

**Narrow Skulls and Vile Flesh: The Failure of Female Anatomy  
and Feminist Critique in Rafael López de Haro's *En el cuerpo de una mujer***

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Early in the twentieth century, a new publishing trend developed in Spain: short novels sold by subscription and fueled by the demands of a growing reading public. Weekly publications such as *El Cuento Semanal* and *La Novela Corta* were mass-produced and sold at low prices that made them tremendously popular (Litvak 46). While some major authors took advantage of these venues, by and large the writers of these novellas have been forgotten due to the questionable literary merit of their publications.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the prolific and once avidly read Rafael López de Haro (1876–1967) lamented at the age of ninety that according to literary history, “era como si no hubiera vivido y trabajado” (Armiñán 10). During his career as a lawyer, López de Haro wrote 27 novels, 100 novellas, and 20 plays as well as essays, articles, and poetry. *ABC* journalist Luis de Armiñán gives readers a hint of the popular appeal of the *revistas noveleras*, commenting nostalgically that López de Haro and his peers “lucían una gracia narrativa que hoy no tiene réplica y reflejo. Por un duro le daban a uno tantas ilusiones en una sola aventura, que eso tenemos que agradecerles quienes fuimos sus lectores” (11). Nevertheless, nearly half a century after his death, López de Haro is scarcely discussed by scholars though his once-famous name still graces schools and streets in Cuenca and in his native San Clemente.

López de Haro divided his novelistic production into three categories: “Novelas de la vida,” “de las almas,” and “de la carne,” and as the latter category suggests, he cultivated the

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Mira refers to these writers as a “lost generation” that has been ignored by literary histories, publishers, and scholars because their texts often lack “traditional ‘canonical’ virtues (experimentation, elegance, depth, substantiality), yet somehow they connected with their readership, a fact that has often been regretted or treated as an embarrassment” (26–7). Although these texts tend to recycle literary trends such as French Decadentism and Naturalism into melodrama and pornography, Mira notes that they should not be summarily dismissed by scholars because they often consider serious social and psychological issues (27).

controversial but lucrative erotic novel along with fictions that he considered to be of higher artistic merit (“Escritores” 111). He published *En el cuerpo de una mujer* in 1918 as an installment of *La Novela Corta*, one of the most enduring and popular of the *revistas noveleras* (Litvak 45). The novella may have been considered erotic due to its emphasis on the female body and illicit sex, but it is far from graphically sexual.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of its classification, it functions in an unexpected manner as a narrative of both *alma* and *carne*, which becomes evident as the supernatural tale unfolds. The novella opens at the resolution of an adultery plot that would have resonated with readers since such stories frequently appeared in Spanish newspapers. The lawyer-narrator of the prologue and epilogue recounts how a client, Gerardo, was acquitted by the law and applauded by society for murdering his adulterous wife Emilia. A month later Gerardo arrives at the lawyer’s office, appearing to be on the brink of madness, and gives him a manuscript apparently authored by Emilia. The fantastical premise of the diary-like text, which the lawyer reproduces as the central part of the novella, is that while Emilia lay stricken by a fatal illness, the soul of an old, decrepit art critic was transferred to her dying body through the arcane craft of the mysterious Dr. Xenis.

Emilia dies, but with his vigorous strength of spirit, the *vejete* (as the art critic refers to himself) overcomes the fever and revives her body. Initially, he is thrilled at his new prospects: “En posesión de esta fábrica robusta, bella, eufórica, ¿cuánto podré gozar?” he exclaims (3).<sup>3</sup> However, he soon learns that Emilia’s life is one of social limitations and menial tasks rather than the pleasure-filled existence that he imagined. He attempts to engage in public life and has

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<sup>2</sup> There was a great range in what was considered erotic fiction, as the selections in Lily Litvak’s *Antología de la novela corta erotica española de entreguerras 1918–1936* attest. The novellas reproduced by Litvak range from merely suggestive, such as Andrés Guilmán’s *La señorita Frivolidad*, to quite explicit, such as Juan Caballero Soriano’s *La domadora de machos*, which contains descriptions of sexual acts including sodomy.

<sup>3</sup> The novella is not paginated, but the text is divided into 31 short sections that will be used to identify the passages referenced. The prologue consists of three sections titled “Anverso,” “Reverso,” and “La verdadera cuestión.” The fourth section, “Lo que decía el manuscrito,” is divided into 27 short chapters identified by roman numerals, and the final section of the text is labeled “Epílogo.” The numbers given in citations correspond to the central 27 chapters.

several affairs—to the shock of Emilia’s social circle—before deciding to become “verdaderamente una mujer,” by marrying her suitor Gerardo even though he holds the man in contempt (17).<sup>4</sup> Trapped in an unbearably boring life of middle-class housewifery, the *vejete* quickly gives in to numerous infidelities, and as a result Gerardo catches Emilia *in flagrante* and stabs her repeatedly. She later dies under Dr. Xenis’s care, and Gerardo, though not burdened by guilt over her murder, is driven mad by the details revealed in the manuscript.<sup>5</sup>

The significance of *En el cuerpo de una mujer* lies not so much in its debatable literary merit as in the transparency with which it reveals the repercussions of the nineteenth-century gender ideology that was still prevalent in twentieth-century Spain. This analysis explores three intertwined elements related to gender in López de Haro’s novella: the critique of male dominance and excess, the critique of women’s subjugation and its contradictory relationship to the protagonist’s female embodiment experience, and the implied desire for a more satisfying romantic relationship, an aspiration which is tinged with queer desire and frustrated by the violent enforcement of traditional gender norms. The text’s uncommon point of view—that of a man living in a woman’s body—gives the reader a unique insight into what it meant to be female in early twentieth-century Spanish culture and into the negative effects of traditional feminine stereotypes on women and their relationships with men. In his critique of women’s subordination, López de Haro seems to suggest that the unequal status of men and women results in romantic relationships that are unsatisfactory because they can never be both intellectually and sexually stimulating. His gender-bending tale thus challenges the strict delineation of traditional

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<sup>4</sup> This analysis presents some challenges in distinguishing between Emilia and the art critic whose soul occupies her body. To help clarify the difference, the term *vejete* will be used in reference to the art critic’s thoughts and actions as he lives in Emilia’s body. The name *Emilia* will be used to refer to Emilia’s physical body and to her actions in the context of relationships with other characters who, unaware of the *vejete*’s presence, believe that the Emilia is still the same person she was before her illness.

<sup>5</sup> Although the lawyer doubts the manuscript’s veracity, Gerardo’s multiple encounters with Dr. Xenis seem to confirm its truth within the novella’s plot, so this analysis proceeds as if Emilia’s body were in fact possessed.

masculine and feminine ideals as it experiments with creating a superior woman who embodies the desirable aspects of both genders (namely, female beauty and male intellect) and who could therefore be an ideal romantic partner.

