



**“Desarreglos propios del sexo”:
Advertising Menstrual Disorders and Regulating Women
in *fin-de-siglo* Spain**

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*“Porque hay una historia que no está
en la historia y que sólo se puede rescatar
escuchando el susurro de las mujeres.”*

Rosa Montero

The year is 1893. Dr. Velázquez declares in Madrid that a fourth if not half of all women suffer from it (qtd. in Aldaraca, “The Medical” 410). Remedies range from Dr. Weir Mitchell’s rest cure and marriage (read sex) to the use of contraptions like ovary compressors or leeches to the anus. Of course, I am referring to the disease hysteria. The *fin-de-siglo* medical field became obsessed with women’s “nervous conditions” and the apparent epidemic of hysteria. I am inserting my research into a voluminous, intriguing body of criticism that looks at hysteria as a cultural metaphor revealed in nineteenth-century Spain in medical texts (Aldaraca; Borderies-Guerena; Jagoe et al.) and in Spanish literature (Charnon-Deutch; Labanyi; Ragan; Sinclair; Valis). The study of women’s illnesses in this period illuminates not only what was happening to women’s bodies physiologically, but also how women’s illnesses were perceived, treated, interpreted, and “cured.” We can question what needs were being met by particular illnesses—ranging from the individual needs of women, to socio-cultural needs, as well as to the medical community’s needs. My contribution builds upon this prior work with hysteria and focuses on both a new set of interconnected illnesses (amenorrhea, anemia, and *inapetencia*) and a new primary source: pharmaceutical advertisements. My aim is not simply to analyze the social construction of Spanish women’s illnesses in the *fin-de-siglo*, but also to understand the role women played as consumers of pharmaceutical goods in managing their own physical ailments. I hope to reveal that physicians—whether intentionally or not—ignored women’s menstrual irregularities; women themselves did not. Instead, they were avid consumers of menstrual regulators and abortifacients. By analyzing pharmaceutical advertisements and relevant supporting texts, I will unravel the connections between menstrual irregularities, anemia, anorexia, and abortion.

The mention of menstrual difficulties (“desarreglos”), such as the lack of a period, “amenorrea”; a late period, “demoras”; or a painful period, “dismenorrea,” clutters the advertising section of women’s magazines of the day. Similar ads also appear in midwifery journals and medical journals. My sources include women’s magazines like *El Eco de la Moda*, *Blanco y Negro*, *El Hogar y la Moda*, and *La Esfera*, as well as the more specialized midwifery magazines *La Mujer y la Higiene* and *El Eco de las Matronas*, complimented with medical literature in journals like *El Siglo Médico*, textbooks, historical data, cultural analysis, and esthetic tendencies spanning roughly the *fin-de-siglo* through 1920. My attention has been called here, on the one hand, because of the sheer number of advertisements for products aimed to bring on a woman’s period or “regularizar” women’s menstrual patterns, and, on the other hand, because of the virtual lack of mention of conditions like amenorrhea in the medical literature, physicians’ notes, and textbooks. My intention is to analyze the cultural biases and misogynist anxieties that are made clear through medical discourse surrounding menstrual troubles. Furthermore, I will highlight what needs women met by treating themselves through their own understandings of menstrual irregularities and other ailments purportedly common among young women.

With a new interest in gynecology, medical texts of the second half of the nineteenth century begin to address the problems and dangers of women’s reproductive functions.¹ In 1876, the highly influential Ángel Pulido, who published his *Bosquejos médico-sociales para la mujer*, describes puberty in young women as quite dangerous because he sees the woman as the victim of her encroaching womb: “[E]nvuelve a la mujer toda en su esfera de actividad.” He described the process as “una revolución profunda, radical, en la que el más pequeño desorden puede provocar una enfermedad grave” (qtd. in Jagoe et al. 421). The French doctor Jules Michelet, widely read in Spain, claimed in 1858 that because of menstruation, a woman is “almost always” sickly: “Así, pues, quince o veinte días en cada veintiocho (puede decirse casi siempre), la mujer no es en realidad únicamente una enferma, sino una herida” (qtd. in Jagoe et al. 334).² Dr. Miguel Fargas, based in Barcelona, wrote in his 1898 treatise on gynecology that “El periodo genésico en la mujer abarca desde la pubertad a la menopausia, siendo el aparato genital en ambas épocas extremas, un verdadero parásito de la mujer” (9). He then uses this logic to argue that a modern lifestyle and studying are too hard on a woman’s delicate system. Therefore, women should not be troubled with “tareas intelectuales” once menstruation begins (17–18). This theory accompanied a similar logic that women in the countryside rarely suffered from menstrual troubles. Fictional Dr. Juncal expresses this sentiment exactly in Emilia Pardo Bazan’s canonical *Los pazos de Ulloa* (1886):

A las mujeres se les da en las ciudades la educación más antihigiénica [. . .]. Mil veces mejor preparadas están las aldeanas para el gran combate de la gestación y alumbramiento, que al cabo es la verdadera función femenina. (173)

