



No Annulment: Three Women Characters of the Mid-1880s Confront the Problem of an Impossible Marriage (Manuel Cubas, Sawa, Galdós) Vernon Chamberlin

Distaff discontent with matrimony has been a subject of literary treatment throughout the ages. In Classical, Renaissance, and Golden Age times, the emphasis was often on the cleverness of the wife in securing and protecting a lover—one who could supplement or even fulfill completely the husband's amatory role. Certainly, there was a diversity of reasons for the wife's discontent and her need for remedial action. For example, in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, the problem is that the wife has a more zesty nature than does her spouse (IX, 407). In Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the husband's neglect of his wife in preference for (male) sodomy is the mainspring of the plot (I, v, 10: 434).¹ And in Cervantes's *El viejo celoso*, the husband is clearly impotent (151).

With the advent of Romanticism, French novelists changed the focus of the impotency problem. No longer interested primarily in how male impotency impacted the woman involved, the Romantics now concentrated on the thoughts and feelings of the impotent, eponymous male protagonist. Thus, male impotency is the hallmark of the following novels: Chateaubriand, *René*; Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe*; and Stendhal, *Armance*; with very little, if any, attention to the concerned female.²

Realism, however, brought the focus back to the sensuality and unhappiness of women protagonists. Landmarks in this vein include: Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (1857); Tolstoy, *Ana Karenina* (1873); and Alas, *La Regenta* (1885). Additionally, Zolaesque Naturalism, which came to Spain in the early 1880s, greatly expanded the aspects of human sexuality which a novelist might explore.³ Even impotency (as we shall presently see) could now be clearly advertised in a novel's subtitle.

It is at this juncture that Galdós chose to explore in *Fortunata y Jacinta: Dos historias de casadas* the unhappy marriage of not one, but two, title protagonists. Surprisingly, Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, in *La mujer insatisfecha: El adulterio en la novela realista* (1984), does not discuss impotence and even says that Fortunata “no es una mujer insatisfecha, sino desventurada” (101).⁴ However, most critics do now accept the fact that one of the main causes of Fortunata's marital problems is her husband's impotence. What is still not well

known is the fact that immediately preceding Galdós's work, there appeared two other novels dealing with the same male affliction: Alejandro Sawa, *La mujer de todo el mundo* (1885); and Manuel Cubas, *Thaïs (el marido impotente)* (1886). The purpose of the present study is not only to explore and make available to *galdosistas* details of these lesser-known novels, but also to indicate how Galdós dealing with the same human problem differs from his predecessors.

Because chronology is not as important as the approach and style of the author, and the possible influence of one of the works on another, we shall begin our consideration with *Thaïs (el marido impotente)*. In this novel, the aggrieved and victimized woman is the title protagonist herself (Thaïs Ramírez). Very much resembling Pedro Antonio de Alarcón's *El sombrero de tres picos* in tone, pace, and happy outcome, *Thaïs (El marido impotente)* contains none of the seamy, sordid, or clinical descriptions so prevalent in Naturalistic novels of the 1880s and 1890s. Rather, the title protagonist (and her family) are faced with a difficult problem that requires continual ingenuity to resolve, as goodness and decency finally do triumph over greed, exploitation, and male impotency.

In consonance with Cubas's earlier *costumbrismo* in *Sal y pimienta, cuadros de costumbres madrileños* (1881), his novel *Thaïs (el marido impotente)* takes place in the heart of oldest Madrid, within the parish of San Andrés el Apóstol. Here, where her father has a blacksmith shop, lives the pride and glory of San Bernabé Street: Thaïs, the eponymous protagonist. Because she was born on 8 October (St. Thaïs's Day), her adoring father gave his only child "el bello y poético nombre de la célebre cortesana egipcia—la fascinadora africana que trastornó el juicio de sus contemporáneos—[antes de ser] regenerada y santificada por el cristianismo" (22).

