



## **Shadowing the Gothic: Rosalía de Castro's *La hija del mar* and Benito Pérez Galdós's *La sombra***

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In this article, I approach Rosalía de Castro's *La hija del mar* (1859) and Benito Pérez Galdós's *La sombra* (1870) as novels that make use of the Gothic as a way to express concerns about gender and society in the Spanish nineteenth century. Rosalía de Castro developed a proto-feminist Gothic that denounced family violence and the sexual abuse of women in Spain. For his part, Galdós used the tropes of this genre to reveal how malicious gossip and outdated notions of honor were provoking a crisis of masculinity in late-nineteenth-century Spain. Building on Kate Ferguson Ellis's idea that the Gothic produced alternate masculine and feminine traditions, with the masculine Gothic generally written as a reaction to the feminine (xvi), I examine Galdós's exploration of the Gothic in *La sombra* as a direct inversion of the feminine Gothic and a response to Castro's *La hija del mar*. By exploring the two authors' gendered engagement with the Gothic mode, this study ultimately contests the gender stereotyping of nineteenth-century novelistic authorship, "whereby men were seen as active originators, and women as passive consumers or imitators of fashion" (Labanyi 9), as it also questions Galdós's claim to initiate an anti-sentimental and purely Realist national novel.

*La hija del mar*, published when Rosalía de Castro was a mere twenty-two years old, has long been considered a fragmented and rambling work. Sentimental in essence, this was the author's problematic first foray into narrative. Numerous critics have seen Castro's youth at the time the novel was written as a "prueba irrefutable de la [...] falta de madurez del texto" (March 51). Ricardo Carballo Calero has characterized the novel as superficial and squalid in its Romanticism, "folletinesca" in genre, and the type of novel that Castro herself would later go on to satirize in her much-acclaimed *El caballero de las botas azules* (195). Xavier Costa Clavell has gone so far as to describe the plot of *La hija del mar* as "ingenuo, irreal" and the characters as artificial (97). Of the remarkably few critical works dedicated to *La hija del mar*, fewer still examine this text positively or constructively. The majority of these works seem only to find interest in the novel because of its purported autobiographical nature or due to the defense of women writers found in the prologue.

It is true that *La hija del mar*'s argument in favor of female authorship stands as an often-overlooked parallel to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*, and that the supposedly

autobiographical nature of this work has shown the potential to elucidate some rather murky passages in Castro's personal history. However, the time is ripe for a reevaluation of this curious novel. Susan Kirkpatrick's 1995 essay, "Fantasy, Seduction, and the Woman Reader," makes brief mention of *La hija del mar* before moving on to an extended study of *El caballero de las botas azules*. Her claim that *La hija del mar* resists the oppressive effects of the nineteenth-century literary seduction fantasy on women (79) has heavily contributed to my own reading of the novel. Kirkpatrick cites three significant *loci* of resistance in the text, arguing that "it treats as tyranny both the political and the psychological power of pulp fiction's seductive father-figures; it debunks the myth of female power to redeem through passivity; and it presents the mother as an alternative object of women's desire" (79). I want to highlight another area of defiance of traditional gendering in this text, one that revolves around questions of abuse, the domestic sphere, and the natural world. The accusations of fragmentation, digression, and juvenile writing often leveled at *La hija del mar* are in fact the result of Rosalía de Castro's utilization of Gothic tropes to create a truly post-Romantic and proto-feminist Spanish novel. Castro's fiction particularly stands in contrast to the *folletín* and its idealization of bourgeois home life and mixed-class marriages. By adopting the Gothic mode so prevalent in Northern Europe since the publication in 1764 of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, and adapting it in order to counteract the myth of middle-class domestic bliss so heavily inscribed in the serialized fiction of the day, Castro created a novel unlike any other of its time. *La hija del mar* laid the groundwork for both Castro's later novelistic production and for such canonical novels as Emilia Pardo Bazán's *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886).