Some doctors even claimed that menstruation caused profound melancholy, homicide, or infanticide (Jagoe 307). Not only was a woman in constant danger physically for what her period might provoke within her organism, she was suspect psychologically as well. It should also be noted that during the second half of the nineteenth century, physicians

were only beginning to alter their understanding of the relationship between menstruation and fertility. During most of the nineteenth century, physicians thought that menstruation was the human equivalent of “heat” in animals; in other words, that menstruation was a woman’s most fertile period. Even in mid-century, the misconception of the relationship between menstruation and sexual excitement led to the diagnosis that women with heavy periods were suffering from overexciting the genitals, frequently diagnosed in prostitutes and women who read novels or had high levels of education (Jago 334). Here again, the confusing link between fertility, sexuality, intellectual endeavors, and menstruation obsessed medical literature or, as Shuttleworth puts it, in reference to the English medical context:

To read through the entries is to gain an impression of a near-hysterical male anxiety focused on the flow of female secretions, and in particular those of menstruation—a hysteria whose impact on the female psyche must inevitably have been to create a sense of existing in an almost permanent state of pathology. (61–62)

Apparent now is the contradiction in viewing menstruating women as both sexually ravenous and sickly delicate creatures, a contradiction very much reminiscent of the discourse around hysteria. Clearly, the medical community held a deep-seated fear of, and fascination about, women’s menstrual cycles.

With their misplaced energies focused on menstruation, perhaps it is only fitting that doctors rarely mentioned missing periods or irregular periods—at least not in their medical treatises. Dr. Fargas’s gynecology textbook merely defines the term amenorrhea and calls it: “un síntoma de más o menos valor para el diagnóstico” (31). In contrast, painful periods or masturbation garner lengthy paragraphs. Between mid-century and the *fin-de-siglo*, the journal *El Siglo Médico* documents less than a handful of articles regarding amenorrhea. One article published in 1897 by Dr. Serret warns that when treating amenorrhea, physicians must never forget the possibility of pregnancy, that amenorrhea’s causes may be numerous, and that the principal cause is “genital” (26). Some of the other causes mentioned are blockage or severe illness. In the case of true amenorrhea, that is, cases in which amenorrhea is the primary symptom, Serret prescribes heavy massage and electrical therapy—electrodes applied to the vagina and cervix. When amenorrhea is thought to have an “origen nervioso,” then the disease is related to hysteria, according to Serret. He prescribes injections and offers up several formulas (one of which includes the ingredient apiol, which I will address later in the paper). Finally, if all methods fail, he offers leeches to the perineum (27). Another article by Ramón Baeza recounts a case in which Ángel Pulido tries to cure a sixteen-year-old girl who suffered “un enfriamiento” and stopped menstruating, which, he claims, led to an attack of hysteria with epileptic convulsions (23–24). He applied ovary compressors and leeches to the anus. When this did not work, he succeeded with a treatment given to malaria patients. These few examples I have put forth here serve to highlight the lack of regard for the condition of amenorrhea itself. It was either disregarded or thought to be a symptom of another condition. A final clue reveals the extent to which menstrual irregularities were even belittled on the part of physicians. In January of 1875, *El Siglo Médico* summarized an article by Dr. Terrillon published in a “periódico extranjero” (“Trastornos” 61). The

article addresses menstrual troubles after various types of surgery. Dr. Terrillon concludes that while women often do have menstrual irregularity after surgery, the causes may be many, and the condition is likely not serious. The condition only becomes serious when women worry too much about their cycles:

Estos diferentes trastornos de la menstruación no parecen tener influjo pernicioso sobre la salud de las enfermas, y solo pueden obrar así por la preocupación que tienen todas las mujeres de que es un gran mal cualquiera perturbación de sus reglas. (61)

Clearly Dr. Terrillon finds that women's preoccupation with their menstrual cycles is both unfounded and unmatched by doctors themselves. After gathering evidence from both popular and specialized sources, I surmise that the medical obsession with menstruation, or normal, healthy, cycles in normal, healthy women, distracted doctors from noticing the more serious issue of amenorrhea and a series of accompanying symptoms.

Despite the relatively little that doctors wrote about amenorrhea, pharmaceutical advertisements from this period along with midwifery journals provide us the context for how the condition was interpreted and "cured," as well as what needs were being met for the women diagnosed or self-diagnosed with menstrual irregularities. While stress has been known to delay menstruation occasionally, today we know there are only a few drastic illnesses or conditions that actually provoke amenorrhea: anorexia nervosa, advanced stages of tuberculosis, a hysterectomy, lactation, and hormonal suppressors are some examples (Delaney et al. 253–54). We know, as did the nineteenth-century woman and physician, that the most likely reason for a missed period is pregnancy. In Spanish journals, advertisements to cure amenorrhea abound in journals like *Blanco y Negro* or *El Eco de la Moda*. Many treatments for amenorrhea contained ingredients that would stimulate uterine contractions and, therefore, would likely provoke a miscarriage in a pregnant woman. However, due to the nature of the practice and the moral and legal ramifications percolating in the late nineteenth century—such as new 1870 legislation making abortion a crime—as researchers we will need to tolerate a higher level of ambiguity with respect to how exactly amenorrhea was imagined, diagnosed, and treated.