At times, López de Haro's criticisms of gender disparity seem progressive, even feminist, yet in the end they are fatally flawed by his own depiction of women. Ironically, the same cross-gender point of view that serves to critique the societal limitations placed on women also unveils López de Haro's own ideological prejudices against the female body—nineteenth-century notions of femininity which limit the potential of the hypothetically ideal woman created in the narrative. As the *vejete* embodies femininity on both conscious and subconscious levels, his behavior reflects society's assumptions about women's supposed lack of intellectual capacity and predisposition to sins of the flesh. This underlying ideology results in a conception of femaleness in which carnal urges overwhelm rational thought and are only precariously contained by modesty (*pudor*), sexual ignorance, and societal restrictions. Unburdened by these limitations, the *vejete* uses Emilia's appropriated body to search for intellectual and sexual fulfillment, inverting gender norms and upsetting the social order in the process. The female body, thus endowed with male knowledge, freed from social restraints, and divested of virtues like *pudor*, becomes transformed into a monstrous being; into an alluring but dangerous siren who tempts men and drives them mad. As a result, the possessed Emilia is rejected by her lovers, by society, and even by her author as the protagonist abandons all attempts to forge a new place in society for an intellectual, liberated woman and settles for adulterous and mercenary sexual exploits. This moral and intellectual degeneration leads to her untimely demise, and though López de Haro chastises the society that allows Emilia to be casually murdered, her violent death

is also his way of aborting a gender-bending experiment in which he is left disillusioned by the female body that he tried to sculpt into the perfect object of desire for the intellectual man.

### **They are All Abominable Beasts: Critiquing Male Dominance and Masculine Excess**

While the spiritual occupancy of the vacated female body in the novella results in a unique combination of ways in which a woman can be possessed, objectified, and exploited by men, the male protagonist's unusual ability to experience the world as a woman allows López de Haro to critique, though at times ambiguously, this subjugation of the female sex. The *vejete*'s narrative exposes the male desire to maintain a patriarchal society in which women are treated as objects to be possessed and relegated to roles that serve men. This desire for possession and dominance leads men to impose limits on women's educational and economic opportunities as well as on their legal status and personal freedom. The leitmotif of possession originates when the *vejete* occupies Emilia's corpse, continues in her sexual affairs, and climaxes when Gerardo murders his wife with impunity. Furthermore, it persists even after her death, when Gerardo, in a rage over discovering how the *vejete* has used her body, refers to her as "un cuerpo que era mío, ¡mío!" and his lawyer responds incredulously, "[¿U]sted cree que el amante, que el marido es *propietario*, que el amor es modo de *propiedad*?" ("Epílogo"). The principal means of critique is not the lawyer's brief frame narrative, however, but rather the *vejete*'s complaints about the self-serving and reckless ways that men use Emilia. The critique thus becomes charged with unintentional irony since the *vejete* himself is perhaps the man who succeeds in exploiting Emilia most completely.

The *vejete*'s unconsidered decision to become a woman fulfills his fantasy of possessing a female body for love and sex; he writes, "en posesión yo de un cuerpo de mujer hermosa, que era lo que más había deseado siempre, sería indudablemente feliz" (2). The *vejete* envisions the

possession as a symbolic equivalent of love despite the fact that the woman will be dead and only her passive body will participate in the relationship. He writes, “¿No es . . . el amor . . . la intención que nos mueve a adentrar, a situar en ellas nuestra alma?” (2). The body is the object and recipient of this literalized metaphor of love, and since the *vejete* is the only active partner, there is no need for a mutual intellectual or emotional connection with the loved object. It is a female *body* that he has always wanted, and with the doctor’s help, he is apparently able to dominate Emilia utterly in a supernatural fulfillment of his fantasy.

As the *vejete* observes Emilia’s death throes in the moments before occupying her body, he exposes two key elements of the manuscript: the disclosure of male feelings of entitlement over women’s bodies and the imposition of negative or limiting gender stereotypes onto the female body. The *vejete*’s sense of male entitlement becomes evident as he disregards Emilia’s suffering and thinks of her body as “cosa mía,” a thing over which he can assume ownership (2). In addition, his male gaze exposes long-held yet contradictory stereotypes about female sexuality that will be further imposed upon Emilia’s body in the text. Her death throes are sexualized in a grotesque parody of orgasm—“la faz descompuesta . . . el calor, el trasudor, la negra saburra de su boca”—yet this agony does not destroy her “belleza . . . de virgen de márfil” (2). The carnality and wickedness long attributed to women are symbolized in heat, sweat, and contortions that are reminiscent of the sex act, and in the orifice of the open mouth, with its sickly black coating that suggests evil and corruption. Meanwhile, the phrase “virgen de márfil” contrasts strongly with the reality of the death scene by evoking the ideals of purity, innocence, and *pudor*—the Spanish concept of feminine modesty and sexual reserve—with the image of a white stone statue of the Virgin that is cold and composed. The *vejete* then takes possession of this body that is ideal both because it is still virginal and because it holds the iniquitous promise of sexual pleasure.

The *vejete*'s first act in his life also demonstrates his objectification of Emilia's body by blatantly subjecting it to the male gaze (3).<sup>6</sup> As he dresses in front of a mirror, he applies his critical expertise, admiring Emilia as if she were a figure in a painting. He describes her naked form as full and fleshy like "las Venus de Tiziano" in one of several comparisons between Emilia and the goddess of love and procreation, a motif which undermines her tenuous connection to the Virgin Mary, the preferred divine role model for proper Spanish women (5).<sup>7</sup> The *vejete* also refers to her as "jarifa," a rarely used adjective that while innocent in its denotations, nevertheless calls to mind José de Espronceda's "A Jarifa en una orgía," in which the poet reviles women and fantasizes about the impossibility of female purity:

Mujeres vi de virginal limpieza  
 Entre albas nubes de celeste lumbre;  
 Yo las toqué, y en humo su pureza  
 trocarse vi, y en lodo y podredumbre. (lines 69–72)

Though Emilia is still a virgin, she is already contaminated, if not by the very virtue of being female—which would explain why she was sexualized and "blackened" by sin before the transfer of souls—then certainly by the touch of the *vejete*'s immoral mind, which immediately imagines the sexual use that can be made of her body.

Emilia becomes little more than a tool to be used in the *vejete*'s pursuit of sexual gratification, a fact accentuated by the utilitarian terms that he and Dr. Xenis use to refer to her body: "alcázar" (2), "casa de carne" (3), "fábrica" (5), and "máquina" (10, 26). Furthermore,

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<sup>6</sup> See Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" for more about the male gaze and how it "projects its fantasy on to the female figure" and results in women being displayed as sexual objects (442).