Benito Pérez Galdós's *La sombra* has received as harsh a critical reception as *La hija del mar*. This short novel, although composed in 1867, was not published until 1870, when it was printed as a serial in *La Revista de España*. *La sombra* is thus Galdós's earliest novel, most likely written a year or two before *La fontana de oro*, commonly considered the author's first longer fictional work. Criticisms of the novel range from attacks on its juvenile quality to concerns over its surreal plot. According to Germán Gullón, in *La sombra*, "una cierta tiesura en la técnica de composición, revela que la mano del autor es todavía poco experimentada" (351). For Elizabeth Smith Rousselle, "*La sombra* represents Galdós's overdeveloped sense of fantasy in an epoch in Spain when rigorously realist writing was praised as original and indigenous to Spain" (379). For scholars such as José Monleón and Germán Gullón, *La sombra* is an anomalous foray into the fantastic and Gothic, genres that the author did not return to until the final stages of his writing career, with works such as *Tropiquillos* (1890) or *El caballero encantado* (1909). Even Pérez Galdós himself, perhaps sardonically, used the prologue of the 1890 edition of the novel to describe *La sombra* as emanating from "una época [...] tan infantil" (qtd. in Smith 228).

Yet this purportedly juvenile and purely fantastical novel plays something of a bait-and-switch on readers similar to that which occurs in Castro's *La hija del mar*. Abigail Lee Six has argued that in *La sombra*,

by channeling this narrative through an unreliable narrator and luring his readers in, misled by the initial humor of the internal listener into receiving the text as a relatively lightweight parody of a stigmatized genre, Galdós authorizes readers who regard themselves as discerning and

intelligent to retain that self-image and yet indulge in the cathartic pleasures of a Gothic tale. (77)

While I agree with Lee Six that Galdós, like Rosalía de Castro before him, was a first-time author driven to cultivate a reading public for his work and a writer who knew how to capitalize on the lure of the Gothic genre, this analysis only begins to uncover the transformational tricks of *La sombra*. In *La sombra*, Galdós will take the tropes inherent to the Gothic novel and bend them toward the concerns of Realism; he will make the ravings of an archetypal Gothic madman understandable only through the lens of modern science. Just like *La hija del mar*, *La sombra* will counteract the myth of domestic bliss enacted by the *folletín*, by writing the home as a “contested castle,” to use the terminology of Kate Ferguson Ellis. Pérez Galdós, like Castro, will use his first novel to begin to stake out a paradoxical novelistic space where the principles of bourgeois relationships could be both resisted and disseminated.

In his survey of domestic violence in Spain, Javier García Perales notes that under the 1889 *Código Civil de España*, “a woman was obligated to obey her husband and to follow him wherever he established residence. She could not own property or engage in any activities without her husband’s permission. [And] the same applied to the children within the marriage” (145). The domestic enslavement of women was clearly a point of concern to Castro as she penned *La hija del mar*. The novel’s axis is the Byronic protagonist Alberto Ansot, who employs emotional and physical violence in his relationship with each of the novel’s three female protagonists—Teresa, Esperanza, and Candora. Ansot abandons his wife Teresa, only to return eleven years later. He rekindles his relationship with Teresa in order to imprison her and her adopted daughter, Esperanza. He will attempt to rape Esperanza on multiple occasions, not realizing that she is his own abandoned offspring. When the young woman escapes her imprisonment in Ansot’s home, she will finally learn the story of her real mother, Candora. A lover of Ansot’s whom he left in the early stages of her pregnancy, this woman went mad in the years since Ansot returned to her, denied his paternity, and left their infant daughter to die on a rock at sea. Esperanza, now mad herself and fearing the loss of her adoptive mother, drowns herself in the ocean. In *La hija del mar*, women are abandoned to run households by themselves, are moved from home to home without any say, are repeatedly imprisoned in houses by abusive spouses and fathers, are forcefully separated from their children, and can only long for death as a release from male violence.

As Melissa Valiska Gregory has shown, the second half of the nineteenth century was a key moment in European thought in which “the idea that severe family conflict was exclusive to the lower classes came under considerable pressure” (148). While domestic abuse was long thought by Spaniards to be strictly the terrain of the poverty-stricken and alcoholic, Castro pointedly writes family violence not into the shacks and dilapidated farmhouses of her native Galicia, but rather into its palaces and villas, thereby portraying the presence of domestic cruelty among even the moneyed classes of Spain. This shift is most apparent in the novel’s initial description of the seducer figure Alberto Ansot’s country estate and its surroundings:

Sólo en los aristocráticos salones de aquella vivienda existían la riqueza y el lujo, el refinado gusto de la elegancia [...]. Fuera de allí, las casuchas que se hallaban diseminadas a corta distancia de aquel pequeño palacio, que parecía insultar osadamente la miseria que le rodeaba, eran de un aspecto lúgubre, llenas de pobreza y faltas de todo lo que puede hacer agradable la vida. (110)