Purposely using herbal uterine stimulants as abortifacients is well-documented in many societies across centuries, and even as early as 1500 B.C. We have solid references that in the late nineteenth century this practice continued outside Spain through women's use of emmenagogues, purgatives, and products claiming to cure amenorrhea (Riddle; Van de Walle and Renne). These sources frequently cite from physicians' notes or court cases in England, France, and the United States; the research citing Spanish sources is sparse at best. Several studies of Spanish demographics have shown a decline in population in the second half of the nineteenth century. William Leasure's study discounts urbanization and concludes that the decline is largely unexplained. M. Livi-Bacci rules out war, epidemics, and marriage customs, concluding that better birth control methods account for the decline—a conclusion he reaches by default. Mary Nash's excellent work does tread into the practice of abortion, but focuses on the 1930s and anarchist/neo-Malthusian influences. None of these studies cite the use of abortifacients or abortion as

an explanation for late nineteenth-century population decline. I have set out to find this information by combining sources ranging from the popular press to specialized medical journals.

In Spain, the midwifery journal *La Mujer y la Higiene* was dedicated to all women, not just professionals, and was directed by a midwife herself, Rosa Viñals. The journal contains first-person narrative accounts of births the midwives attended and assisted, usually accompanied by a lament for the poverty of their patients. In a 1905 issue, a news item tells of the arrest of a midwife for performing an abortion, something Viñals calls “actos impropios é indignos de nuestra profesión” (2). The following issue takes up the topic of abortion in a lengthy editorial. First, Viñals calls upon her readers to protest as hygienists, as doctors and as moralists; she is also particularly concerned with the reputation of midwives as professionals, whose honor is damaged by these arrests. Nevertheless, in a curious change in discourse, Viñals passionately argues that abortions are due to social prejudice and poverty (not illegal midwives):

[E]stamos convencidos que el día en que la posición social de la mujer jornalera, alcance un nivel más elevado, se remediará la miseria, y cuando se dejen el individuo y el público de prejuicios y no vean en la maternidad otra cosa que el misterio más noble, más grande y más hermoso, y toda mujer embarazada sea digna de consideración y respeto sin examinar ni fijarse en cuales fueron las causas de su estado, creemos se limitará esta causa de crimen pues cesarán la miseria que obliga á venderse y el miedo que enloquece. (2)

Viñals goes on to point out a hypocritical system in which midwives are persecuted for what is done legally through other means by other professionals. She explains:

Están tan adelantadas la Obstetricia y Ginecología que el vulgo no confía ya en drogas ni en específicos, sabe que hay procedimientos quirúrgicos sencillos y expeditos; le señalan con el dedo ciertas clínicas, no faltan anuncios velados, de *seguridad, reserva, etc.* se les dice que en París, Berlín, no se hace otra cosa y [. . .] ya está. Después se señalan á médicos y comadronas y de cuando en cuando las gacetillas de los periódicos publican relatos que hacen subir la sangre á las mejillas.

Viñals even lists the abortive methods used with a legal facade: bathing the feet, using laxatives, and procuring pharmaceutical formulas and herbs, precisely: “hierbas de virtudes maravillosas contra la amenorrea.” Her mention of laxatives is revealing, since “purgantes” are very prevalent among advertisements, but her sarcastic mention here specifically of amenorrhea provides us with the clues as to how the pharmaceutical industry marketed abortifacients and indicates a fully understood cultural *double entendre*.³ She references “anuncios velados” and “ciertos productos casi específicos,” all within a market in which “entra el lucro en juego.” Finally, she condemns these hidden practices because of the number of women who die due to hemorrhage or infection. By criticizing the private clinics’ use of surgical procedures, as well as the lucrative pharmaceutical business that more than hints at what its products are really for, Viñals sets up a contrast

between the midwives who work with impoverished women and the drug stores that only care about material gain. The middle- and upper-middle class readers of fashion magazines could likely afford a five to eight *peseta* bottle of medicine to provoke a late period, or perhaps a reservation in a private clinic, or even a trip to Berlin. On the other hand, the midwives work with women who certainly cannot afford private clinics for an abortion much less a trip to Berlin, nor do they even possess the means or literacy to read fashion magazines. Although she condemns the arrested midwife, Viñals provides a context for understanding how wide-spread various abortion methods were and implies that midwives are unfairly singled out.

A second source pointing to the use of herbal abortifacients through pharmaceutical ads comes from a legal circular. The *Fiscal del Tribunal Supremo*, Trinitario Ruiz y Valarino, writes to *El Siglo Médico* in 1906 an article titled “Sobre el aborto” to express his moral outrage for the pharmaceutical advertisements that offer abortifacients:

En la prensa periódica, y con preferencia en la de mayor circulación, sin darse ésta buena cuenta de ello por referirse el caso a la sección de anuncios, se publican los de específicos para provocar el aborto. De este modo, guareciéndose en un lugar del periódico que la generalidad no lee, los que faltos de conciencia especulan con la desgracia de los demás incitándoles el crimen para borrar las huellas de un extravío, logran el objeto que se proponen sin que les arredre lo infame de su tráfico ni les detenga en su camino la acción de la ley. (157)

Here the public prosecutor discounts any role we might imagine for the newspaper publishers as quiet accomplices in the selling of illegal pharmaceuticals. He assumes the advertising section goes unchecked. Rather, he lays blame with the advertisers as “lacking conscience,” claiming that they are ready to take advantage of women in distress, and not the least scared off by the criminal justice system. He goes on to suggest that the ads are only superficially veiled through “artificio de palabras” and that the practice “es notablemente escandaloso lo que de un modo tan directo y público ultraja la moral y las buenas costumbres” (157).