<sup>7</sup> Geraldine Scanlon observes that the Virgin was proclaimed as the ideal for nineteenth-century Spanish women to emulate because she united "todas las cualidades que un hombre podía desear para su propio bienestar" (160). For more about the nineteenth-century gender ideology that continued to shape the Spanish understanding of women and their roles well into the twentieth century, see Scanlon, Caballé, and the collection *La mujer en los discursos de género: Textos y contextos en el siglo XIX*, edited by Jagoe, Blanco, and Enríquez de Salamanca.

when the *vejete* finds himself restricted to “un medio social estrecho e incómodo” by his new identity and is not able to gratify his desires freely, Dr. Xenis urges him to utilize Emilia’s body without regard for her reputation: “Disfrute [ese cuerpo] como propietario inteligente: cultivándolo, haciéndole producir, sacando de él el mayor provecho posible. Decrétese a sí mismo las prerrogativas y franquicias a que tiene derecho la belleza. . . . ¿Qué le pueden importar el honor ni el deshonor a quien está más allá de la vida?” (10). On this advice, the *vejete* spurns Gerardo and uses Emilia’s body sexually to the point that he becomes “cansada, fatigada, enferma,” as well as disillusioned with the way that men treat Emilia: “son todos unas bestias abominables,” he bitterly complains of his former sex (15). His sexual excess has a negative effect on Emilia’s body and reputation, and though his male intellect may disregard the latter, the Spanish preoccupation with honor—still in force in the early twentieth century—becomes a more immediate and deadly problem once Emilia becomes a wife.<sup>8</sup>

The *vejete*, however, is only one of the men who seek to possess and use Emilia’s body. Beginning in the prologue, López de Haro emphasizes men’s exaggerated sense of entitlement and their attempts to subvert sexual morality and establish their rights to female beauty and sex. When the lawyer’s friends rebuke him for helping to exonerate Gerardo, they are not outraged because a man murdered his wife, but rather because he murdered a woman “tan hermosa y tan inteligente que tenía derecho a todos los pecados de amor y de belleza.” They ask indignantly, “¿con qué derecho ha privado a los demás hombres de la contemplación y el deleite de una maravilla[?]” (“Reverso”). This language of rights, which is later echoed by Dr. Xenis and Emilia’s novelist lover, suggests that a beautiful woman should be granted special sexual liberties not because she should have exclusive rights over her own body, but so that more men

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<sup>8</sup> Various sources from the time demonstrate the cultural persistence of masculine honor, which can be stained by female infidelities and cleansed by the blood of the offenders. See the critiques of honor crimes in the following articles: “Lo de todos los días” by Zeda (1907), and “Del amor, del honor, y del crimen” by Felipe Sassone (1914).



may enjoy her. This sense of entitlement escalates to nearly absurd proportions when one lover insists on sculpting Emilia in the nude. Ironically, the dead Emilia no longer has any control over who is given rights to her body, yet the sculptor manages to intensify this sense of female powerlessness by suggesting that her nakedness should be accessible, even against her wishes, as a universal benefit to the (male) public: “No tienes derecho a privar el mundo de él [su desnudo]. . . y si yo fuese Ministro de Bellas Artes, dictaría por este caso una ley de expropiación forzosa por causa de utilidad pública” (15).

Men in the text use Emilia’s “rights” as an excuse to enjoy her outside of the honorable confines of marriage and as a pretext for ending their affairs: she has the right to have many lovers, and if one man possesses her illicitly, then other men have rights to her as well. However, the liberties that men ascribe to desirable women are in fact male rights; they do not liberate women, but instead potentially expose them to social stigma and deadly retribution. It is crucial to note that until its reform in 1928, Article 438 of the *Código Penal de 1870* set forth *destierro*, the least severe punishment given for serious crimes, for men who killed their adulterous wives. Even that sentence was rarely enforced since the all-male juries tended to absolve the defendant completely, as is the case in Gerardo’s trial and in numerous newspaper accounts from the era.<sup>9</sup> Male entitlement to female beauty and sex is paradoxical; while Emilia’s lovers believe that they should be able to possess her freely, it is that possession that makes her unsuitable as a permanent companion. Hence she is rejected by man after man until Gerardo is fooled into

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<sup>9</sup> Article 438 from the *Código Penal de 1870* reads in part as follows: “El marido que sorprendiendo en adulterio a su mujer matase en el acto a ésta o al adúltero o les causara alguna de las lesiones graves, será castigado con la pena de destierro. Si les causara lesiones de segunda clase, quedará libre de pena.” Sentences are listed by severity in Article 26, and according to Article 29, which sets their duration, *destierro* entailed banishment from a town or region for six months to six years. However, according to newspaper accounts, juries regularly absolved wife-murders if the wife was guilty or suspected of adultery. Two of the numerous examples are the exoneration of Ángel Buelta, who killed his adulterous wife Rosa in 1904, and of José Pascual Torres, who fatally stabbed his pregnant wife in 1916 and was absolved due to his claim that she was unfaithful. See these articles for more details about the Buelta and Torres cases, respectively, “Tribunales: El médico de su honra” by J. Guimón, and “Vista de una causa.”

marrying her, but when he learns that her infidelities have resumed, he exercises the rights granted to him by society and the law to kill his wife with impunity.

The *vejete* possesses Emilia, her many lovers use her, and Gerardo, as her husband, treats her like a piece of property to be managed and exploited. The *vejete* depicts Gerardo's interest in Emilia as common lust, comparing his advances to those of "un mamífero en celo" (6). Indeed, Gerardo's interest in Emilia seems to be limited almost exclusively to the physical functions of her body, including sex, housekeeping, and eventually, childbearing. He is appalled by the idea of an intellectual or professional wife, and as such he tells Emilia bluntly that her role as his wife is to share love, not ideas or work with him (11). In addition, when the *vejete* plans to give a scholarly lecture, Gerardo responds angrily, telling Emilia that he will not marry a "sabihonda," and later adding, "Maldita la falta que te hacen ni inteligencia ni cultura para ser una buena madre de familia" (11). Gerardo's outright rejection of his wife's economic agency and intellectual freedom, along with the *vejete*'s comments about women's lack of education or of opportunities other than marriage, form the core of López de Haro's critique of women's status.

For Gerardo, love remains synonymous with sexual desire once he and Emilia are married, and in contrast to the *vejete*'s intellectually and physically titillating affairs, sex with Gerardo is inelegant and habitual. Gerardo is entitled to sex by the custom of the *débito conyugal*, and the *vejete* describes the enforcement of that right in terms of ownership over Emilia's body: "Mi belleza es para Gerardo como su sueldo . . . es cosa suya, periódica, invariable" (21).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, just as Gerardo does not want any intellectual exchange from Emilia, he does not require a physical response from her either, which prompts the *vejete* to comment scornfully, "Este asno quiere que simplemente para su uso, tenga yo cuerpo; se

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<sup>10</sup> The *débito conyugal*, or women's obligation to be sexually available to their husbands, was understood to be an implicit part of the civil code's requirement in Article 57 that wives obey their husbands.

considera bien servido con que le soporto pasiva” (27).<sup>11</sup> Ironically, the *vejete*’s description of how Gerardo treats of Emilia echoes his own possession of “un cuerpo de mujer hermosa” that has no capacity to interact with him independently of his own desire (2). This parallel between the two men underscores the *vejete*’s hypocrisy, because while he censures others’ exploitation of Emilia, he also utilizes her body in an extreme fashion.