Upon reaching the age when "la carrera de la mujer es casarse" (96), the beautiful Thaïs attracts the attention of a handsome young tailor named Narciso Pulido. Narciso, however, is really interested only in obtaining a large dowry—which will enable him to set up an elegant tailor shop in the Puerta del Sol. Instinctively, Thaïs's father is suspicious of the suitor's physical appearance and his "unmanly" occupation.⁵ Notwithstanding this misgiving, the blacksmith does yield to the wishes of his wife and daughter. The wedding takes place in the church of San Andrés el Apóstol, and the subsequent happy neighborhood (*costumbrista*) celebration honoring the newlyweds suggests that the fears of the bride's father may have been unfounded.

Within fifteen days, however, Thaïs's father perceives that his daughter is very unhappy. Within a month, others realize that something is wrong. Finally, Thaïs's mother is able to persuade her daughter to share her burden: "Entre lágrimas y sollozos, estrechamente unidas sus bocas, con frases entrecortadas, el rubor de los rostros, entre la madre y la hija, en voz baja, muy baja, con un débil murmullo, sonó por primera vez la palabra *impotencia*" (93).

Armed with this information, the bride's father goes to the son-in-law's shop and demands satisfaction. The handsome tailor denies the accusation and reiterates that Thaïs is his personal property, that he has authority over her, and that her father has no right to ask intimate questions. Thaïs, who is attracted by the sound of this angry exchange, faints

when the confrontation between her father and her husband becomes violent. When the father is physically restrained by others, he realizes that he will have to seek legal redress.

Accordingly, he seeks the advice of the prominent attorney Don Apeles Recursos (whose comic name suggests both the attorney's tactics and the narrator's opinion of the legal profession). Don Apeles agrees that there are certainly grounds for an annulment. Not only does the attorney cite Spain's 1870 *Ley de Matrimonio* (art. 4, par. 3), but also earlier opinions, going back even as far as Alfonso el Sabio's *Siete Partidas* (115). Because impotence is the last thing that most men will admit, says Don Apeles, it will be necessary to secure the cooperation of a physician, for the present problem is indeed "un caso de medicina legal" (119). The physician consulted (Dr. Don Damián Ventosa) finds the case unique; for, in his experience, young people habitually satisfy themselves concerning such intimate matters before the wedding vows. Still, he agrees to consult his reference books, and he reads aloud from one that "opina que los médicos no debían intervenir en estos negocios [. . . porque] los tribunales se hacen los sordos y dan largas hasta que muere uno de los cónyuges" (128). Notwithstanding this, the doctor promises to do what he can at the appropriate juncture in the legal proceedings.

Meanwhile the bridegroom (who neither wants to return the dowry nor lose the exploitable labor of his wife in the tailor shop) secures his own legal counsel: Don Lucas Embrollos. This also appropriately surnamed attorney assures the tailor that there is no reason to be concerned, for: "Estos pleitos se dan muchas largas por su propia esencia y yo alargaré el de usted hasta el día del juicio" (141). The attorney begins his campaign, gaining a year's delay, by hiring a woman to testify that Narciso the tailor has been intimate with her daughter. Such virility away from the conjugal bed is made to seem understandable as Embrollos has his client countercharge that it is really the bride, Thaïs, who is "impotente." If the latter charge (implying frigidity) can be sustained, the tailor and his attorney know, Spanish law specifies that, even if the marriage terminates, the husband does not have to return the dowry. Thaïs's adversaries even consult their own medical expert, who reassures them that no reputable physician (as Thaïs's father is now finding out) will allow himself to become involved in such a case. Even though Thaïs has signed documents charging her husband with impotency, she is forced to continue living in the same house with him and his mother.⁶ The latter abuses Thaïs verbally, while the husband continues to exploit her as an indispensable worker in his business. Meanwhile, both lawyers send ever more legal documents to the court house.⁷ Thus, with no prospect of effective intervention by the family, or by the legal or medical profession, Thaïs realizes that she herself is the only person who can solve the problem of being in an unhappy marriage.