As Viñals and Ruiz y Valarino suggest, advertisements for treatments of amenorrhea or irregular periods are relatively easy to find. They are listed in magazines that range from the widely read *Blanco y Negro*—a popular journal publishing art, literature, and news—to women’s magazines such as *El Eco de la Moda*—a journal filled with pictures of women in the latest fashions and patterns for making clothes. They are worded with phrases such as “restablece la regularidad,” “la disminución ó supresión de dicho flujo,” “menstruaciones difíciles y tardías, provoca y normaliza las reglas,” “constante acción emenagoga,” “provoca el flujo menstrual,” and “cura la amenorrea.” The highly technical language, such as “emenagogo” (provoking menstruation) and “amenorrhea,” suggests that women readers were well-versed in gynecological terminology, terms that are largely lost on educated readers today. Viñals’s revelation of products that are “casi específicos” or Ruiz’s “artificio de palabras” hints that products like these were knowingly taken for their abortive qualities. However, on the surface, the language of the ad is directed toward women who are not sure if their absent period is due to pregnancy, or some irregularity

or obstruction; the ad also assures them that the product is safe, i.e. will not cause a miscarriage. It bears stating that during much of the nineteenth century the concept of a pregnancy began once “quickening” began, when the woman first felt the fetus move. Not until later in the nineteenth century, upon scientific discoveries of fertilization, was the concept of life at conception introduced into medical and popular discourse. This adds another layer to the ambiguity of how these products were used. Some women surely used these products at the earliest sign of a late period, but would not have considered the process an abortion. Yet, as Ruiz reminds readers, part of the 1870 Penal Code states: “[E]l farmacéutico que sin la debida prescripción facultativa expendiere un abortivo incurrirá en las penas de arresto mayor y multa de 125 a 1250 pesetas.” The law, then, did have a provision for the use of abortifacients, yet we see that advertisements for the products claiming to cure amenorrhea flourished.

Even if these pharmaceuticals were heavily used, how can we know whether they worked? How effective were the products? Clearly, bathing the feet, mentioned by Viñals, would not have worked. John Riddle’s lengthy study *Eve’s Herbs* remarks several herbal formulas women knowingly used for their abortive qualities across cultures and throughout time. Abortifacients advertised as brand names or pharmaceuticals in *El Siglo Médico* included ergot, strychnine, and arsenic. Ergot is a known abortifacient and toxin derived from a fungus on rye. Contemporary studies show ergot growth has been linked to low birthrates and high mortality rates (Kilbourne 199). Some examples of Spanish products were Ergontina Bonjean and Ergotina Yvon.⁴ Strychnine, which can cause premature delivery, appears as a component in *nux vómica* found in the product Píldoras Hematógenas de la U.M.F. An ad for the product claims: “Para corregir los desarreglos de las jóvenes y evitar la escasez” (66). Arsenic, connected to stillbirth, is found in products that use the word in the very brand name “Aguas Arsenicales Léxico,” used for “trastornos de la menstruación” (849).

The most commonly advertised abortifacient, however, was apiol, a chemical compound found in parsley, celery, and dill. The plants in the mint family, including parsley, are documented abortifacients from as far back as Hippocrates and still today are recognized abortifacients. Apiol is widely mentioned in Spanish medical journals and as an ingredient in products advertised in Spanish fashion magazines, including *Blanco y Negro* (Apiol de los Joret y Homolle, Apiolina Chapoteaut, Apiolina Sol). The ads usually mention “amenorrea,” “dismenorrea,” “regulariza el flujo menstrual, corta los retrasos,” or “excelente emenagogo” (see fig. 1).

One such product, Apiolina Sol, was regularly advertised. An ad for the product in the Catalan medical journal *Arxius de Cirurgia i Malalties Especials de la Dona*, published in 1901, contains strong rhetoric as to its effectiveness, touting it as “excelente emanagogo,” to be used in the same *instantes* as one would use *apiol*, but with “molta mes energia que aquest producte” (“much more energy than that product”), to be used “tres días avans de la aparició de las reglas” (“three days before the appearance of menstruation”). This product, then, as well as Apiolina Chapoteaut, was to be used before a woman could even know if her period was late. Perhaps this method was used to avoid any doubt, guilt, or legal trouble for the patient or doctor when forced to speculate on why the period was late. Or it may have been used as a monthly contraceptive. Another advertisement for the

same product appears in the popular fashion magazine *El Eco de la Moda* and reads: “Las señoras que sufren menstruaciones difíciles y tardías usen Apiolina Sol. Este producto, que no debe confundirse con el apiol, provoca y normaliza las reglas.” Both ads reference another product, “apiol,” assuming the reader is familiar with the product and its uses. This ad avoids the overly technical jargon, yet many of the apiol or emenagogue ads do not. In the same fashion magazine, another ad for apiol uses a highly-medicalized vocabulary:

¡Atención Señoras! Cápsulas Eupépticas de Apiol del Doctor Pizá. Es un medicamento altamente valioso por su constante acción emenagoga; provoca el flujo menstrual evitando contracciones dolorosas; disipa los dolores de riñones y demás molestias que proceden y acompañan las menstruaciones en doncellas y casadas. Cura la amenorrea ó linterismo consecutivo á las mismas. No ofrece peligro alguno aun en caso de preñez.⁵

This ad proves the most revealing with regard to the connection between cures for amenorrhea and pregnancy. It takes care to calm a woman’s fears that the product may be dangerous to use during pregnancy. On the other hand, given the 1870 law addressing prescription of abortifacients, the disclaimer may have served the purpose of legal protection. The product also appears to be helpful with “molestias” that occur with menstruation. The brand name “Capsulas Eupépticas” (digestive capsules) gives us some insight into menstrual discourse as well. The product name is couched in terms of the digestive process rather than the reproductive process, even though the language that follows is purely gynecological. This phrasing might indicate the need to mask the true function of the product or to provide a less embarrassing brand name for a modest female client at the pharmacy. However, the more likely explanation is the connection made between the digestive and the reproductive in the medical discourse of the day. Fargas goes into a lengthy explanation about how the stomach and uterus are similar in their shape, ultra-sensitivity, and passive nature among other characteristics (3–4). Later in his treatise, he claims: “Hoy bastará con indicar que el aparato digestivo es uno de los que más directamente sufren el influjo de las enfermedades genitales” (33). To be noted here is that Fargas places blame on the genitals for causing problems with the digestive apparatus, and not the other way around. As Catherine Jagoe points out in her study of nineteenth-century Spanish women and medical discourse:

En la segunda mitad del XIX, la relación de causa y efecto entre enfermedades e irregularidades menstruales se veía a la inversa que hoy día; se creía que los trastornos menstruales producían enfermedades graves, en vez de ser meros síntomas de otros problemas fisiológicos. (334)

By studying midwifery manuals and pharmaceutical advertisements, I believe it becomes clear that women’s late and missing periods were a marketing treasure chest in which women’s real problems were of little interest. I suggest that had physicians not been so preoccupied with women’s normal and regular menstruation, they may have noticed that women were more concerned with their missing periods than the ones that arrived. On the other hand, perhaps it was this same indifference to irregular, absent, or late periods

that created a relaxed climate for early-term abortions, at least within the middle class. The lone voice of midwife Rosa Viñals points out the great hypocrisy to such an indifference—or perhaps blatant discrimination—not only for the midwives, but for their poor clients as well.

While the connection between amenorrhea and abortifacients is fairly easy to make, the link between these two and anemia is less clear. Nevertheless, when analyzing advertisements for anemia, the mention of “amenorrea” or other menstrual troubles is fairly common. Like hysteria and amenorrhea, anemia ads hint at larger socio-cultural problems with women’s bodies.

Anemia, chlorosis (a specific type of anemia in women, resulting in an intense paleness), neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion), and lack of appetite (“inapetencia”) are an intertwined set of symptoms both in medical literature and in pharmaceutical advertisements. Some combination of these five ailments is almost always mentioned together. By my count, ads claiming to cure this set of illnesses are the most common of all ads directed at a medical malady. For example, in the medical journal *El Siglo Médico*, ads for cures to anemia occupy about a third of the total ads, and in the well-read, mainstream journals like *Blanco y Negro* and *La Esfera*, Hipofosfitos Salud began advertising in 1890 and was particularly strong in the late teens. In 1919, it had a different full-page ad in each weekly edition of *La Esfera*. These products appear to be iron supplements called “tónicas” (see figs. 2 and 3). In my archival research of magazines and journals, I found dozens of products, similar to Hipofosfitos, advertised with names as varied as Fosfo-Glico-Kola, Hierro Bravas, Hemoglobina Liquida Dr. Grau, Elixir Callol, among many, many others, and they appear in fashion magazines and literary magazines as well as medical and midwifery journals.

To be sure, anemia was likely a large problem given the level of poverty in the nation as a whole. Historian Antony Beever blames poverty for Spain’s large emigration rate and the low life expectancy—only a dismal thirty-five years in the *fin-de-siglo* (9). Moreover, anemia affected women in particular who were dissuaded from eating meat. Pedro Felipe Monlau, the most widely-read and respected of medical hygienists, published *Elementos de higiene privada* in 1887. Monlau outlines the connection between a diet of meat and a life of passion and sexuality, not becoming of the *ángel del hogar* image that idealized women who were self-sacrificial, asexual, and obedient.⁶

However, my findings lead me to believe that the anemia problem has alternative interpretations, both in real women’s bodies and symbolically. When we view anemia as one of a package of illnesses always marketed together, it becomes clear that the disease was likely much more than an iron deficiency. This has already been noted outside the Spanish context. For example, Deborah Perlick and Brett Silverstein comment on the emergence of “chlorosis” in the United States during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. They document a physician’s notes from 1901 that described symptoms of “chlorosis” to include “*amenorrhea, appetite disturbance, depression, anxiety, headache, breathing difficulties and insomnia, as well as a disturbed body image*” (77; my emphasis). In Spain, ads for “anemia,” “chlorosis,” and “inapetencia” almost always list *chlorosis* and

inapetencia side by side. When multiple ailments are listed, these last two are most often the first on the list or are in larger print.

