



## **“After the Apple”: Female Sexuality in the Writings of Emilia Pardo Bazán**

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The Biblical story of creation in which Adam and Eve are deceived by the serpent is recognized widely as one of the foundational stories of Western culture. The story's importance is asserted by many scholars, including Elaine Pagels in her groundbreaking study *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*: “[T]he biblical creation story, like the creation stories of other cultures, communicates social and religious values and presents them as if they were universally valid” (xx). In this same study Pagels suggests that Christians have interpreted the story of “Genesis” in various ways over the centuries, finding in it important teachings about sexuality, human freedom and human nature. Emilia Pardo Bazán's short story, “Cuento primitivo,” (1893) refashions the Biblical tale of Adam and Eve by incorporating some significant changes into the narrative. This was not a novel idea since many writers already had rewritten the story of Creation over the years, adding new layers of interpretation to this foundational story.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it seems very likely, as Charnon-Deutsch has suggested, that Pardo Bazán wrote this story in response to Clarín's misogynist rewriting of the “Genesis” story, “Cuento futuro,” which was published a year earlier than “Cuento primitivo” in 1892 (*Story* 71).<sup>2</sup>

The 1890s mark a period in which Emilia Pardo Bazán increasingly addresses women's roles in society in many of her fictional and non-fictional works. Carmen Bravo-Villasante attributes the Countess's new focus on feminist issues to two main events in her life: the death of Pardo Bazán's father, a very liberal-minded man who fully supported his daughter's intellectual pursuits, and the Countess's unsuccessful candidacies for open chairs in the Royal Academy of Spanish Letters in 1890 and 1891, which have been attributed primarily to the academy's unwillingness to accept female writers into its ranks. Bravo-Villasante characterizes the Countess's texts from this timeframe in this manner: “[S]i antes un vago feminismo se diluía por sus libros, ahora un feminismo militante declarado informa todos sus escritos” (167).

In this study I explore Pardo Bazán's rewriting of the foundational story of Adam and Eve, in particular its many subtle ideological underpinnings that serve to question some of the primary tenets of the patriarchal culture of the late nineteenth century, specifically those that limited women's roles in society. Echoes of the scholar John Phillips' words can be heard in Pardo Bazán's narration: “To follow the path of Eve is to discover much

about the identity that has been imposed upon women in Western civilization. If one would understand Woman, one must come to terms with Eve” (xiii). In this analysis I propose that Pardo Bazán’s version of the Creation story highlights two key themes: the double moral standard and women’s nearly universal acceptance of their inferior position in patriarchal society. This study first explores some key modifications of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve found in “Cuento primitivo”. Principally, that Pardo Bazán’s tale highlights the origins of misogyny, rather than those of *original sin*. Subsequently, the development of the two primary themes found in Pardo Bazán’s story of Adam and Eve is mapped out in two short stories from the same period, “La culpable” and “La novia fiel,” and in the two-part series of novels that Pardo Bazán called “El ciclo de Adán y Eva”.<sup>3</sup> Pardo Bazán published these two novels, *Doña Milagros* (1894) and *Memorias de un solterón* (1896), shortly after “Cuento primitivo.” These two novels’ engagement with issues of morality, sexuality and decadence add nuance to this discussion. Moreover, the common themes that can be found both in the rewriting of the story of Adam and Eve in “Cuento primitivo” and the novels that comprise the “Adam and Eve series” open up the interpretive possibilities of all three of these works.

### **The Biblical account**

As a first step one must briefly look back to the Biblical version of the story of Adam and Eve, in order to later highlight the differences between the original and Pardo Bazán’s rewriting of the story.<sup>4</sup> In the story found in “Genesis” God first creates all the elements of the earth, including the land and seas, all of the living creatures of the animal kingdom and many plants. After He has completed this elaborate project, He creates Adam and then as the first man is sleeping, God takes his rib and creates Eve. Adam and Eve live happily together free to do as they wish, with just one prohibition: God tells them that they cannot eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the Garden. Their existence in paradise is tranquil and pleasant until Eve is coerced by a serpent to eat an apple from the forbidden tree, lured by the serpent’s promise that her action will make her wise like God and will allow her to live forever. After Eve eats part of the apple, she offers it to Adam so that he too can eat some of it, and as a result they both become aware and ashamed of their naked appearance and are later exiled from Paradise. God’s punishment to Eve for her transgression is pain in childbirth and subjugation to her husband. Given Eve’s culpability and her divinely-imposed punishment to remain under her husband’s domain, it is easy to understand why contemporary scholars have found this foundational story of Western culture to be an important source of misogyny. Indeed, the eminent scholar Mary Daly asserts: “[T]he myth has projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and the ‘nature’ of women that is still imbedded in the modern psyche” (45).