Although Thaïs is always chaperoned by her mother-in-law when she leaves the house, she soon manages to make flirtatious eye contact with a handsome young man at Mass. In a short time, the young man (Fernando) is emboldened to follow her each Sunday after church. Thaïs cleverly stops to look in shop windows, using the occasions to further engage in eye communication. In time, Thaïs and the young man exchange secret letters, and when Thaïs's mother-in-law injures a foot and can no longer accompany her to church, the title protagonist and Fernando become intimate:

Aquel domingo no hubo misa, para la joven se entiende, que en la iglesia se dijo y todas las de costumbre. Un pecado más que confesar para Pascua Florida, y que podía indemnizarse oyendo dos al domingo siguiente, como opinan muchas lindas devotas que tienen novio. [Y de aquí en adelante . . .] Thaïs descuidó bastante, casi de todo, sus deberes religiosos dominicales, y las pilas de agua bendita de la iglesia de San Sebastián cesaron de besar los rosados dedos de la tentadora beldad, cediendo sus antiguos derechos a los ardientes labios de Fernando. (204–07)

Two years after initiating her annulment procedure, Thaïs becomes pregnant. As her pregnancy shows, Thaïs begins to enjoy some feelings of revenge, for people either congratulate her husband or consider him a cuckold. In either case, he suffers intensely and he is forced to admit to his mother that he is impotent—and that he married only for financial gain. Unfortunately, Narciso is not the only person negatively affected because Thaïs’s pregnancy is also devastating news for her father. He now feels that his own honor is besmirched and that he is completely disgraced. When he receives a letter from Narciso demanding that he reclaim his daughter—and without return of the dowry—the blacksmith renounces his daughter and fulminates: “¿Por qué no ha esperado á que la ley la devolviese sus derechos? Nadie debe tomarse la justicia por su mano. ¡Antes morir que dejar de ser deshonrada!” (252).

As a consequence, Thaïs and her lover Fernando feel compelled to leave Madrid. Thaïs’s husband, despite the success of his elegant tailor shop, feels ever more disgraced and dishonored. Soon he loses all desire to live, becomes ill, and dies. Before expiring, the tailor is able to realize and confess to his mother the enormity and foolishness of his transgression.

Narciso’s death and the passing of time help to affect a happy ending for the novel. Five years after Narciso’s death, Thaïs returns to her father’s house with a beautiful daughter. Her father is overjoyed and welcomes both her and Fernando into the family circle. He also expresses the hope that Thaïs will marry her partner and produce a male heir. To the latter, he says, he will look forward to teaching the art of blacksmithing, and then even bequeathing to his grandson the family business, if the young man should be vocationally so inclined.

In the second of our novels, Alejandro Sawa’s *La mujer de todo el mundo*, the victim of male impotence, Luisa Galindo (who also files for and fails to obtain an annulment) is only fifteen years old at the start of the novel. Because she has wealth that her future mother-in-law needs, Luisa is tricked into an impossible marriage. The ruthless and completely immoral mother-in-law, the Condesa de Zarzal, easily overcomes two obstacles. First, she insists that her impotent and reluctant son must marry. Next, she brazenly seduces her Jesuit confessor,⁸ so that he will not only overlook the moral and legal impediments of her son’s impotence, but he will also use his spiritual authority to persuade Luisa that she can find happiness in a marriage with the physically unfortunate and very unattractive young man.⁹ After an impressive marriage ceremony in a foreign embassy in Paris, Luisa patiently spends three months awaiting the consummation of her marriage, even as she discovers that all of her money, jewels, and property have been stolen by her mother-in-

law. That the marriage should take place in France seems appropriate, for Sawa was a fervent admirer of Emile Zola.¹⁰ Moreover, Sawa's description of Luisa's response to the non-consummation of her marriage is in accord with Zola's advocacy of emphasizing basic instincts in animal-like characters:

[La] virgen sacudió la cabeza con el elegante ademán de una leona nostálgica de sus amores del Desierto, [y] lanzó un grito de hembra en celo. [. . . Su] grito salvaje de la naturaleza genésica menospreciada, pero magnífica y brava [. . . refleja el grito] de todas las mujeres [. . .] condenadas por la sociedad, pero apremiadas por la Naturaleza, ese acreedor implacable. (60–62)

When Luisa confronts her husband, he affirms that he can offer her only friendship and “unión de las almas” (64). Consequently, she abandons him and courageously seeks legal redress. News of her action soon reaches the countess: “[Luisa] había solicitado de los tribunales franceses la anulación de su matrimonio por impotencia del esposo: aceptaba las pruebas; se sometía a las experimentaciones periciales,—estaba virgen después de cuatro meses de unión conyugal;—se había casado con un eunuco” (72).