The term anorexia, which indeed means “lack of appetite,” as does the Spanish word “*inapetencia*,” was first used in 1873 to refer to a nervous disorder found in adolescent girls in England and France (Showalter 127). The term “anorexia” is relatively absent from Spanish sources of this period, though not entirely. One ad for Elixir Grez in *El Siglo Médico* lists “anorexia” along with “*vómitos*,” but clearly the ad is a product for digestive upset (66). The term *inapetencia*, on the other hand, is abundant. Two notable things are to be said about this early stage in the medical history of diagnosis and treatment of anorexia. Doctors attached “mental perversity” to the victims of the disorder and lamented the patients’ state: “[S]he does not sigh for recovery, [nor] is [she] ill-pleased with her condition” (Showalter 127). This complaint suggests that anorexia in the nineteenth century was self-inflicted, a sentiment reflected in contemporary understandings of the disorder. Secondly, when noting the similarities and differences between nineteenth-century anorexia and the illness today, both renditions of anorexia “display ritualistic or compulsive physical activity,” yet in the Victorian context, excessive physical activity took the form of charity or volunteer work and was therefore “culturally sanctioned,” as is exercise and fitness today (Brumberg 138). Excessive volunteer or charity work fit in perfectly with the *ángel del hogar* ideology of self-sacrificial and abnegating women within the Spanish context.

Advertisements in Spain link lack of appetite with the lack of a period, in line with our current understanding of how anorexia affects the female body. Several advertisements for tonics like Hipofosfitos Salud, precisely those portraying young women, make mention of women’s reproductive function, or the disruption thereof.⁷ One such ad reads: “Este poderoso reconstituyente domina aquellos síntomas, robustece la naturaleza y regulariza todas las funciones y desarreglos propios del sexo” (*Blanco y Negro*). This ad is revealing in its use of the word “robustece,” suggesting a desire to fatten up—alluding to an ideal female body which has regular menstrual cycles. Other ads mention “*desarreglos de la menstruación*” or “*desarreglos periódicos*” alongside anemia. A two-page, text-rich ad in *El Hogar y la Moda* for “Píldoras Pompeya” draws a clear connection between amenorrhea—irregular periods—and chlorosis or anemia: “Una mujer bien reglada, es garantía de buena salud, hermosura y riqueza de sangre. Cuando este flujo falta o presenta irregularidad en sus periodos, es señal clara que en la mujer se desarrolla la Clorosis o Anemia.” These ads indicate that, in fact, “anemia” and “*inapetencia*” were commonly accompanied by disruptions, irregularities, or the absence of the menstrual cycle. In 1873, the same year anorexia was first diagnosed in England, the Spanish medical journal *El Siglo Médico* republished and translated a German article on chlorosis that points out that the medical field had little understanding of diseases like anemia and chlorosis and draws the link between chlorosis and amenorrhea: “Puede decirse que no existe teoría alguna satisfactoria acerca de la clorosis, a pesar de ser ésta una de las enfermedades más comunes, más conocidas en su aspecto [. . .]. [L]as cloróticas [. . .] están comúnmente amenorreicas o sufren dismenorrea” (“Una nueva” 491).

This evidence points to our need to understand the Spanish term “*inapetencia*” as something potentially more encompassing and revealing than its literal meaning suggests.

At the very least, we need to contemplate the possibility that anemia and *inapetencia* accompanied by amenorrhea were a manifestation of what we now call anorexia. If we understand that today a ravaging marketing campaign for thinness is to shoulder at least part, if not most, of the blame for the context of the contemporary disorder, we can look to the turn-of-the-century esthetic preferences for a similarly compelling context. That is to say, another explanation for the frequency of anemia among young women has less to do with malnutrition, social class, or even anorexia, and lies squarely in the esthetic preferences of the day.⁸

In Europe, during the *fin-de-siglo*, *el decadentismo* reined over the literary and artistic world. The decadentist literary movement revitalized the work of Edgar Allen Poe whose writing was also fixated on the esthetic potential of the dead woman's body. Poe himself said the death of a beautiful woman was "unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (369). In Spain, by 1900, representations of women's illness had shifted to become a beauty ideal for women. The *fin-de-siglo* made a fashion out of illness, including dark circles under the eyes, pale faces, and thin bodies. Lily Litvak studies this tendency and notes: "Los últimos años del siglo poblaron la literatura y la plástica de *cloróticas languidecientes y anémicas*, de mujeres martirizadas de párpados violáceos y moretones sanguinolentos. Se popularizó el encanto de la agonía [. . .] la delgadez" (101; my emphasis). Bram Dijkstra analyzes this same trend throughout Europe and notes: "[T]he rise in feminism led to the cult of women invalids" (31).