Additionally, the way that the *vejete* and Gerardo use and objectify Emilia continues to coincide as they both participate in the death of her body. For both of them, she becomes disposable once she no longer fulfills their feminine ideal, which for the *vejete* entails access to sexual and intellectual pleasures and for Gerardo means having a submissive and faithful wife. When the *vejete*’s spirit wearies of her body’s pleasures, he asks Dr. Xenis to find him a male body so that he can escape from her restrictive life. López de Haro does not reveal whether Xenis is able to grant this request, but regardless of the *vejete*’s ultimate fate, he knowingly puts Emilia’s body in a position to be murdered, an act which will relieve him of a now unwanted possession. Likewise, Gerardo’s belief that Emilia is a piece of property that he can manage as he wishes ultimately sanctions his right to kill her. In the same way that the civil code gave men almost exclusive rights to use and dispose of their family’s money and properties, Article 438 of the penal code gave them the *de facto* right to do the same with their wives under certain conditions.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, while Gerardo endures Emilia’s death and his trial with a “pasmosa serenidad,” the *vejete*’s manuscript eventually leaves him in “un estado horripilante de locura

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<sup>11</sup> Emilia’s passive role in sexual relations with Gerardo recalls an assumption of nineteenth-century gender ideology: that proper women had little if any sexual desire. According to Pedro Felipe Monlau in *Higiene del matrimonio* (1853), women’s role in sex “casi está limitado a sufrir la intromisión mecánica del órgano copulador masculino” (398). The use of the verb “sufrir,” which is similar to López de Haro’s choice of “soportar,” reflects the attitude that the decent women were expected to have toward sex. Men, in contrast, were permitted by culture and law to be aggressively sexual and to have extramarital affairs. While the crime of female adultery included all extramarital sex, for men, adultery was only a punishable offense if the man conducted an affair in the family home or caused a public scandal. See Articles 448–52 of the *Código Penal de 1870* for details on adultery legislation.

<sup>12</sup> See Articles 56–66 of the *Código Civil de 1889* for laws about the obligations of husbands and wives in marriage, and Articles 1,336–1,444 for details about rights over dowries, inheritances, property, and family income.

furiosa” (“Prólogo,” “Epílogo”). This descent into madness is not prompted, as the lawyer guesses, by Gerardo’s loss of the woman whom he claimed to love desperately, but rather by the realization that while she was his wife, she did not belong to him at all. Hence, Gerardo accuses the *vejete* of “usurping” Emilia’s body, a word choice that again evokes his feelings of rightful sovereignty over her (“Epílogo”).

All of the ways in which Emilia’s body is possessed and then discarded add up to a radical objectification of the female body, and as a result none of the sexual relationships depicted in the text involve equal interaction between two subjects. Instead, each is composed of a male subject and a female object, Emilia’s body, which is at the center of the narrative although Emilia as a person is present only at the moment of her death. Her spiritual absence is of little concern because even when she is endowed with a new and remarkable mind, her husband and lovers remain focused on her physical attributes. Therefore, Gerardo’s anger at the *vejete* and Dr. Xenis stems from the loss of Emilia’s body because her mind was never of particular interest. In contrast, the fixation on Emilia’s body proves to be disappointing for the *vejete*, who seeks to engage in affairs that are not just sexually pleasurable, but are also intellectually stimulating. Even though he has affairs with writers and artists, they, along with the rest of society, reject Emilia because a woman with a male intellect and a male sense of sexual freedom is unacceptable and perhaps even dangerous. López de Haro’s gender-bending protagonist strays too far from conventional feminine paradigms to claim a place in society; in fact, the combination of her female biology and her male intellect makes her not only an undesirable figure, but also an *impossible* one according to the representation of women’s anatomy in the novella.

### **Narrow Skulls and Vile Flesh: The Limitations and Liabilities of the Female Body**

While the external focus on Emilia's body repeatedly exposes male possession and exploitation of women, the *vejete*'s internal perspective as a male occupant of female flesh brings to light the novella's underlying gender stereotypes. Despite his critiques of women's status, López de Haro's representation of the female body is drawn from a nineteenth-century understanding of anatomy that stresses the opposition between male and female bodies and uses biological dissimilarities as evidence to draw moral and social distinctions between the sexes and to support claims of women's natural inferiority (Howson 45).<sup>13</sup> Following the Cartesian concept of dualism, in which the mind is understood to be separate from the body and to be the seat of rationality and the self, in post-Enlightenment thought the body came to be identified with nature and femininity while the mind was associated with masculinity and culture. The female body increasingly became linked to irrationality, deviance, and pathology and was understood as a threat to moral order and social stability (Howson 43, 50–1). López de Haro reiterates these views as he portrays Emilia's body as intellectually incompetent and morally flawed through the *vejete*'s cross-gender embodiment experience.

Emilia's body is pictured from without as ideal and desirable, but seen from within, *vejete*'s pleasure palace is gradually revealed to be a hellish prison. Early in the manuscript, he foreshadows this torment when he blithely remarks, “Entre ir al infierno y no ir a ninguna parte, seguramente todos elegiríamos ir al mismísimo infierno” (2). He expects to feel liberated upon abandoning his decrepit body for Emilia's, but instead, he experiences physical confinement that evolves into a claustrophobic existence in which he describes himself as drowning, suffocating, and being tortured by the inanity of female life (16, 7). Before long, he accuses Xenis: “Lo que

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<sup>13</sup> For an illuminative discussion of how the development of anatomical science was linked to beliefs about women's nature and employed to justify and enforce women's inferior status in Europe from the eighteenth century on, see Londa Schiebinger.

ha hecho usted es un crimen. . . . la vida de una inteligencia en un cuerpo de mujer es insoportable” (16). As the oppressiveness grows, he devolves into misogyny, stating that he could be “una de tantas idiotas”—that is, ignorant and resigned housewives—but he cannot because he is still “el pensamiento de un hombre en cuerpo de mujer” (27). The *vejete*’s male intellect is irreconcilable with Emilia’s body and social station because of the belief embedded in the text that women are by nature, in their very anatomical design, intellectually inferior to men.

As the *vejete* settles into Emilia’s body, their anatomical and ensuing intellectual differences are delineated as his mind conflicts with her flesh:

Mi primera impresión es de angostura: no quepo en este cráneo. Me encojo, me reduzco, me comprimo. . . . Nada, no quepo. Tengo necesidad de ocupar con el intelecto otras dependencias de mi nueva casa de carne. Intento situar un destacamento en el corazón; pero el corazón está repleto de sentimientos excluyentes, sin que haya libre ni un resquicio. Desciendo más hasta hallar un albergue ancho, lujoso y misterioso. Instalo la mitad de mi alma en las rojas, magníficas y palpitantes entrañas de la mujer. (3)

The *vejete* divides his soul, which he also names with the more cerebral and masculine term “intelecto,” because Emilia’s smaller skull cannot contain the whole. Her body’s fictional configuration is not surprising considering that in 1918, phrenology and other early scientific ideas about the brain were yet to be entirely discredited, particularly in the popular imagination. Phrenologists claimed that the intellectual faculties were more developed in men while the affective faculties prevailed in women, and their findings were seemingly corroborated by studies measuring the relative size of male and female brains (Scanlon 164–65). These erroneous findings lent weight to long-held opinions about the biological destiny of the sexes in Spanish

culture. For example, nineteenth-century medical students learned that anatomical differences determined the sexes' roles and capacities; as one degree candidate affirmed in 1859, men and women "llevan en su físico señales indelebles de la misión que cada cual desempeña en la tierra. El uno fue destinado al trabajo, y al ejercicio del pensamiento, el otro a las ocupaciones sedentarias, y al ejercicio de las afecciones del corazón" (Mayoral y Medina 63). Such gender-essentialist beliefs, though distanced from the novella by half a century, were still prevalent in a culture where conservative political and religious authorities sought to keep women in stasis even as feminist movements were gaining force in the Western world.