Luisa's action surprises the countess, who thought that her daughter-in-law would submit meekly to her fate and then, most likely, be content with taking a lover (31).¹¹ Realizing that Luisa has a good chance to secure an annulment because “en Francia hay más moralidad en las instituciones del Estado” (72), the Countess again uses her powers of amorous seduction in order to secure the transfer of Luisa's litigation to Spain. Even the necessity of creating a new political party and effecting a change of government in order to obtain her goal is no problem really for the countess.

The daughter-in-law refuses to surrender. When summoned for a court appearance in Spain, Luisa decides to have a meeting first with her mother-in-law. In a stormy confrontation, the older woman not only refuses to return any of Luisa's possessions, but also remains implacable regarding the impossible marriage. No annulment! The aggrieved Luisa courageously expresses her feelings and multiple grievances, but this action only serves to dehumanize her opponent into a Zolaesque animal (first labeled a “loba,” then a ferocious “tigre”) that attacks “hasta ensangrentar por completo la cara de su presa” (134). Then, the mother-in-law actually tries to kill Luisa.

Luisa, now nineteen years old, survives this confrontation, but it has so terrified her that she must be confined to a mental asylum. At the climax of the novel, however, she escapes, enters the Condesa's house, pours gasoline on her enemy, and sets her afire. This last action expands into the novel's denouement, as Luisa accidentally perishes in flames also, even while avenging herself—and all others who have also been wronged by the Countess.

Chronologically and aesthetically, Alejandro Sawa and his *La mujer de todo el mundo* belong to the period between the well-known generations of 1868 and 1898. It was written fifteen years after the *Revolución Gloriosa* terminated the reign of the notoriously promiscuous Isabel II—and her unsatisfactory husband.¹² Containing elements of Zolaesque

Naturalism and Echegaray-like Neo-Romantic tragedy (in addition to influence from the Decadents and incipient *Modernismo*), *La mujer de todo el mundo* has been judged a “bellísima novela” (González Blanco, qtd. in Phillips 202). Enthusiastically received by the reading public, its message of social protest was well understood. In an introduction to the 1988 edition, José Esteban affirms that the novel

fue saludada como revolucionaria por los entonces influyentes círculos anarquistas. *La Bandera Social* (Madrid, núm. 31) le dedica grandes elogios y destaca el capítulo IV de la novela como una auténtica joya literaria, por sus huellas iconoclastas y anticlericales, y recoge estas palabras proféticas de Sawa: “Ay continente europeo, vieja Europa, vieja Europa maldita; porque los tiempos de las grandes justicias y de las grandes venganzas se acercan Una nueva era está encima.” (vii)

At the same time that Sawa attacks decadent aristocracy, political corruption, and immoral clericalism in his novel, he is clearly successful in presenting his young female victim, Luisa Galindo, as a self-aware, confident, and courageous fighter for her own—and other women’s—rights. Luisa herself affirms: “[E]stoy decidida á todo, á todo, [. . .] hasta el escándalo, aquí en medio de París [. . .]; creo que voy á ponerme á gritar estas cosas como una furiosa desde las barandillas de la columna Véndome. Se me ha robado, y se han mofado de mi sexo casándome con un eunuco” (66).