The influence of the pre-Raphaelite artists on the advertising world is not to be discounted. Karen Sproles describes the pre-Raphaelite prototype as "the central figure [of a work] who has been rendered passive in some way. She is sleeping [. . .] has committed suicide [. . . or] is about to die." Physically, "her head is bowed; almost always her eyes are averted. She looks up, or down; she is asleep or dead [. . .]. [S]he is the perfect object of desire because she herself is without desire" (299). Sander Gilman's historical analysis of the representation of sexuality notes the obsession with the portrayal of Ophelia during the turn of the century.

The pre-Raphaelite artistic movement displays its esthetic throughout the Spanish advertising industry. Charnon-Deutsch describes the representation of female corpses in the Spanish press: "white skin, rounded shoulders, cascading hair, and utter immobility" and follows with a connection between the images of dying or bed-ridden women and those of women exhausted, in repose, or lounging (*Fictions* 225). Clearly then, anemia and chlorosis, along with thinness, had an esthetically desirable quality. Like tuberculosis, anemia left its victims slowly fading away, weak, and bedridden. Petróleo Gal shampoo advertisements took particular advantage of the pre-Raphaelite esthetic in their advertising (see figs. 4 and 5). In the 1915 edition of *La Ilustración Artística*, several ads show women with long, flowing hair either modeling for a painter, sick with a doctor nearby, or sleeping in bed. Píldoras Pompeya describe women with "mirada melancólica y triste, languidece de un modo alarmante" and claim to make women more beautiful than "la más bella creación de un artista." These popular journals published images of women who are lounging, faint, sickly, thin, and anemic in reproductions of artwork, as well as in advertisements for shampoo and soap. At the same time, these journals published advertisements for tonics and pharmaceuticals for anemia, chlorosis, amenorrhea, and

inapetencia in order to cure the very symptoms and ailments promoted by the esthetics within. This ironic juxtaposition is realized most clearly in the Hipofosfitos Salud ad, which ran in *La Esfera* in 1919. The ad describes the anemia victim as “pálida, ojerosa, inapetente, tose, se cansa al menor esfuerzo, tiene náuseas, vómitos, desarreglos [. . .].” The ad features a young woman gazing out a window, her head bowed. Her features and clothing are reminiscent of portrayals of Jane Morris, model and muse to William Morris and Dante Rossetti, pillars of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood (see fig. 6). All at once, the ad fetishizes the sick woman while offering to cure her ailments.

At a time when hygienists were calling on women to shed some of their femininity for the good of Spain (take off corsets, dress sensibly, go for walks, cycle, or play tennis), doctors were just as quick to publish warnings of the dangers of normal femaleness symbolized by menstruation, which they suggest rendered women helplessly mad at least part, if not half, of the time. What I am suggesting is that we grant some attention to what is missing in these medical documents, rather than what is most preoccupying them. While it is significant that doctors stressed the urgent need to be vigilant of women’s rampant madness while menstruating, it is just as telling that doctors paid no mind to women who were wasting away, sad, not eating, or suffering from anemia or amenorrhea. Not only were these women, by medical logic, less apt to be mad, they fit the cultural beauty norms of the *fin-de-siglo*. Nor was mind paid to the impoverished women who were burdened with numerous births in unhygienic conditions. Hygiene was reserved for the middle-class, whose access to pharmaceuticals or private abortions under the guise of amenorrhea was a salient reminder to women like Rosa Viñals of the terrible injustice of it all. Perhaps the misdirected attention on menstruation gave women a chance for some initiative in naming and treating their own illnesses as well as ownership of their own reproductive functions through their procuring of pharmaceuticals. In addition, class delineation could be performed through particular conditions as well as in the procurement of their remedies. In other words, the tendency to see women as victims of medical misogyny and repressive social mores obscures the fact that women were actively seeking out, purchasing, and procuring their own treatments, which often times would imply a further step: that of self-diagnosis. At best, we can imagine anew the women readers of fashion magazines as active participants in their own reproductive functions, subversively or illegally seeking out remedies not readily available to them through physicians or midwives, reading between the lines to meet their own needs. At worst, we uncover an undiagnosed story of self-starvation designed to meet the new standards of abnegation, class, and the esthetic preferences of the day.

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A LAS SEÑORAS
APIOLINA CHAPOTEAUT
 La Apiolina Chapoteaut, tomada dos ó tres dias antes de las épocas, regulariza el **FLUJO MENSUAL**, corta los **RETRASOS** y **SUPRESIONES** asi como los **DOLORES** y **COLICOS** que suelen coincidir con las épocas y comprometen á menudo la salud de las señoras.
 Deposito en **PARIS, 8, rue Vivienne.**

Fig. 1. *Blanco y Negro* (1897).