And yet, as the narrator will quickly emphasize, “todas las comodidades que llenaban la casa ... [de Ansot] no eran capaces de disipar las negras melancolías que pesaban en la existencia de los que vivían en ella” (111). Unlike serialized novels of the era, which showed the power of marriage to improve the social status of lowly-born women and turn them into Countesses and Duchesses, *La hija del mar* depicts palace life for Teresa, a fisherwoman, and Esperanza, her adopted daughter, as dangerous at the hands of abusive men. The commonplace *folletín* plot in which humble women seamlessly marry into a higher social status is portrayed in *La hija del mar* as a grave misfortune. The other “feminine” novel circulating at the time of *La hija del mar*’s publication, the *folletín* regularly depicted the home as a sanctuary in a world of chaos and abuse.<sup>1</sup> In Wenceslao Ayguales de Izco’s *María, la hija de un jornalero* (1845), for example, María’s home, a humble abode that she shares with her protective father, provides her only respite from the slander and unwanted seductions of the lustful fray Patricio and the economic blackmail and sexual overtures of the Barón de Lago.

Drawing on such English Gothic precursors as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Rosalía de Castro’s *La hija del mar* turns the serialized novel’s idealization of the domestic on its head.<sup>2</sup> As in *Jane Eyre*, the elegant mansion in *La hija del mar* becomes the site of female imprisonment and eventual madness. From the first mention of Teresa’s home in *La hija del mar*, we sense that “home” is a term that has been stripped of its typical associations with happiness and family and instead linked to sordid behaviors and broken relationships. Teresa, perhaps the most fully developed of the novel’s characters, is described as an illegitimate child, “depositada en una de esas benditas casas en donde la caridad ajena puede darle la vida, pero de seguro no le dará una madre” (24). Never having known a domestic refuge in childhood, the adult Teresa creates a home for herself and Esperanza that is also a contested space. Her cabin, located on an isolated cliff outside of Muxía, in “[el] lugar [...] más apartado y salvaje de aquella comarca” (37), is the site of another abandonment, this one by her husband, Ansot. After the birth of their son, he disappears for more than a decade, so this shack likewise becomes the residence of her shame. Although the narrator stresses that “la vida de aquellas mujeres [...] había llegado a ser para todos un objeto de veneración casi, que nadie osaba profanar, y su cabaña tan solitaria y tan pobre no fue jamás perturbada por ninguna mirada indiscreta” (47-48), this “lugar [...] en donde mora la virtud inocente,” imagined by the citizens of Muxía becomes tainted upon the return of Ansot, whose prolonged absence is shrouded in mystery.<sup>3</sup> The same chapter that opens with a reading of the outward or public appearance of Teresa’s home life will thus end with the unearthing of the secrets hidden in this secluded abode. In this way, Castro begins to debunk what Ferguson Ellis has called the modern mythologizing of the home as the highest expression of harmony between the sexes (xvi).

In *La hija del mar* the theme of familial cruelty finds its most forceful expression in the intermingling of representations of the home and the sea. While critics such as Carlos Ruíz Silva have paid some attention to the “Sturm und Drang” or Romantic quality of the natural world in this novel (370), the role of the sea as a Gothic element, much more than just a reflection of the characters’ stormy passions, has been overlooked. Castro portrays the numerous houses in her text as wild and furious spaces, recalling the seashore of the Costa de la Muerte, where the novel is set. Like the endless waves that crash against this shore, family violence is presented as a never-ending cycle, perpetuated by the pirate Ansot on a series of women. These women are joined in a mysterious web of relations, with each woman physically or psychologically imprisoned by the cruelty of this seductive male figure. This series of connections, rather than any conventional narrative order, is the basis of *La hija de mar*’s structure. The novel will use the fundamental tropes of Gothic fiction—“imperiled heroines, dastardly villains, ineffectual heroes, supernatural events, dilapidated buildings and atmospheric weather” (Spooner and McEvoy 1)—to create a text that seeks to liberate women from the darker side of domesticity. Their salvation, the novel suggests, will come through a denunciation of masculine abuse and the cultivation of a poetic union with the natural world.