### **Pardo Bazán’s rewriting: “Cuento primitivo”**

Returning now to Pardo Bazán’s version of the story, one can see that the first part of “Cuento primitivo” is similar to the Biblical account with one significant difference: instead of creating all of the Heavens and earth prior to creating Adam, in Pardo Bazán’s version of the tale Adam is created first. The narrator explains God’s reasoning for creating man first: “Destinándole como le destinaba a rey y señor de lo creado, le pareció

a Dios muy regular que el mismo Adán manifestase de qué hechura deseaba sus señoríos y reinos. En suma, Dios, a fuer de buen Padre, quiso hacer feliz a su criatura y que pidiese por aquella boca” (I: 194). This modification is relevant because it establishes that the world is not a divine creation (as it is in the version found in “Genesis”), but rather, one that was determined by Adam’s whimsical desires. Later in the story, the narrator evinces Adam’s frivolous nature: “Adán se despertó cierta mañana pensando que la vida era bien estúpida y el Paraíso una secatura” (I: 195). As I will show in the following pages, the fact that the world was not divinely created is a key to Pardo Bazán’s narration—as later she proposes that there is one essential flaw in Adam’s design.

In contrast to the apparently thoughtless way in which Adam determines the world’s design, God takes much care in creating Eve. Rather than simply taking one of Adam’s ribs while he is sleeping to create her, in “Cuento primitivo” God takes a little bit of all of the best parts of Adam in order to create a companion for him. The story implies that man’s companion is superior to him, therefore when Adam meets Eve he is in awe of her perfection: “[S]e quedó embobado, atónito, creyendo hallarse en presencia de un ser celestial, de un luminoso querubín. [...] Adán juraba [...] que Eva procedía de otras regiones, de los azules espacios por donde giran las estrellas, del éter purísimo” (I: 196). This hyperbolic description of Adam’s reaction to Eve shows the high regard in which Adam holds Eve immediately after her creation while it also contrasts markedly with the deeply negative perception of her he expresses later in the tale.

In Pardo Bazán’s version, it is Adam who eats the forbidden fruit, and with no coercion by a serpent or anyone else. Pardo Bazán’s decision to shift culpability from Eve to Adam is an important difference in her rewriting of the story, since Eve’s gullibility in the “Genesis” story is linked to God’s punishment for her—that she be subordinate to her husband. This shift in blame does not change Eve’s status at the end of the “Cuento primitivo,” however, in this version of the tale she continues to be relegated to an inferior position, but for a different reason.

The overtly sexual interpretation of Adam’s actions in “Cuento primitivo” is apparent in the narrator’s description of how Eve safeguards her apple: “(Adán) vino en antojo vehementísimo de comerse una manzana que custodiaba Eva con gran cuidado. Yo sé de fiijo que Eva la defendió mucho, y no la entregó a dos por tres; y este pasaje de la Escritura es de los más tergiversados” (I: 196). The allusion in this passage is clearly to Eve’s virginity, given the narrator’s insistence that Eve very closely guarded the apple. Moreover, the choice of the word “entregó” alludes to the sexual nature of the encounter, considering the long literary tradition that employs this verb to describe a woman’s willingness to engage in sexual relations (i.e. “ella entregó la flor”). Furthermore, this correlation apple=virginity is repeated again later in the story. The sin committed in “Cuento primitivo” is the taking of Eve’s virginity by Adam. This sexual reading of Adam and Eve’s encounter is an essential aspect of Pardo Bazán’s rewriting, since their carnal contact is the source of Adam’s changed perception of Eve.

After Adam has taken Eve’s apple/virginity, his opinion of her drastically changes—he no longer sees her as a perfect, celestial being but rather as a “demonio” or “fiera bruta.”