The effects of Emilia's stereotypically small brain are also exacerbated by her body's innately sentimental nature, which is a problematic aspect of his new body that the *vejete* did not expect. Influenced by the legacy of Cartesian dualism, the *vejete* seems to assume that his mind and Emilia's body will remain completely separate entities, and that though he may be biologically female, he will remain in essence his exact former self.<sup>14</sup> He does not realize that his mind will adapt to and be influenced by Emilia's female anatomy, and that as a result he will take on a new, hybrid gender identity. For instance, the *vejete* cannot situate part of his soul in her heart because it is full of emotions that López de Haro envisions as part of Emilia's anatomical design since, unlike her spirit, they remain in her body after death. Therefore, besides merely having a female body, the *vejete* is now instilled with womanly sentiments that are inseparable from Emilia's flesh. Moreover, he finally succeeds in lodging the rest of his spirit in her *entrañas*, which is a site not only related figuratively to sentiment and conscience, but also literally to involuntary urges that operate independently of the intellect.

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<sup>14</sup> Howson discusses the historical significance of the Cartesian legacy that distinguishes mind from body and privileges the former over the latter, a view which suggests that if our bodies were to be altered or damaged, our sense of identity would not disappear (3).

The *vejete* understands that to live in society as Emilia, he must consciously embody femininity by wearing women's clothes, mastering women's tasks, and even adopting grammatically feminine language in his speech and writing, but he is surprised to find that he also embodies femininity on a subconscious level.<sup>15</sup> The conflict between the *vejete*'s intellect and Emilia's emotional, irrational body becomes apparent in his reactions to Gerardo. After reading Gerardo's crude love letters, the *vejete*'s first impulse is to end the relationship, but immediately afterward he admits to being agitated by feelings that contradict this intellectual rejection: "La parte de mi alma alojada fuera del cerebro es partidaria de mi novio" (6). Despite the *vejete*'s conscious disgust, Emilia's body reacts physically to Gerardo's marriage proposal and to his less gentlemanly propositions (6). These physical sensations compel the *vejete* to assume, or at least try out, a more thoroughly feminine identity, because though he knows he will be miserable as Gerardo's wife, he agrees to be married anyway, supposing irrationally that married love must hold an unknown enchantment for women.

Consequently, it becomes evident as the narrative progresses that the *vejete* suffers from a partial feminization induced by Emilia's body. He develops new tendencies, such as a taste for luxury and fashion although he previously condemned this propensity in women. Now, he depicts this "afán de hermostearse" as being the natural feminine equivalent to men's desire to improve their intelligence by "adorning" it with learning (8). As well as expanding the divide between intellectualism and femaleness, this observation and his subsequent revelation that he would be flattered if rival suitors fought over Emilia both serve to emphasize a stereotypical female flaw that has come to be part of the *vejete*'s character: excessive vanity.<sup>16</sup> Such details

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<sup>15</sup> See Alexandra Howson for further discussion of the concept of gender embodiment.

<sup>16</sup> According to Adolfo Llanos y Alcaraz, writing in 1864, vanity is women's only innate sin. Nevertheless, he writes, this one vice is "suficiente para trastornar las cabezas y pervertir los corazones del sexo femenino" and is the origin of other sins such as "lujo y egoísmo, orgullo y ambición, interés y coquetería" (72).



confirm that Emilia's body is not a passive recipient of the *vejete*'s spirit; while her soul may be gone, her sentimentalism, irrationality, and innate moral flaws remain and cause the *vejete* to become increasingly feminized in spite of his male consciousness.

Despite López de Haro's critical take on Spanish women's lack of education, the nineteenth-century understanding of women as incapable of true intellectual achievement overwhelms the critique as it is repeatedly reflected in the *vejete*'s opinions and behavior. Upon experiencing womanhood firsthand, the *vejete* pities Spanish women who were still often denied a comprehensive education by the force of custom more than by the lack of access.<sup>17</sup> He laments that the instruction Spanish housewives receive is only “un gradito más sobre nuestras fregonas,” and even suggests that women's skulls may atrophy over the generations from lack of use (17). He also thinks that poor and idle *señoritas* whose future depends on marrying well would be happier if they had “un estudio que hacer . . . una ambición que satisfacer, aparte del hombre” (9). This critique founders, however, because he does not imagine university or professional women but rather remarks, “Las lavanderas, ¡qué felices!” (9). This incongruity between male mind and female flesh culminates when the *vejete* steps up to give his lecture at the Ateneo and suddenly feels constricted by “la angostura de [su] cavidad craneana” and influenced by the part of his spirit lodged in Emilia's entrails. As a result, his serious scholarly talk degenerates into “una amena y frívola revista de modas de la antigua Grecia” which is applauded not because of its scholarly merits, but because of Emilia's beauty and impassioned eloquence (11). This moment, more than any other in the text, demonstrates López de Haro's acceptance of female intellectual inferiority, because although the *vejete* remembers the research conducted in his

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<sup>17</sup> The educational reform efforts of the late nineteenth-century took decades to affect the lives of most Spanish women. As Catherine G. Bellver points out, although the number of women enrolled in institutions of higher education multiplied “a thousandfold” between 1900 and 1930, the general state of women's education across Spain remained lamentable (654). As late as 1930, almost 60% of Spanish women remained illiterate (Scanlon 50).

previous life, Emilia's body and brain are fundamentally incapable of using that knowledge and performing intellectually at the level of a male scholar.

The intellectual successes and failures of López de Haro's cross-gender protagonist resonate with nineteenth-century discourses which suggest that an extraordinary intellect in a woman must be the result of an atypical masculinization, or in other words, that a female intellect is actually a male one that nature has mistakenly assigned to a female body. Perhaps most illuminative are men's reactions to undeniably talented women writers; if these women united a keen mind with womanly graces and conformity to other feminine ideals, they were often praised, but if not, they were criticized as inferior imitators of their male peers. José Zorrilla, for instance, described Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda by writing, "Nada había . . . de masculino, en fin, en aquel cuerpo de mujer, y de mujer atractiva," yet he admits that her literary talent is "viril y fuerte," and concludes that she is "una mujer; pero lo era sin duda por un error de la naturaleza, que había metido por distracción una alma de hombre en aquella envoltura de carne femenina" (131). The less physically attractive and more abrasive Emilia Pardo Bazán, however, was often ridiculed despite her intelligence and talent; Armando Palacio Valdés, for example, derisively calls her one of "Estas mujeres que se meten a hombres" in a letter to Clarín (qtd. in Caballé 312). Inversely, the *vejete* is a man *que se mete a mujer*, but the results are similar: with her male intellect, Emilia is either applauded and hailed as a marvel or is insulted and rejected ("un virago . . . una bachillera cursi . . . loca . . . sabihonda" 11) depending on how her behavior fulfills or subverts the desires of others.