In a series of scenes set within the chaotic landscape of the Costa de la Muerte, we see both Teresa and Esperanza seeking refuge in nature after Ansot’s unapologetic and demanding return. Teresa struggles between the call of the natural world and the renewed call of married life. She reminisces about the freedom of her childhood and her urgent desire for a connection with the natural world around her, one that would allow her to escape the storms of day-to-day domestic life. Her thoughts

se lanzaba[n] con los alegres pájaros por aquel espacio inmenso, que yo deseaba cruzar ligera como ellos [...] careciendo de abrigo en la tierra, quería hacer su nido en el aire [...]; yo quería también mecirme en las olas como las blancas gaviotas para vivir en aquella extensión sin [...] cansar mi alma con las tormentas de este mundo. (63-64)

Teresa flees her cabin for a desolate beach, kneeling before the waves, kissing the sand, and imagining how easy it would be to end her life there (73). Intuiting her adoptive mother’s potential abandonment or perhaps the imprisonment and sexual abuse that is to come, Esperanza also seeks out the sea, described as “su elemento, su felicidad, el sueño de sus sueños” (76). In the midst of a violent storm, she takes her ardent admirer Fausto to the top of the Peñon de la Cruz, showing absolute serenity while Fausto cowers and eventually faints at her side. Here Castro bombards the reader with blended images of the natural and the domestic. The Peñón is “como un castillo de la edad media” (80), while Esperanza proclaims that, having reached the top of the cross, the waves cannot reach them there “porque mi casa es alta” (81). Amongst the violent waves in her organic *casa/castillo*, Esperanza manifests a confidence and finds a sense of security that will thereafter be consistently denied her in the houses of men.

The freedom to risk one’s life or commit suicide soon feels as if it is one of the only liberties left to women in the world of *La hija del mar*, when Ansot abducts Teresa and Esperanza, carrying them away on his steamboat to a prison-like palace. The horrors this

country villa shelters are all the more wretched for the exotic beauty of the gardens that surround the home. In a chapter entitled “Tormentos,” the narrator describes how “desde el momento mismo en que por primera vez traspasaron el dintel de una puerta que cerraba a todos el hermoso misterio y el lujo de tan suntuosa estancia, la libertad de Esperanza murió con su felicidad” (113-14). Anso, described at this juncture in the novel as a brutal sultan and lord of the women’s lives, is said to “complac[erse] en amargarlas” (117), never hiding from his wife his intention that “la fuerza de un hombre venciese la débil voluntad de una niña” (121).<sup>4</sup> The threat of sexual abuse, described by Castro in increasingly lyrical terms, pervades this home. Teresa, dressed again in fisherwoman’s rags, is thrown out of the palace for combating Anso’s improper advances toward her daughter. When Esperanza manages to run away after Fausto’s father discovers Anso attempting to rape her, both women find momentary solace in the natural world. Dreaming of Fausto, Esperanza sleeps on the seashore, where “aquellas olas parecían pedirle una caricia, parecían darle la bienvenida y regocijarse con su presencia” (152). Teresa summons wind and fire to burn Anso’s palace to the ground, while an unusually calm sea and sky glow in empathetic reflection of these flames of revenge.<sup>5</sup>

But such interludes in the organic world are brief, as patriarchy once more impedes woman’s place in the natural order. Watching Fausto die and finding herself recaptured by Anso, Esperanza goes mad. Now entirely desensitized to her natural surroundings, Esperanza begins to wander the forest where she is newly imprisoned. Here, more clearly than ever, we see that the violence of the world of men is to blame for the madness of women. The cycle of abuse unleashed by Anso comes full circle when in the woods Esperanza encounters Candora, a madwoman like herself, yet who has the knowledge to make her sane again. In the world of *La hija del mar*, sanity is a horrible curse. The discovery of familial bonds leads only to the recollection of abandonment and the threat of incest. Learning that this madwoman is her mother and Anso her father, the same man who deserted her as a baby to be swallowed by the sea, Esperanza flees the domestic world, which she describes as the claustrophobic “mundo de seres que bullen y se agitan como abejas en su colmena” (239). She will surrender to the only environment in which she has ever felt safe—sublime nature: “[L]a *Hija del mar* volvió a ser arrastrada por las olas sus hermanas, hallando en su lecho de algas una tumba que el humano pie no huella jamás” (240). Ending her novel with a pitch-perfect mix of the language of the domestic with the organic, Castro once again defies the patriarchal norms of space. Yet by closing the novel with Esperanza’s suicide, Castro reminds the reader that in this era, women can be free only in death.<sup>6</sup>