One year after the publication of Sawa’s *La mujer de todo el mundo*—and the same year as *Thaïs (el marido impotente)*—Galdós brought out the first two volumes of *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Even though we find no record of Galdós having ever mentioned the well-known and colorful bohemian Sawa or his novel, Don Benito may indeed have read *La mujer de todo el mundo*.¹³ Possible echoes from *La mujer de todo el mundo* within *Fortunata y Jacinta* include the fact that both novels have two impotent males (one young and one old) and the physical description of the younger in each novel suggests to critics that he is a victim of congenital syphilis (Ullman and Allison 11; Paolini 395).¹⁴ There is also a self-aggrandizing priest in each novel who counsels the unfortunate young woman into an impossible marriage. In each novel the impotent husband consults a physician (*La mujer* 65; *Fortunata* II, vii, 9: 701–02); both aggrieved women are urged to settle for a “union of souls” (*La mujer* 64; *Fortunata* II, iv, 5: 565). Also each novel has a character surnamed Izquierdo whose career and livelihood are based in the realm of contemporary painting.¹⁵ And a further echo reflecting the world of art may be seen in the employment of the nickname “Fornarina.” This sobriquet, given to his mistress and model by the famous Renaissance painter Rafael Sanzio, appears in both novels. During her honeymoon in Galdós’s novel, Jacinta attempts to wheedle from Juanito the name of his previous lover. When the reluctant Juanito stammers “For . . . For . . . For . . .,” Jacinta exclaims (mistakenly), “Fornarina” (I, v, 4: 423). In *La mujer de todo el mundo*, the nickname “Fornarina” is one of endearment and comes directly from the world of artists. One of the countess’ lovers, the painter Eudoro Gamoda, calls her “mi pequeña Fornarina” (107), and she responds that she enjoys being “tu Fornarina [. . .] tu modelo” (109–10)—before their relationship sours and she becomes his “desdeñosa Fornarina” (113).¹⁶

More important than whether or not Galdós was aware of Sawa's (and Cubas's) novels is Don Benito's originality in presenting and developing the problem of impotency differently than the other two authors. First of all, let us note that, at the time of her marriage, Fortunata is aware that the bridegroom is impotent. Secondly, Fortunata does not validate societal and ecclesiastical laws by seeking an annulment, but rather subverts them by means of her own very personal concept of marriage, which is based on the laws of nature. Moreover, Fortunata is from a completely different social class. Rather than the daughter of a successful proletariat/entrepreneur craftsman, or an aristocrat with her own wealth, Galdós's female victim is a working class orphan—with no dowry at stake. Before her marriage, she had been seduced, and abandoned with a child. Consequently, she was forced to accept the protection of undesirable men, and, at the time of her marriage, had become engaged in prostitution. In the latter profession, her luck was so bad that she always had to endure "*lo peor de cada casa*" (II, ii, 1: 479). In his Alpha MS, Galdós also considered having her aware of the health dangers of prostitution (322). Thus, it is understandable that Galdós's impoverished heroine is willing to enter into a sexless marriage with a man who can give her financial security, respectability, and genuine affection.

She is strengthened in this decision by Mauricia la Dura, who (functioning as her alter ego) reminds her of the very difficult position of unmarried women in nineteenth-century Spanish society:

Casadita, puedes tener lo que quieras, guardando el aparato de la *comenencia*. La mujer soltera es una esclava; no puede ni menearse. La que tiene un peine de marido, tiene bula para todo. [. . .] Casarte es tu salvación. Si no, vas a andar de mano en mano hasta la *consunción* de los siglos. [. . . Siempre] y cuando quieras ser honrada, *serlo*, pero dejarte de casar!, Dejar de casarte!, que no se te pase por la cabeza, hija de mi alma. (II, vii, 2: 666–68)

Moreover, her marriage counselor, Father Nicolás Rubín ("el cual entendía tanto de amor como de herrar mosquitos" [II, vi, 7: 633]) assures her that she can have a successful marriage, because "El verdadero amor [. . .] es el de alma con alma. Todo lo demás es obra de la imaginación, la loca de la casa" (II, iv, 5: 565).¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is not an easy choice for Fortunata. As Mercedes López-Baralt has pointed out (126–28), Fortunata is aware of her own sexual desires, and she clearly evidences some premarital resentment concerning what she will have to forego.

In spite of the fact that Fortunata had clearly reviewed her options (II, ii, 4: 495; et passim) and definitely knew that Maxi could never give her children (II, iv, 8: 589), after becoming married, she finds herself more unhappy than she had anticipated.¹⁸ At first she tends to view her situation as part of a continuum of very bad luck:

Todo va al revés para mí . . . Dios no me hace caso. Cuidado que me pone las cosas mal . . . El hombre que quise. ¿Por qué no me era un triste albañil? Pues no; había de ser señorito rico, para que me engañara y no se pudiera casarse conmigo . . . Luego lo natural era que le aborrecía . . .