Emilia's body is designed not for intellectual endeavors, but for sentiment, which is an integral part of her anatomy. Likewise, her flesh is imbued with the sinfulness historically associated with the female sex because of Eve and Pandora's mythic original sins. The *vejete*

describes Emilia's flesh as "impulsivamente pecadora," and while this predisposition suits his immoral purposes, the methods of social control spawned by such feminine stereotypes complicate his pursuit of sexual gratification (7). Now that he is encumbered with feminine emotions and social restrictions, his sexual affairs—which were so routine and meaningless during his male life—become entangled with new complications: he discovers a conflict between his lust and Emilia's *pudor*, he falls in love and suffers rejection, and he dishonors himself in a way that he did not as a man. He writes, "ignoro si debo alegrarme o arrepentirme. Lo evidente es que ante mí misma he desmerecido . . . creo que todo esto significa en definitiva mi humillación" (13). In a body full of irrational urges, he is more vulnerable to temptation, and that weakness is also more problematic because female deviance from sexual norms involves a more profound social stigma and a greater risk of retribution. In addition, it entails not only using and enjoying the female body, as the *vejete* does vicariously through Emilia, but also being exploited and then rejected by other men due to the double standard of acceptable sexual behavior.

Consequently, the *vejete*'s sexual escapades leave him feeling sick and tired rather than satisfied, and like the lovers who used and discarded Emilia, he wishes to replace her body, telling Dr. Xenis, "Ahora quiero el cuerpo de un fraile . . . un cuerpo que me permita hacer una vida espiritual, quiero tener la menor cantidad posible del ser humano" (26). This request reveals his assumption that the female body is incompatible with higher spiritual life because it is more inherently human and sinful than male flesh. The *vejete*'s ideal form becomes that of a celibate male, because such uncorrupted flesh would be less vulnerable to temptation since it lacks previous carnal knowledge. One must note, however, that celibacy is seen as a more perfect state in men than in women, because even while Emilia was virginal, her flesh was already sinful and longing for sexual release. Dr. Xenis responds to the *vejete*'s request, noting, "A esta conclusión

llegan todos los que se paran a observar cuan odiosa es la carne vil” (26). By extension, “la carne vil,” becomes synonymous not with all human flesh, but specifically with female flesh, because the way to escape it is not to die but to return to a male body.

Like his treatment of women’s education and intellectual capacity, López de Haro’s depiction of female sexuality is rife with contradictions. Beginning with the juxtaposition of her sexualized dying body and the image of the marble virgin, Emilia is characterized by the opposing stereotypes that on one hand women are naturally modest and lacking in sexual appetite, yet on the other they are prone to being tempted and to tempting men into sexual sin.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, Emilia’s mouth has “una gracia húmeda y cálida de pasión y de pureza,” and her *pudor* interferes with her “deseos latentes” when Gerardo tries to kiss her (5, 7). Emilia’s *pudor*, which is also characterized as part of her female essence, initially struggles against the *vejete*’s libidinous desire, but the latter overcomes when he disregards concerns about her honor. Like the concept of *pudor*, honor is a sexist and socially constructed method of sexual control. While the male characters may imagine a beautiful woman who is “divinamente amoral” and entitled to sin without consequence (“Reverso”), the problem of her dishonor must be resolved for her to marry an honorable man, so Dr. Xenis intervenes and convinces Gerardo that Emilia was temporarily insane after her illness and was not responsible for her misconduct. Xenis declares her to be morally “inmaculada,” a word that again recalls the Marian ideal though the comparison is clearly false (20). For Gerardo, it is sufficient to believe that Emilia’s mind is pure, perhaps because her flesh was already tainted by the very virtue of being female.

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<sup>18</sup> While the former stereotype is a result of the ideology developed in the nineteenth century around the Marian cult and the domestic ideal of the *ángel del hogar*, the latter has much deeper roots in Spanish culture. Anna Caballé writes that the Spanish Middle Ages were “una etapa decisiva en la creación y consolidación de la retórica *contra femina* que, por su virulencia y radicalidad, se convertirá en una de las retóricas misóginas europeas más activas” (58). One belief about women that developed in medieval Spain is “el de la voracidad sexual femenina, proveniente de su carácter húmedo y frío que la empujaba, como quien dice, a una necesidad de coito permanente” (61).

### **A Beauty with a Man's Mind: Divine Goddess or Monstrous Siren?**

As the above analysis demonstrates, López de Haro uses *En el cuerpo de una mujer* to critique the excesses of male dominance and the resulting inferior status of women in Spanish society, but his critique is weakened by his negative portrayal of women's intellectual and moral qualities. Though he undeniably attempts to contribute to the gender debate, these contradictions render the novella's message ambiguous, leaving the reader to sort out its ambivalent response to women's subjugation. However, a more nuanced reading of what the *vejete* is seeking, yet fails to find, in the tale reveals what is perhaps the key to this strange narrative: a third, more subtle critique that demonstrates how gender disparity, particularly in regard to education and sexual freedom, leads to interpersonal relationships that are unsatisfactory because they can never meet an intellectual man's physical and psychological needs. Romantic relationships in the text are founded almost exclusively on sex and other physical services that women provide to men, in part because the average, undereducated woman is unable to engage intellectually with a male partner. Male / female relationships have the potential to be sexually stimulating, but for intellectual engagement a man must recur to relationships with his male peers, who are either physically unattractive due to their maleness or are off limits erotically due to cultural taboos against homosexuality. Unlike some of his popular-novelist peers who openly or covertly explore homoerotic desire, López de Haro seems to intentionally avoid the subject; instead, he demonstrates the flaws of typical heterosexual relationships and experiments with the possibility of reinventing them.<sup>19</sup> He critiques two types of relationships: illicit affairs in which the woman is exploited for sex and then discarded because she is dishonored, and societally-sanctioned

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<sup>19</sup> López de Haro's text contains elements of queer or homosocial desire, but its overriding heterosexual orientation becomes more clear when it is contrasted with texts from this time period in which homoeroticism appears either openly or encoded in ways that complicit homosexual readers would have recognized. See Alberto Mira's article "After Wilde: Camp Discourse in Hoyos and Retana, or the Dawn of Spanish Gay Culture" for some examples.

marriages such as Gerardo and Emilia's in which the wife's lack of personal and sexual agency leads to a dull and routine life with no sexual or intellectual sparks.<sup>20</sup>

So what is the *vejete* seeking when he chooses to assume the social identity of a woman? The novella's implied answer is that he is pursuing more gratifying relationships with partners that have certain prized characteristics; that indeed, López de Haro's object in creating this cross-gender character is to craft the perfect romantic partner, one which surpasses the gender essentialism of his era by combining the most desirable traits of both genders. This "divine woman," a beauty with the mind of a man, would theoretically be able to interact intellectually and sexually on the same level as her male peers, and this equality would pave the way for an ideal relationship. Through Emilia's female body, the *vejete* seeks both cerebral and sexual intercourse with intellectual men in a manifestation of what Eve Sedgwick describes as male *homosocial* (not homosexual) desire.<sup>21</sup> Expanding on the work of René Girard, Sedgwick notes that in literary love triangles the bonds between the two rival males often exceed the bond between each of them and the woman that they both desire, so that the woman serves to facilitate the relationship between the men (21). Similarly, López de Haro uses Emilia's body to create a kind of love triangle that allows the protagonist, through the supernatural substitution of a female body, to carry on male / male romances without breaking the taboo of homosexuality.