Rosalía proclaimed in the prologue to *La hija del mar* that “todavía no les es permitido a las mujeres escribir lo que sienten y lo que saben” (17). Although Marina Mayoral has vehemently argued that Rosalía’s intention was never to make hers a “novela como una obra en clave” (81), the author’s words, the final ones of *La hija del mar*’s prologue, suggest that Castro imagined this novel as a forum for developing strategies to express a more feminine understanding of the world. Clearly, the numerous negative critical assessments of *La hija del mar* result from attempts to read this intriguing novel in too linear or realist of terms. Instead, one ought to accept the experiment in feminine writing it represents, as a novel structured on repetitions, replications, and associations. Described humbly by the author herself as “un libro más en el gran mar de las publicaciones actuales” (17), *La hija*

*del mar* is anything but. Far from a “folletinesca” work, as Carballo Calero and Mayoral have labeled it, this is a novel that inscribes a place for women in the natural world while systematically dismantling the domestic ideal of the *folletín*. In *La hija del mar*’s prologue, Castro also insists that her poems only became public when a “móvil [...] me obligó a publicar versos,” that this novel was written “al azar, sin tino,” and that “la aparición de este libro era forzosa casi” (17). Castro thus mines yet another trope of Gothic fiction, one where female Gothic novelists write themselves into their works as passive recipients, even victims, of their literary visions (Wolstenholme 3). The fictional story that follows this prologue vibrates with the same tension between masculine force and imposition, and the search for a true expression of feminine feeling and knowledge: “todavía no les es permitido a las mujeres escribir lo que sienten y lo que saben.” The trio of women portrayed in *La hija del mar* use emotivity and ties to nature to resist walls endlessly placed around them by the seductive male figure, Ansot, and to control the “stories” of their lives. Sadly, as the plot of *La hija del mar* ultimately reveals, what Spanish women of this era most “sienten y saben” is a constant substratum of abuse in the home.

The inherent struggle of Castro’s female characters is mirrored in the voice of the novel’s narrator, “una voz [...] que reacciona ‘con emoción’ ante la realidad, que en un sentido significa perder parte de su control sobre la historia que narra, aunque al menos permanece fiel a la intensidad de lo que revela” (March 54). This narrator appears to take on the role “de lo intuitivo y lo irracional, lo subterráneo u oculto del pensamiento” (March 53). Taken together, the declarations regarding authorship found in the prologue, the novel’s narrative voice, and a story that swings between domestic captivity and a limited freedom found only in the natural world, highlight the challenges nineteenth-century women novelists faced in creating their own modes of literary expression in a patriarchal society. More than one hundred years after the publication of *La hija del mar*, Hélène Cixous would argue that, “with a few rare exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity” (878). *La hija del mar* was clearly one such exception. Castro’s novel represents a type of feminine writing later praised by Cixous, wherein a woman could “invent for herself a language to get inside of” (887) in order to explode the discourse of man (887) and bring about “an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments” (888).

That Benito Pérez Galdós also began his novelistic career invoking the paradigm of Gothic fiction speaks to the continued public interest in this genre during the second half of the century, as well as to the open-ended nature of the Gothic itself. Harriet Turner’s belief that “even in its rudimentary form *La sombra* anticipates in both matter and manner the artistry characteristic of [Galdós’s] later masterpieces” (5) underpins my own reading of this often critically maligned work. Although Hazel Gold has argued that *La sombra* oscillates “between imagination and reality, absurdity and verisimilitude, lies and truth, [...] leav[ing] undecided the either/or dialectic that realist fiction must appear to resolve if it is to discharge its theoretical mandate” (832), I instead suggest that Galdós uses the fantasy and absurdity inherent to Gothic fiction precisely to propel his readers toward the stark reality and clear social consequences of the domestic agon he describes in the novel. Unlike Castro’s *La hija del mar*, which dismantles the narrative structures that idealize the home as a sight of happiness at the same time that it strives to create a world of female expression unchained from the abuses of the domestic world, *La sombra* expresses the

domestic anxieties of patriarchy in late-nineteenth-century Spain by condemning the malevolent intervention of the public sphere into the private realm. Although Galdós's novel is ultimately no less critical of the horrors that face women in the matrimonial home, its focus is less on Elena, the heroine trapped in a violent mansion filled with supernatural occurrences. Instead, the novel centers on the social ethos that has turned the male protagonist, Anselmo, into a mad domestic tyrant and jailer. Much as Galdós writes against the excesses of the Gothic, all the while composing a tale that relies heavily on Gothic elements, *La sombra* condemns the nature of bourgeois marriage in modern Spain, while working from within this social structure to rewrite the norms that govern such unions.