pues no señor, [. . .] la mala otra vez: me anda rodando y me tiene armada una trampa . . . También era natural que ninguna persona decente se quisiera casar conmigo; pues no señor, sale Maxi y ¡tras! me pone en el disparadero de casarme, y nada, cuando apenas lo pienso, bendición al canto. (II, vii, 5: 686)

Later (although she arrived at this conclusion differently than her predecessors), she too feels herself to be a victim. “Me han engañado, me han llevado al casorio, como llevan una res al matadero, y cuando quise recordar, ya estaba degollada” (II, vii, 7: 691). Further, “[M]i boda era un engaño, una ilusión, como lo que sacan en los teatros” (III, vii, 2: 246).

In spite of feeling that she has been deceived, Fortunata never thinks of seeking an annulment. There are many reasons for this, including lack of opportunity, education, and a support system. For example, unlike Thaïs, she has no father to hire attorneys or physicians. Further, her personality and motivations are completely different from the self-confident Luisa Galindo, who is also fighting to recover stolen wealth. Also Fortunata is not unmindful of the nineteenth-century Spanish Catholic view of marriage as indissoluble. In his Alpha MS, Galdós considered having Jacinta remind Fortunata, “La ley y la religión le han hecho mi marido [Juanito] y esto no tiene remedio. Esto no se puede deshacer. [. . . Usted tiene que conformarse] con las leyes divinas y humanas” (819). In the final version of the novel, however, Fortunata herself thinks of this idea in the convent during her reverie vis-à-vis the Host, as she tries unsuccessfully to convince herself of this concept, which the Church has tried to instill in her. She imagines that God tells her that she cannot have Juanito, because he is already “casado, casado por mi religión y mis altares” (II, vi, 7: 635).

Fortunata, however, does have an option that was not available to Thaïs and Luisa Galindo, who were virgins when they married. She can return (secretly) to her former lover. And, rather than seeking an annulment, this is precisely what Fortunata chooses to do. Whereas Thaïs and Luisa Galindo accept—and try to solve their problem within the framework of existing social and ecclesiastical laws, Fortunata does not. Believing that she has a right to personal happiness, she instinctively responds to the laws of nature, rather than those of society and the Church. Affirming that she should be considered the true wife, she tells Guillermina Pacheco: “A mí me había dado palabra de casamiento [. . .] y me la había dado antes de casarme . . . Y yo había tenido un niño . . . Y a mí me parecía que estábamos atados para siempre y que lo demás que vino después no vale” (III, vii, 2: 246). To Fortunata, the fact that Jacinta is sterile and childless is also unnatural and confirms her own natural right to Juanito. “Esposa que no tiene hijos, no es tal esposa. [. . . Ella] *no tiene hijos* [. . .], la esposa que no da hijos no vale [. . .]. Sin nosotras, las que los damos, se acabaría el mundo” (III, vii, 2: 247–48).

Further proof that Galdós considered impotency and how a victimized woman might cope with it (a very important part of *Fortunata y Jacinta*) is seen in the fact that Galdós gives Fortunata a second encounter with this affliction. Whereas Maxi’s impotence has a large psychological component, Evaristo Feijoo’s does not. It is simply a part of the aging process.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Fortunata realizes that she can not be happy staying with the

kindly Feijoo after he has become impotent, because “El apetito del corazón, aquella necesidad de querer fuerte, le daba sus desazones de tiempo a tiempo, produciéndole la ilusión de estar encarcelado y puesta a pan y agua” (III, iv, 7: 122). Furthermore, Feijoo’s impotence even opens new vistas for Fortunata: “[A]vivió en la mente de la joven aquel naciente anhelo de lo desconocido, del querer fuerte sin saber cómo ni á quien” (III, iv, 7: 123).

Fortunata’s experience with Feijoo is similar to that of Ana de Ozores with Víctor Quintanar in *La Regenta*. Ana, in contrast to Thais, Luisa Galindo, and Fortunata, did not marry a man who was already impotent. Rather, as in the case of Feijoo, Víctor’s problem comes on with advancing age—after ten years of matrimony (and it is further complicated by latent homosexual feelings for his friend “Frígilis”).

