tenets of naturalism, and especially determinism, and find ways to incorporate Catholic beliefs such as free will into their writing.

The oppression of women is not a topic limited to the nineteenth century, but rather one that has spanned several centuries and continues to be an issue of interest today. Historically, women of all ages and races have struggled and fought for a social voice and equal standing to men. This dissertation provides an insight into the struggle of Spanish American women as portrayed in the naturalist novel of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By analyzing the ways in which the novelists of the time, both
female and male, portrayed women, their social roles and responsibilities, and their place in society, we are able to gain a better understanding of what life might have been like for the women of that society. It is my hope that this study will pave the way for future studies on the naturalist novel in Spanish America and enable more comparisons with the European novel of that period.
Bibliography

I. Works Cited


II. Sources Consulted