The home portrayed in *La sombra* is, on the surface, strikingly Gothic. Anselmo describes the palace that has been in his noble Andalusian family for centuries as a rich yet gloomy place, filled with hundreds of Renaissance-era paintings. Marrying the young and markedly beautiful Elena after the death of his father, Anselmo will turn this home into an isolated and melancholy place, “hasta el punto de que la maledicencia, afanosa por saber lo que allí pasaba, entró en su casa y no dejó a nadie con honra” (16). The isolation of their home is even more surprising given its location in the center of Madrid, a city that experienced vertiginous growth in the nineteenth century. The narrator or Anselmo's interlocutor, however, constantly questions, even satirizes, Anselmo's description of this palace as a home that was “construida muy misteriosamente;” since “al exterior no aparentaba nada de notable, [...] [pero] interiormente estaban todas sus maravillas” (29). The narrator's voice urges us to penetrate beyond the fantastic or any Gothic veneer with which Anselmo might coat his tale, and move toward the more banal reality that “el tal palacio no tenía de particular más que algunos cuadros” (30). Interestingly, it is one of these “cuadros,” a painting depicting Paris's seduction of Helen, that will be the greatest instance of bifurcating perceptions between the protagonist Anselmo and *La sombra*'s narrator.

Anselmo's belief that the pictorial Paris has exited his painting and entered his home to court his new bride Elena does reinforce the view of Anselmo as a Gothic protagonist *à la* *The Castle of Otranto*. Like Walpole's Manfred, who fluctuates between “rage, hysteria, and crafty manipulation” (Clery 24), Anselmo at times exhibits Machiavellian behavior despite suffering from terrible delusions. His split personality allows him to justify imprisoning his wife in their home and is the root cause of her ultimate death. But the greatest influence on Galdós's construction of Anselmo would seem to be Cervantes. Anselmo is a man who, like Don Quijote, devoured books night after night (16), whose “personalidad era la narración” (13) and whose stories “eran por lo general parecidas a las sobrenaturales y fabulosas empresas de la caballería andante, si bien teniendo por principal fundamento sucesos de la vida actual” (13). Anselmo will initially behave more like a character “de éstos que se ven en el artificioso mundo de la novela o el teatro,” (11) than a late-nineteenth-century man of flesh and blood. In true realist fashion, Anselmo's “madness,” like Don Quijote's, will become a mirror for the grave social ills of his era, although Galdós's critiques are principally aimed at social rumor and the decadent practice of arranged marriages. The similarities between Galdós's Anselmo and yet another character from *Don Quijote*, Anselmo in “El curioso impertinente,” extend beyond their connection as namesakes. Both are jealous husbands plagued by doubts about their



wives' fidelity; and both men's "madness" leads to their wives' real or assumed adultery. *La sombra* thus reads less as a reiteration of archetypal Gothic madness from the English tradition and more as an examination of the madman in Spanish society. Calling upon his literary predecessor, Cervantes, Galdós builds upon the history of the male tyrant in Spanish narrative and points to a new crisis in masculinity percolating beneath the surface of nineteenth-century Spain. This crisis, in which Spanish men lack the "vitality and initiative to move away from the prevalent values and structures of the Old Regime" (Heneghan 66), will become one of the staples of Galdós's mature fiction, forming the basis of novels such as *La de Bringas* (1884), *Lo prohibido* (1884-85), and *La incógnita* (1889).

It is vital to any understanding of *La sombra* to note that the novel opens, not with the story of Doctor Anselmo, but with the voice of the narrator speaking directly to, and even naming, the "lector." In this way, Galdós highlights the narrator's and the reader's interpretive roles in understanding Anselmo's character and history. Although the narrator will ultimately waver in opinion (Abigail Lee Six's assessment of him as unreliable seems too strong), the hierarchy set up by Galdós in the opening chapter makes clear that society's opinion of Anselmo is even more unreliable. The narrator invokes the public opinion of Anselmo as a "loco rematado" (3), only to show its dubious reference by noting that public belief in Anselmo's madness persisted,

sin que bastaran a desmentirla los frecuentes rasgos de genio de aquel hombre incomparable, sus momentos de buen sentido y elocuencia, la afable cortesía con que se prestaba a relatar los más curiosos hechos de su vida, haciendo en sus narraciones uso discreto de su prodigiosa facultad imaginativa. (3)