The overriding sense in the text is that the *vejete* is enjoying the female body through his sexual use of Emilia, not that he is enjoying the male bodies of her lovers. While Emilia's body may respond sexually to the male body, on a conscious level the *vejete*'s desire is focused on presumably masculine characteristics such as intellect, artistic talent, and conversational skill.

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to footnote 11, which describes the passive sexual demeanor expected of Spanish wives.

<sup>21</sup> In her work on homosocial desire in English literature, Sedgwick describes how relationships between men in patriarchal cultures are often carried on through the bodies of females; for instance, practices such as the giving of women in marriage serve to create relationships between men and thereby reinforce patriarchal structures (35, 8).

López de Haro seems to avoid the queer aspect of his protagonist's relationships by omitting any physical descriptions of the *vejete's* lovers or of actual sex acts, which is a noticeable absence in a genre of popular literature that frequently contained erotic and even pornographic scenes.

There are also potential traces of unease caused by the ambiguous orientation of the *vejete's* affairs, including his admission that he has disappointed or degraded himself in his first sexual escapades with a man (“ante mí misma he desmerecido” 13) and a curious comment about his interludes with the novelist. He writes that at the height of their passions, he and the novelist often avoid looking at each other's faces (“muchas veces evitamos mirarnos a la cara” 13), which could be read as a sign of the *vejete's* unease about having sexual intercourse with a man.

Emilia's body remains the focus of the *vejete's* physical desire even as it provides access to romantic partners with attractive masculine attributes. By extension, the possessed Emilia also becomes the idealized object of López de Haro's desire through his exaltation of her as a supposedly divine woman, a perfect romantic partner for the intellectual, amoral man. However, despite the repeated comparisons between Emilia and Venus / Aphrodite, her status as divine and beyond traditional feminine morality is illusory and quickly breaks down because neither her lovers nor Spanish society is prepared to accept a woman with the intellect and sexual agency of a man. The novelist Echegoyen is Emilia's most significant lover in part because he, along with the lawyer-narrator of the frame story, serves as a fictional proxy for López de Haro, who was both a novelist and a lawyer. Echegoyen adores Emilia “como a una diosa” and, like his author, finds in her “la encarnación de la mujer por él imaginada . . . la aspiración a una mujer con cerebro de hombre y sensibilidad y belleza femeninas” (13, 2). In Echegoyen's imagination, such a woman would be an ideal companion, but in reality, the masculinized Emilia is merely an unusually fascinating, but still temporary, sexual diversion. He rejects her like “una copa de licor

dulce y venenosa” because while she is alluring, she is also undesirable because her sexual aggressiveness interferes with her status as a proper woman (12). Even Emilia’s intellectual lovers, though intrigued by her mind, cannot accept her deviation from sexual norms, and thus the *vejete*’s attempts to develop an intellectually and sexually satisfying relationship remain frustrated. In the end, he settles for a lover who appreciates Emilia by repaying her sexual favors with money and expensive gifts, a capitulation that renders him the same as the women he pities; from housewives who exchange their love and bodies for economic security to prostitutes who sell their bodies for sex.

When endowed with a male mind, Emilia’s body becomes—like Avellaneda’s in Zorrilla’s estimation—a mistake of nature that is regarded by some as a curiosity and by others as a freakish defect. Emilia provokes increasingly negative responses because her gender deformity is more extreme than Avellaneda’s since in addition to performing intellectually (somewhat) like a man, she also behaves with masculine sexual agency. Thus, López de Haro’s depiction of the possessed Emilia as an extraordinary, goddess-like woman is undermined because she can also be interpreted as freakish, monstrous, evil, and hence unfit to be regarded as a proper woman and wife. Moreover, López de Haro associates her with demonic references such as the *vejete*’s comment about hell and his sinful desire to provoke passion and envy in others, reactions which are described infernally as “dos llamas, roja y pajiza” that illuminate the excessive vanity which stems more from Emilia’s body than from the *vejete*’s mind (8). Emilia is therefore implicitly indicted for committing or tempting others to commit deadly sins such as lust, envy, and pride.

According to societal standards that López de Haro seems unable to disregard, Emilia becomes repugnant because she is biologically female yet is incapable of being a true woman.



The *vejete* may be able to master women's work, but he cannot resign himself to social conventions that govern women's lives to the point of becoming understood as aspects of their natural beings: selfless love, sexual reserve (*pudor*), and religious faith. The *vejete* devalues love ("Me parece . . . nada" 11) and lacks the religious faith that he would need to find worth in a woman's lot: "Pensar que una mujer inteligente y sin fé . . . iba a resignarse, era un absurdo," he complains to excuse his lapse into numerous infidelities (25). Such attitudes create an unresolvable conflict in the *vejete*'s social identity because for the nineteenth-century writers who defined women by the ideal of the *ángel del hogar*, love and faith were indispensable components of femininity. In an 1863 treatise on women, Francisco Alonso y Rubio writes, "La mujer ha nacido para amar . . . Suprimid el amor en la mujer y sería una estatua muda . . . Sería otro ser distinto en naturaleza, . . . en todo género de vicios y virtudes" (66). Similarly, Severo Catalina, whose popular 1858 book *La mujer* was reprinted in numerous editions for over a century, writes, "La mujer que no está organizada para amar, no es mujer," and later he adds that without love, a woman "se quedará convertida en el ser más abyecto de la tierra" (48, 57).<sup>22</sup> In a curious echo of Alonso y Rubio's phrasing, Emilia's body, vacated by her spirit and her female knowledge of selfless love is indeed "una estatua muda" that is animated by the *vejete*'s spirit. She becomes a new entity in which male lust dominates over feminine love, and in terms of gender ideals this makes her, as Catalina writes, an abject being, an aberrant female body that is not actually a woman.