Far beyond the scope of Cuba and Sawa’s novels, Galdós also gives Fortunata the challenge of regressing from an impotent lover back to an impotent husband. Then once again, after living with her impotent husband, she chooses to return to the only man she has really ever loved: Juanito Santa Cruz. At this juncture, Galdós’s use of an extensive dream differentiates his artistry from that of Cubas and Sawa, who use no dreams at all. Fortunata’s dream allows Galdós to give the reader a vivid, extra-dimensional view of the psycho-sexual dynamics motivating the protagonist. Much longer than the dream before her first return to Juanito, this time (after Fortunata has lived with impotent men) the oneiric experience includes references to the problem of impotency as Fortunata dreams of such things as “los lápices más fuertes del mundo (como que da con ellos tremendos picatazos en la madera sin que les rompa la punta” (III, vii, 4: 257).

Although both Thais and Fortunata turn away from their impotent husbands to have a child by their lovers, Fortunata’s “pícaro idea” is unique. Already in the Michaelas Convent before her marriage, Fortunata had dreamed of having a child and donating it to her rival Jacinta (II, vi, 6: 31). Subsequently, part of her motivation in renewing her intimacy with Juanito a second time is to fulfill this desire and “cambiar un nene chico por el nene grande [Juanito]” (II, vii, 7: 695). Fortunata thus subverts the social concept of marriage through her “pícaro idea,” which defines marriage in natural rather than institutional terms, whereas in the earlier novels, the protagonists reaffirm the social institution through their recourse to annulment, which recognizes/legitimizes the power of the state (and the church) to define the essence of marriage.

In summation, we see clearly that the mid-1880s was a time when an author could—and at least three did—openly explore the feelings and actions of married women victimized by male impotence. These authors dare to suggest that women have sexual desires and feelings like men. Two of the women characters (Thais and Luisa), as we have already shown, aggressively file for an annulment, one (Luisa) even submits to a medical examination, and then finally kills her (culpable) mother-in-law. A knowledge of what these women think and feel is afforded the reader in varying degrees. Thais’s thoughts and feelings are the least explored. For the most part, they must be inferred from her quiet, clever, and determined actions. Luisa Galindo vociferously verbalizes her outrage, becomes animalized (a la Zola), and finally seeks revenge through overt aggression. Of the

three woman characters, Galdós's *Fortunata* is the most intensively, and extensively, studied.

Galdós not only chose a time when other authors were presenting the more simplistic situation of a woman being deceived about the husband's premarital impotence, but he also chose a moment in which he could be creatively different. Galdós approached the issue of impotency in ways that other authors did not, and, in the process, he called into question the existing social structures of the nineteenth century. Unlike Cubas and Sawa, Galdós's protagonist works outside the social norms to find a solution that reworks and redefines what constitutes marriage. Moreover, by making *Fortunata* knowledgeable about Maxi's problem—and taking responsibility for entering into the impossible marriage—Galdós was able create a more complex, more conflicted, and thus more interesting character.

Galdós also had the advantage of the long novel form, and could in the last three volumes leisurely develop and present *Fortunata*'s reactions to her unfortunate circumstance. As already noted, Galdós even gives her a second partner, and then later shows her reactions as she has to regress from this now-aged and impotent lover back to her impotent husband. Even *Fortunata*'s dreams and innermost thought processes about her problem are revealed to the reader, as she chooses to confront her problem in accord with the laws of nature rather than those of society.²⁰ Thus it is no surprise that, of the three mid-1800s works, only Galdós's novel is really remembered and esteemed today. *Fortunata y Jacinta*'s becoming a landmark continuer of the *Madame Bovary-Ana Karenina-La Regenta* trajectory of masterpieces about women's sensuality and frustrations is due in considerable measure to its detailed study of a nineteenth-century Spanish woman's confrontation with male impotency, inside and outside, an impossible marriage.