From the beginning of the novel the narrator insists that Spanish society prefers to assume horrifying madness in a man of imagination and genius. The narrator's critiques push the reader to be wary of public opinion and favor a more rational explanation of Anselmo's curious behavior. Despite insisting that it is not his place to determine whether Anselmo is one of the greatest men to have lived or one of the biggest fools to have ever been born (4), the narrator notes that this character himself "nos revelará en el curso de esta narración una porción de cosas, que serán otros tantos datos útiles para juzgarle como merezca" (4). Encouraging his public to read against the grain in order to unmask the corrosive power of a social ill (in the case of *La sombra*, malicious gossip), this is the *modus operandi* of a mature Galdós in the best of his Contemporary Novels series.

To cultivate a literary audience capable of navigating the more modern mode of Realism, Galdós must guide the readers of *La sombra* away from the conceit of Gothic madness and toward an exploration of hereditary mental illness, beyond hearsay and illusion and toward psychology and social realism. David H. Richter has proposed that,

the Gothic novel sits astride a major shift in the response of readers to literature, a shift (in Jauss's terms) from *catharsis* to *aisthesis*, [...] a shift from reading for information, and for the sake of entry into a verisimilar world otherwise inaccessible to the reader, toward reading as an escape from the world one inhabits into an inner site of fantasy. (112-13)

In *La sombra*, Galdós seems keenly aware of such changing expectations among readers and deftly bends the page-turning fantasy he weaves in the first half of the novel back toward a cathartic experience for his readers and an opportunity for learning in the novel's dénouement. For this reason, two-thirds of the novel is given over to the recounting of Anselmo's unstable youth, the increasing apparitions of Paris in Anselmo's home following his marriage to Elena, and the disorienting, jealous rages that begin to devour him and debilitate his spouse. At each step, Galdós will temper the Gothic tale that must have consumed *La sombra*'s first "serialized" readers, accustomed as they were to high jinks, mystery, and cliffhangers galore. Paris is no longer "un bello ideal" borrowed from remote mythology, but rather a "caballero del día, como otros muchos que van por ahí" (16); nor is he a mysterious Gothic figure who haunts the moors, since "los campos, las aldeas, los villorios [l]e son antipáticos" (56). Paris is a modern, cosmopolitan figure who admires "las capitales [...] donde la comodidad, la refinada cultura y la elegante holgazanería [l]e ofrecen sus invencibles armas y eficacísimos medios" (56). When Anselmo challenges Paris to a duel, the apparition will insist that the combat occur without seconds or witnesses, thus shrouding in mystery what transpires between them on the field of honor. The narrator insistently calls the reader's attention to the unrealistic plot, stating that "los procedimientos de ese duelo son una inverosimilitud incomprensible" (72). Although Anselmo believes more and more fervently in Paris as an immortal apparition, Paris tells the protagonist that he is nothing more than Anselmo's questionable psychological state—"su idea, su mal pensamiento, su mal deseo" (81).

Marshall Brown has argued that the focal issues of the Gothic novel were perception and imagination (xiv). Galdós's novel clearly plays with these tropes on multiple levels, from Anselmo and the narrator's disparate readings of the portrait of Paris and Helen, to society's and Anselmo's conflicting beliefs about the identity of the interloper in the marriage as Alejandro or Paris. Even *La sombra*'s curious dénouement reflects this tension between delusional and lucid perception, with Anselmo's and the narrator's competing narratives at blows for definitive control of the novel's discourse. In the last chapter of *La sombra*, this rhetorical "duel" between Anselmo's fantastic tale and the narrator's pragmatic questioning and rewriting of it finally tips in favor of the narrative voice. The narrator sets about properly perceiving and thereby restructuring the products of Anselmo's imagination into a logically ordered story (122), in which "usted [Anselmo] conoció que ese joven galanteaba a su esposa; usted pensó mucho en aquello, se reconcentró, se aisló: la idea fija le fue dominando, y por último se volvió loco, porque otro nombre no merece tan horrendo delirio" (122-23). This positivist reordering of Anselmo's tale is the culmination of the psychological diagnostic that the narrator/interlocutor has been carrying out on Anselmo in the novel's final pages. Though he claims no formal understanding of medicine, the narrator assures Anselmo, and thereby the reading public, that having studied the question in a neuropathic treatise, "se trata de un estado morbosos, no puede dudarse" (117). Their final dialogue has the tone and the parameters of the "talking cure" that Freud would later practice. The narrator draws Anselmo out about his father's history of melancholy and the debt collector apparition that had haunted his father years prior. For the narrator, Anselmo's revelations here are confirmation that the protagonist suffers, not from madness, but from a hereditary illness—"veo que es mal de familia" (116), and that the context of an arranged marriage between a man and a woman who barely knew each other, combined

with the wagging tongues of Madrid's high society and Anselmo's jealousy of the rumored interloper, Alejandro, have provoked what Anselmo himself will refer to as a "dislocación encefálica" (116). It is the vocabulary of neuroscience, and not that of the Gothic, that ultimately defines Anselmo.