The narrator's hyperbolic description of Adam's changed perception of Eve is noteworthy: "¡Oh cambio asombroso! [...] ¡oh inconcebible versatilidad! [...], en vez de tener a Eva por serafín, la tuvo por demonio o fiera bruta; en vez de crearla limpia y sin mácula, la juzgó sentina de todas las impurezas y maldades; en vez de atribuirle su dicha y su arrobamiento, le echó la culpa de su desazón, de sus dolores, hasta del destierro que Dios les impuso" (I: 196). Adam's shift is essential to our understanding of the text, therefore, since Pardo Bazán's version of the story leaves the source of *original sin* aside, and instead focuses on the origin of misogyny.<sup>5</sup>

The importance placed on male-female relations is made clear since after man and woman have been created, Pardo Bazán's tale no longer focuses on their relationship to God, but rather, on Adam and Eve's personal relationship. Indeed, after God has created Adam and Eve, he disappears entirely from Pardo Bazán's story. Moreover, the story's message becomes universal when its last lines suggest that this same paradigm is repeated over and over again, as all women are devalued by their mates "after the apple": "Y el mito genésico se reproduce en la vida de cada Eva: antes de la manzana, el Adán respectivo la eleva un altar y la adora en él; después de la manzana, la quita del altar y la lleva al pesebre o al basurero..." (I: 196-7).

Adam's inability to reconcile his initial perception of Eve as a pure, perfect and nearly celestial being with his newly found carnal knowledge of her references the hegemonic view of female nature in Spain's nineteenth century. Along with many other scholars, Catherine Jagoe has argued that during this timeframe in Spain the social discourse on female nature is somewhat narrow—nearly all writings agree that virtue, chastity and innocence are what most clearly and accurately define a woman; thus, she is completely devoid of sexual needs and desires (25-7). Even in her role as wife, society envisions her as mother to her husband, rather than his sexual partner: "El punto supremo de la nueva ortodoxia es la <<pureza>> de la mujer. En la cosmovisión burguesa, ésta era naturalmente casta porque así se lo dictaba su falta de deseo erótico. Descaba al hombre sólo con fines maternas; amaba al niño en él y a los niños que éste le iba a proporcionar" (Jagoe 32). Therefore, according to this worldview a woman's chastity and innocence are what define her. "Cuento primitivo" highlights the hypocrisy apparent in this definition of female nature since it is clearly Adam's sexual desires that lead to the carnal relationship between him and Eve, but yet it is Eve who suffers because Adam is unable to reconcile his desire for her with his perception of how she should be. Thus, Pardo Bazán's story proposes that the origins of misogyny lie precisely in this paradox.

Parallel to Adam's negative view of Eve "after the apple" is Eve's new perception of herself: "[A] fuerza de oírlo, también Eva llegó a creerlo; se reconoció culpada, y perdió la memoria de su origen" (I: 196). Thus, the story suggests that women's acceptance of their inferior position is not caused by any weakness or sinfulness of their own, but rather it is owing to their indoctrination at the hands of patriarchal culture: after hearing over and over again that she is guilty, Eve simply accepts what Adam tells her. This is a significant difference between the biblical tale and Pardo Bazán's version of the story since Eve's inferior position in "Genesis" is divinely ordained: God punishes her by making her subject to her husband's authority. In "Cuento primitivo," however, although

she is not the one who was guilty of picking the fruit, she nevertheless is convinced that she is guilty and thus relegated to an inferior position because Adam has persuaded her of this. This final statement, therefore, references the double moral standard, which sees female sexuality as pernicious and reproachable. It is Adam's carnal knowledge of Eve that changes his perception of her forever, dethroning her from the eminent status he elevated her to when they first met. Pardo Bazán shows that she is aware of the biased nature of sexual mores in her essay "Una opinión sobre la mujer," when she stresses that carnal desire is an inherent part of all human nature, that of man and woman alike: "La atracción sexual, fuente de la unión conyugal, y el instinto reproductor, ley de la naturaleza que impone la filogenitura en beneficio de las generaciones nuevas, han sido, son y serán móvil poderosísimo de las acciones humanas—humanas, entiéndase bien, de varones y hembras, que forman la humanidad; [...]" (*La mujer española* 195). The emphasis that the author places on the presence of sexual attraction in both sexes alludes to the social repression of female sexuality that was so commonplace during this period. Likewise, Adam's drastically-changed perception of Eve after their sexual encounter underscores patriarchal culture's rejection of female sexuality. What Pardo Bazán proposes in her story is that Adam, and by extension all men, has convinced Eve that she is inferior because she has been taught that this innate and natural part of herself, her sexuality, is something that she must reject.