Catalina also writes that a woman who is "incrédula," or lacking religious belief, is "el ser más inverosímil y hasta repugnante que puede existir sobre la tierra," because without

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<sup>22</sup> Of the nineteenth-century texts on gender referenced in this analysis, Catalina's is perhaps the most relevant because its long-standing popularity demonstrates the persistence of this ideology well into the twentieth century. Espasa-Calpe's third edition, published in 1968, is still hailed by its editors on the inner flap of the book's jacket as conserving "todo su brillo y galanura" and as being "un gracioso, leve, y al mismo tiempo profundo tratado del alma de esa mitad del género humano."

experiencing God's love, a woman cannot truly love others and complete her ordained mission on earth (48). Accordingly, Geraldine Scanlon observes that religious faith was a necessity for Spanish women since most husbands, even non-religious ones, preferred devout wives whose religious beliefs encouraged submission and resignation (159–61). Intimately linked to religious virtues, the *ángel del hogar* exemplified the woman who endured suffering with selfless devotion to her family in hopes of earning heavenly glory through her sacrifices.<sup>23</sup> Obviously aware of this ideological discourse, the *vejete* writes that he could only resign himself if his faith promised him “una bienaventuranza posterior,” but as it is, he has little faith and is incapable of the altruistic sentiments required of good Catholic women (24). In sum, a woman like the possessed Emilia, who lacks the capacity for love and faith, cannot be the *ángel del hogar* who tends and comforts her husband; rather, she becomes Catalina's “implausible, repugnant being,” something akin to a monstrous but beautiful siren who fascinates men and drives them mad. Consequently, the *vejete* is both compelled and repelled by her body throughout the manuscript, and in the end, he is driven to the extreme of inciting her murder, an essentially suicidal measure, to escape from her defects and limitations. Gerardo, who turned a blind eye to Emilia's wantonness so that he could fulfill his desire to have her, kills her to avenge her infidelities, but in the end he is driven insane by the realization that he has utterly failed to possess her at all.

In short, when the *vejete* replaces the feminine virtues of love and faith with the masculine attributes of sexual aggressiveness and intellectual skepticism, Emilia becomes a monstrous being who defies the very definition of womanhood and therefore must be purged from society. This is confirmed by the public applause that follows Gerardo's absolution: “Todo

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<sup>23</sup> Along with the angel ideal, the Marian cult also fed into perceptions of the wife and mother as the saint or “priestess” of the home, and of resignation to suffering as an ennobling act. These beliefs, according to Scanlon, helped to keep women from rebelling against cruel or unfaithful husbands “porque el matrimonio era una ‘cruz,’ una ‘escuela de sacrificios’” and “la verdadera felicidad no se encontraba en este mundo, sino en el otro” (160).

el mundo aprobaba lo hecho por el procesado,” the lawyer states in the novella’s opening line, drawing immediate attention to society’s benevolent response to the murder. Nonetheless, López de Haro’s least conflicted critique of women’s subjugation is his condemnation of cultural norms that allow men to murder with impunity as long as the victim is an adulterous wife. The lawyer’s words convey a palpable sarcasm as he describes how the public judges that Gerardo acted not only lawfully, but nobly by “apuñalando, cosiendo de puñaladas a su mujer,” and how they receive him with “la admiración, la gloria de los eméritos, de los héroes” (“Anverso”).<sup>24</sup>

However, like his other critiques, this one is still undercut by details such as the fact that the lawyer seems less concerned with the verdict’s injustice than with its potential effects on his professional reputation. Still, López de Haro’s disapproval of the impunity with which Emilia is murdered is clear in the prologue’s heavy sarcasm, and while he may, consciously or otherwise, subscribe to various negative feminine stereotypes, he at the very least objects to the injustice that allows human beings to be murdered simply because they are female and do not conform to stifling and inequitable societal conventions.

### **The Horrors of Female Being: Critique, or Cautionary Tale?**

The conflict between the reality of misogyny and the possibility of feminist critique persists in the closing lines of the novella’s epilogue, when the lawyer casts doubt upon the manuscript’s veracity. His alternative and more rational explanation is that Emilia invented the

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<sup>24</sup> The way that the public and the press treat Gerardo like a celebrity after his absolution may seem greatly exaggerated, but it is not uncommon in newspaper accounts of similar trials to find that the journalist and the public enthusiastically take the defendant’s side. Attorneys are highly praised for their eloquent defenses, and the masses approve of the resulting exonerations. The coverage of the trial of Ángel Buelta (see also footnote 9) demonstrates both of these tendencies. J. Guimón writes, “[El abogado defensor] Retrata de mano maestra, con arranque de poeta y visiones deslumbradores de pintor y estilista consumado, la silueta moral de Ángel, ciudadano honrado, padre amantísimo, esposo cariñoso y magnánimo, amigo leal, y la figura de Rosa, voluble, casquivana, veleidosa. . . . toda maldad e ingratitud . . . [y] termina solicitando un veredicto de inculpabilidad, apoyado en la petición plebiscitaria de la opinión. . . . Letrados, Jurados, y curiosos abrazaron al orador, felicitándole efusivamente; el procesado, llorando, le besó la mano. Bien lo merecía su labor” (3). In the case of Alberto Robles, who attempted to stab his wife to death in 1919, a reporter writes that the defense, “Terminó solicitando del Jurado la absolución de Robles, que viene absuelto por el padre de su mujer, por sus hijos, y por el pueblo entero de Cartagena, que le conoce bien” (“El drama conyugal” 3).

fiction to exact a posthumous revenge on her husband, and thus he concludes as follows: “Pudo Emilia Otamendí no ser el pensamiento de un hombre en un cuerpo de mujer... Pero yo digo que pudo ser y fue *un pensamiento*; que fue *una inteligencia* en un cuerpo de mujer. Y, admitido esto, la narración no me parece disparatada” (“Epílogo”). The lawyer’s admission that Emilia *may have been* an abnormally intelligent woman is loaded with the same ambiguity that pervades the rest of the novella. The visual emphasis that López de Haro places on the possibility of “*una inteligencia*” occupying a woman’s body indicates the perceived rarity of the conjunction of intellect and womanhood, and furthermore, if the manuscript is a fiction written by Emilia, it is equally if not more problematic and “disparatada,” or absurd. While she would then be the source of the critique, she would also be the one imposing damaging gender stereotypes onto her own fictionalized body, indicating that she as an intelligent, artistically talented woman had thoroughly internalized and accepted these beliefs. So even if the manuscript is meant to be evidence of a strong female intellect, Emilia’s capacity for reasoned thought and critique remains hopelessly flawed and results in a text which both challenges and supports the ideological system that limited her as a woman.

Rafael López de Haro may have intended to craft a fictional critique of women’s status, but he is foiled by his own preconceptions about femininity and the female body, details of anatomy and aptitude that render his divine woman fundamentally incapable of embodying the male characteristics with which he endowed her. Not only is she incapable of possessing and utilizing intellectual talent, but her sexual agency, combined with her inherent moral flaws, makes her a danger to society. As such, she is a failed experiment who is rejected by her lovers, her husband, and even her author, whose critique of women’s status and of the particularly grievous injustice of Article 438 is undermined by his inability to envision a woman who is in all

respects the equal of a man. Thus, the convergence of critique and traditional ideology results in something akin to a cautionary tale that warns of the dangers of divorcing womanhood from the regulating social conventions of sexual reserve, unconditional love, and religious devotion, because the female body divested of these virtues is a soulless corpse directed by irrational whims and sinful impulses; a monstrous female being that drives men mad and leads to horror and ruin. Consequently, the *vejete*'s misogynist ideology prevails, and as he says, "Hacen muy bien los hombres en no perdonarles nada a las mujeres" (21).

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