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Notes

- ¹ For the very clever, but unmistakable, manner in which this information is communicated, see Singleton (III: 868, n. 434).
- ² For details concerning these novels, see Waller.
- ³ For a list of topics which a Naturalist might explore, see Botrel (189–91).
- ⁴ Quite surprising is Ciplijauskaitė’s further opinion: “Mirándolo estrictamente, la novela (*Fortunata y Jacinta*) ni siquiera debería ser considerada en este estudio” (101). The reason for this opinion, as she says in the introduction, is that that the chapters on *Fortunata* and *La gaviota* are “estudios sueltos que tratan del adulterio sin subordinarle la estructura total” (10).
- ⁵ The blacksmith affirms: “[E]s muy fino, demasiado fino. El hombre debe ser, al menos en apariencia, algo más áspero” (54).
- ⁶ Thais’s father would rescue her, but he is overruled by his attorney. According to Pardo Bazán’s short story “El indulto,” Spanish law could even force a woman to continue living with a man who had murdered her mother (111–19).
- ⁷ The court building is a former convent (probably confiscated as a result of the liberal revolution of 1868). Clearly the inefficiency and corruption of the Spanish legal system is suggested by the musings of one of Thais’s supporters: “¿Por qué ahora no se construyen edificios para los objetos del día, como en lo antiguo se construían para lo que entonces se privaba? [¿ . . .] En vez de construir un edificio adecuado para la administración de justicia, hemos obligado a replegarse á las hijas de Dios, para que dejen sitio donde pueden colocarse los hijos del diablo?” (172).
- ⁸ Reminiscent of Zola’s protagonist in *Nana* (1880), the Condesa de Zarzal seems to personify throughout the novel insatiable and irresistible sexuality.
- ⁹ The narrator describes the prospective bridegroom: “Raquítico, desartalado, estólido. Barba rala, ojos grandes, aunque sin expresión; boca graciosa, pero obeso, como aturdido, como hecho de prisa para completar un pedido de chiquillos” (23).
- ¹⁰ See especially Sawa, “Zola” (239–40).
- ¹¹ According to the countess, Louise’s problem is simply that she “ha ido al matrimonio, como otras mujeres á la prostitución: en busca de placeres, buscando el hartazgo” (76).
- ¹² Although the royal consort definitely preferred the company of other men, one of the Bécquer brothers’ pornographic water color paintings depicts him vis-à-vis Isabel II as cuckolded because of underendowment, rather than impotency (253).
- ¹³ Shoemaker’s authoritative *La crítica* contains no record of Galdós having ever mentioned Sawa or his novel. Nearly all commentators emphasize Sawa’s predominately bohemian attitude and behavior. (See, for example, Zavala 32–54.) Thus, it is understandable that Sawa would serve as the prototype for Max Estrella, Valle-Inclán’s protagonist in *Luces de Bohemia*, and for Rafael Villasús, a minor character in Baroja’s *El árbol de la ciencia*.
- ¹⁴ In *Fortunata y Jacinta*, impotence afflicts both Maxi Rubín and Evaristo Fájoo; in *La mujer de todo el mundo*, impotence is an important aspect in the characterization of both the countess’s son and husband.
- ¹⁵ Izquierdo, a painter, is one of the countess’s lovers. (148–55). Galdós’s José Izquierdo “se hizo célebre [. . . como] el gran *modelo* de la pintura histórica contemporánea (I, ix, 6: 348).

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- ¹⁶ For more details and opinions concerning “Fornarina” in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, see Chamberlin, “Cultural Nicknames” (18–19).
- ¹⁷ Father Rubín is depicted as emotionally “frigidísimo [. . .] y glacial” towards the concerns of love and passion: “Era quizás la persona más inepta para el oficio a que se dedicaba [. . . y] había hecho inmensos daños a la humanidad [. . . ignorando por completo] la máquina admirable de las pasiones” (II, iv, 5: 564–65). And Galdós gives him the nose, mouth, and forehead of a well-known contemporary criminal (Boo 144)!
- ¹⁸ See also Chamberlin, “Poor Maxi’s Windmill” (427–37).
- ¹⁹ Maxi’s great desire to redeem Fortunata seems an “acting out” of his childhood desires regarding his promiscuous mother. As Ullman and Allison state: “At the deepest level of his unconscious mind, he is bedeviled by the incestuous nature of his sexual desire for his mother-wife” (13). His defense against this intolerable situation is impotence, which, of course, causes additional problems.
- ²⁰ See especially Chamberlin, “The Perils” (113–24).

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