"Cuento primitivo" highlights the double moral standard as the root cause of misogyny while it also underscores the hegemonic status of patriarchal sexual mores. By shifting blame from Eve to Adam in this account, the story shows that it is not Eve's culpability or innocence that has condemned her to an inferior position, but rather the social conditioning to which she is subject in patriarchal culture. In the story it is Adam who condemns Eve after he alone is responsible for eating the apple, and after hearing his disparaging words over and over again, she comes to believe them. Thus, the story suggests that regardless of women's actions the misogynistic tendencies of patriarchal culture will indoctrinate them into believing that they are guilty. Moreover, the exaggerated way in which the narrator presents Adam's perception of Eve first as an angel and then as a whore, highlights the hyperbole apparent in this dichotomous view of women's nature that was so prevalent in the popular imagination of the time. At the same time it also underscores the hypocrisy of the socially-imposed prohibition of female sexuality that demarcated the division between these two opposed visions of female nature.

The reader is left with a glimmer of hope when the final words of "Cuento primitivo" assert that it is Eve who holds the reminder of the divine beauty of paradise: "[D]esterrado de tan apacetible mansión, sólo logra entreverla un instante en el fondo de las pupilas de Eva, donde se conserva un reflejo de su imagen" (I: 197). Thus a manifestation of the perfection that they left behind is ever present in Eve's eye: for she, like paradise, was once an ideal that has been lost, although not through any action on her part, but rather through Adam's changed perception of her "after the apple."

This sexual reading of the story of Adam and Eve that Pardo Bazán proposes can also be found in the biblical version of the account. Indeed, one of the two primary



interpretations of the story of Creation is a sexual one. Elaine Pagels asserts: “[W]hen we explore Christian and Jewish writers from the first centuries of the Common Era, we find that they seldom talk directly about sexual behavior, [...]. Instead they often talk about Adam, Eve and the serpent—the story of creation—and when they do, they tell us what they think about sexual matters” (xviii-xix). Likewise, the literary scholar Pamela Norris asserts: “[T]his apparently unsophisticated story [...] has remained the essential source for Christian definitions of sexuality for nearly two thousand years. A reading of the myth in which Eve features as sexually culpable has been operative since before the Early Church Fathers uncompromisingly established the links between sexuality, sin and death” (4-5). Here Norris suggests that Eve’s culpability is an essential element in the sexual reading of the Creation story. Elaine Pagels adds to our understanding of this interpretation by noting that the sexual reading of original sin became increasingly accepted in the fourth century of the Common Era after St. Augustine proposed that spontaneous sexual desire is proof of original sin, and that original sin is passed from parents to children through intercourse (xxvi). Based on this understanding of the story of “Genesis,” St. Augustine and other Christian ascetics from this period cited the story of Adam and Eve as proof that Christians should remain celibate (Pagels xxv). Interpreting the story in a less radical (yet misogynistic) way, other groups of Christians “used the story of Adam and Eve to support traditional marriage and to prove that women, being naturally gullible, are unfit for any role but raising children and keeping house; the story of Eve was made to reinforce the patriarchal structure of community life” (Pagels xxiii).<sup>6</sup> It is this last reading that seems to have served as the impetus for Pardo Bazán’s revision of the biblical tale.

The other common interpretation of the biblical account (other than the sexual reading) highlights the importance that the story places on moral responsibility: “Adam’s sin was not sexual indulgence but disobedience; thus Clement (of Alexandria) agreed with most of his Jewish and Christian contemporaries that the real theme of the story of Adam and Eve is moral freedom and moral responsibility. Its point is to show that we are responsible for the choices we freely make—good or evil—just as Adam was” (Pagels xxxiii). Thus, this interpretation suggests that it was Adam and Eve’s choice to disobey God that is their most important action in the story, and the one that shows the eternal struggle that all Christians face: to make morally responsible decisions. In this reading of the story the culpability is shared equally by Adam and Eve, and thus, the focus is placed on their disobedience of God, rather than Eve’s individual guilt.

Now that I have discussed the relationship between “Cuento primitivo” and the Biblical account of the story of Creation, I will shift to other works penned by our author that make reference to the same themes present in this story: the unjust sexual mores that require women to suppress their sexuality and the social conditioning of all women that convinces them to accept their inferior social status. Moreover, I shall highlight the important link that these works establish between a woman’s acceptance of her inferior status and the realization of her own sexuality. The remainder of this study will focus on the treatment of these themes in two short stories published within months of “Cuento primitivo” and the two novels, *Doña Milagros* and *Memorias de un solterón*, that comprise the only series of novels that Pardo Bazán wrote, titled “El ciclo de Adán y Eva.”