Brown has also shown that the Gothic "was the one truly international literary mode remaining as Europe entered its great era of nationalism" (xiii), though it is clear that even in the earliest years of his writing career, Galdós was concerned with much more than simply elaborating upon an established literary genre such as the Gothic. As he would proclaim in his 1870 literary manifesto, "Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea en España," Galdós sought to create a "novela nacional de pura observación" (107) that could compete with the conventional, sensationalist, and foreign novels so common in the literary market of his day. That Galdós achieves this by taking up the Gothic themes of imagination and perception and framing them in psychological and sociological terms, instead of supernatural ones, represents a complex but key moment in the modernization of the Spanish novel.

Rosalía de Castro's *La hija del mar* and Benito Pérez Galdós's *La sombra* offer almost negative images of each other, with Castro's novel exploring a crisis of femininity and Galdós's novel one of masculinity. Both works are centered on the deconstruction of the space of the home as it was once idealistically portrayed in domestic fiction. *La hija del mar*'s denunciation of violence against women begins a feminist line of enquiry that Emilia Pardo Bazán later takes up in her columns for Barcelona's *La Ilustración Artística*. Castro's novel thereby disputes the notion that feminism in Spain is a much later phenomenon, and one limited to the suffragist era.<sup>7</sup> *La sombra*'s portrayal of the psychology of the male abuser and the backwardness of the masculine code of honor also stands as a precursor of the psychological novels of male alienation so prevalent from the *fin de siglo* until the early 1930s. Novels such as Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914) or *Nada menos que todo un hombre* (1920), and even Benjamín Jarnés's *Locura y muerte de nadie* (1929) owe much to Galdós's study of the medicalization of decadent male codes of conduct and the evolving forms of social control exerted on Spanish men in the modern era.

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**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> See pgs. 9-10 of Jo Labanyi's *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel* for a discussion of the ways in which Restoration critics cast the *folletín* as a "feminine" genre.
- <sup>2</sup> Both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* were translated into French, a language Rosalía de Castro knew well, by the early 1850s. Furthermore, a Spanish theatrical version of *Juana Eyre* by Francisco Morera y Valls premiered in Madrid in 1859. Castro was married in Madrid in 1858 and lived in the capital for part of 1859. *Jane Eyre* in particular seems to have influenced the construction of *La hija del mar*. The themes of violence in the home and women's madness are central to both novels. However, *La hija del mar* presents an interesting transposition of *Jane Eyre*. Unlike Charlotte Brontë's novel, which gives no voice to the madwoman in the attic, Castro's novel is presented from the perspective of the abused madwomen.
- <sup>3</sup> Here we see another possible influence of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, with Anso's mysterious absence recalling Rochester's fifteen-year Jamaican excursus.
- <sup>4</sup> Castro's depiction of Anso builds on the archetype of the historical Barbary corsair, Barbarossa. Barbarossa, or Red Beard, was a frequent archetype in Spanish folklore as well as in the English Gothic Novel. Eliza Parson's *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) is an early example of an English Gothic Novel whose plot makes great use of Barbary pirates.
- <sup>5</sup> Teresa's actions here remind us of Bertha's arson in *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's madwoman burns Rochester's ancestral home, Thornfield, to the ground after setting fire to the room Jane once occupied. However, unlike Teresa, Bertha kills herself in the midst of the blaze by jumping to her death.
- <sup>6</sup> Forty years later, in 1899, American author Kate Chopin wrote a similar dénouement for her novel *The Awakening*. The novel's protagonist, Edna Pontellier, is abandoned by her husband because of her infidelities. She returns to the place of her emotional and sexual awakening and there commits suicide by submerging herself in the sea.
- <sup>7</sup> For more information on Emilia Pardo Bazán's journalistic writing about domestic abuse, see Ruiz Ocaña.

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