ANEMIA
 clorosis, palidez, pobreza de sangre, desarreglos periódicos, palpitations nerviosas,
 desvanecimientos, debilidad por exceso de trabajo mental,
 agotamiento por pérdidas humorales, neurastenia, SE CURAN rápidamente con la
HEMOGLOBINA LÍQUIDA DR. GRAU
 PÍDASE EN FARMACIAS Y DROGUERÍAS
GRAU Y BUFILL, Campo Sagrado, 24

PLA MUNICIPAL

Fig. 2. *La Mujer y la Higiene* (1905).

EL GLOBEOL Y LA ANEMIA



ánimese. Ese es el remedio que cura. EL GLOBEOL, del cual yo conozco la eficacia constante y absoluta. . .

OPINION MEDICA.—"Puedo asegurar a usted que yo he obtenido buenos resultados con EL GLOBEOL. Gracias a un régimen apropiado, este remedio está bien tolerado en las anemias, aun en los enfermos más rebeldes. Triunfa de la debilidad, hace volver el apetito y hace desaparecer las palpitaciones.

"Dr. Gomm Giuseppe Bottalico, en Bari."

"He obtenido buenos efectos con el primer frasco de EL GLOBEOL; el apetito, que había desaparecido en el enfermo, lo ha recuperado. Las noches son tranquilas y reparadoras. La fatiga respiratoria casi ha desaparecido y la flojedad ha sido reemplazada por cierto bienestar.

"Dr. De Messimy."

Fig. 3. *Blanco y Negro* (1920).



Fig. 4. *La Ilustración Artística* (1915).



Fig. 5. *La Ilustración Artística* (1915).

Hipofosfitos Salud "ESPARTA.."

SI UNA SEÑORITA en la flor de su juventud está pálida, ojerosa, inapetente, tose, se cansa al menor esfuerzo, tiene náuseas, vómitos, desarreglos, use "HIPOFOSFITOS SALUD", y al poco tiempo recobrará el color de sus mejillas, la actividad y la alegría :: JÓVENES ANÉMICAS y de semblante pálido, debido á la pobreza de sangre: sabed que el remedio para fortaleceros son los "HIPOFOSFITOS SALUD" :: 29 años de crecientes éxitos :: Aprobado por la Real Academia de Medicina

AVISO: RECHÁCESE EL FRASCO SI NO SE LEE EN LA ETIQUETA EXTERIOR, CON TINTA ROJA.
HIPOFOSFITOS SALUD
 EN LA ARGENTINA PIDASE "HIPOFOSALUD"

Agentes para la venta.—En la República Argentina: Iglesias, Bidón-Chanal y C., Moreno, 661 y 663, Buenos Aires.—En Venezuela: Eliseo de Aramburu, Colono á Coronación de Jesús, 48, Caracas.—En Chile: De venta en las principales farmacias y droguerías.—En Panamá: Gervasio García, Avenida Central, 68, Panamá.—En Filipinas: G. Martini, Limited, Droguería, Manila.—En Colombia: J. M. y N. E. Acosta Madiedo, Progreso, 5, Barranquilla.—En Chile: Eduardo Limifiana, Santa Victoria, 350, Santiago de Chile.—En Puerto Rico: José Combas, Apartado 182, San Juan.—En Méjico: En las principales farmacias y droguerías.

Fig. 6. *La Esfera* (1919).

Notes

- ¹ I would like to thank Anne Giffey of the Knox College library for her help in acquiring *El Siglo Médico*, an essential source for this piece. My gratitude also goes to the libraries Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat (Hemeroteca) in Barcelona, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Center for Research Libraries for allowing me to obtain copies of the documents and illustrations I reference in this article.
- Two important groups of medical experts emerge in the mid and late nineteenth century—gynecologists and hygienists, whose missions overlapped quite significantly on women’s bodies. The hygienists’ focus was on women as propagators of the new hygienic rituals. Women were touted as saviors whose cleaning rituals held a moral significance. Hygienic practices were taught to girls in schools: how to air out a house, how to disinfect. Hygienists and feminists coincided in their demands for women to abandon restrictive dress and to embrace exercise regimens. Obstetricians and gynecologists were new on the scene, slowly inching out the midwives’ long-established practices.
- ² Apparently, Michelet kept meticulous records of his own wife’s menstruation, including the color and character of the flow as well as his feelings about her flow (Delaney et al. 244).
- ³ This advertisement appears in the very magazine Viñals directs: “Purgen. Purgante ideal. Los facultativos del mundo entero lo prescriben a las señoras en estado interesante.”
- ⁴ Ergotina is usually advertised as a cure for post-partum hemorrhaging. A midwife or obstetrician would likely keep it on hand.
- ⁵ Linterismo is not listed in any major dictionary, but probably means consecutive, delayed periods.
- ⁶ *El ángel del hogar* refers to a novel published in 1859 by María del Pilar Sinués de Marco. The impact of this image in Spain has been studied at length by Bridget Aldaraca.
- ⁷ This product was widely advertised during the 1910s and 20s.
- ⁸ Figlio argues that in nineteenth-century Britain, doctors themselves were aspiring bourgeois who held chlorotic women in contempt for what was seen as a self-inflicted illness that highlighted class distinction, or at least upper-class aspirations.

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