**“El ciclo de Adán y Eva”: *Doña Milagros* and *Memorias de un solterón*<sup>7</sup>**

Perhaps the most obvious treatment of these themes can be found in the first novel of the “Adam and Eve series,” *Doña Milagros* (1894). While in “Cuento primitivo” we see how Eve is negatively affected by the social prohibition of female sexuality in an allegorical setting, in this novel we catch up with Eve’s descendants and see how they cope with this same biased social more under concrete circumstances in the bourgeois culture of Spain’s nineteenth century. This novel tells the story of Benicio Neira, his wife Ilduara, their twelve children and the various ups and downs in their relationship with their neighbor, Doña Milagros. The novel opens with Ilduara giving birth to twin girls. Her difficult labor eventually leads to her death, which serves to highlight the difficult plight of a fertile woman—her fecundity eventually takes her to the grave. Indeed, this part of the novel could be interpreted as a representation of one of the primary punishments of Eve in the Biblical story—Ilduara suffers immense pain in childbirth, so much so that she eventually dies as a result. The second part of the novel focuses on Benicio’s eleven daughters and their difficulties in finding socially-acceptable outlets for their budding sexuality while Benicio attempts to keep his home and family in order after his wife’s premature death. The predicament of Benicio’s many daughters is complicated by the fact that their family’s meager economic status is at odds with its aristocratic heritage, making it difficult for these young women to find eligible bachelors willing to marry them. As one might expect, since most of Benicio’s daughters are unable to marry, they also do not find socially acceptable ways in which to satisfy their sexual desires.<sup>8</sup>

One of Benicio’s daughters, Argos, is a strikingly beautiful young woman who becomes a religious fanatic in an attempt to sublimate her sexual desires for a Jesuit priest, el Padre Incienso. As her obsession becomes more and more uncontrollable she finally falls ill with hysteria. Ironically, the old-fashioned physician who is hired to treat Argos uses archaic medical practices while his interpretation of her predicament is unexpectedly progressive. He articulates Argos’ situation to Benicio: “El injusto mundo, señor don Benicio, hace a las doncellas responsables de este mal [...] cuando este mal es precisamente un certificado público de vida honesta y de pureza incólume, pues las mujeres que se entregan a desarreglos como el varón apenas conocen tan terrible padecimiento” (*Doña Milagros* 432). It seems clear that the “desarreglos” of men to which the blood-letter refers are sexual affairs, thus highlighting the unjust social code of the double moral standard. Moreover, the text’s description of the gravity of Argos’ illness underscores the negative effects that the suppression of her sexuality has caused. Nevertheless, Argos is unable to understand the link between her deteriorated state of health and her unfulfilled sexual desires, since society has taught her to entirely reject her sexuality from her earliest days. As will be discussed shortly, Argos eventually does find an outlet for her sexuality in the second part of the series, *Memorias de un solterón*.

Another daughter in *Doña Milagros*, Tula, is faced with the same problem, but unlike her sister Argos, Tula understands her predicament and quickly finds an acceptable outlet for her sexual desires: marriage. In Benicio’s eyes, however, Tula’s is an undesirable match because she marries a laborer well below her social standing. Benicio describes Tula’s decision to marry below her class in this way: “La caída de Tula me recordó que el

hambre de amor, [...] hace olvidar las facticias jerarquías sociales [...] sólo quedan en pie Adán y Eva, la primitiva pareja del Edén, el varón y la hembra atraídos el uno hacia el otro merced a instintos que a veces ni saben definir [...]” (444). The reference in this passage to the Garden of Eden serves to highlight the important element of sexual desire that brought Tula and her husband together.<sup>9</sup> Such a straightforward reference to his daughter’s sexual desires, however, seems out of place in Benicio’s narration, since, echoing society’s repression of female sexuality, he often looks for more innocuous explanations for his daughters’ frustrations. Tula succeeds in escaping patriarchy’s scrutinizing gaze by fulfilling her sexual needs within the socially-sanctioned medium of marriage. It is the loveless and unequal nature of her union, however, that tempers her success.

Of equal importance in this novel is its staging of a truly unique set of circumstances: Benicio has eleven daughters, many of marrying age, while the family’s poor economic situation does not allow these young women to offer a sufficient dowry to attract suitors of their social class. The novel explores what will happen to these many young women when social constraints do not allow them any acceptable outlets for fulfilling their sexual needs. Thus we can see how these women are condemned by the double moral standard, since they are not given any acceptable means by which to explore their budding sexuality, while their one legitimate opportunity to become ladies in society’s eyes is severely hampered by their family’s economic situation.

In the second part of the Adam and Eve series, *Memorias de un solterón*, the narrative continues with the same characters—principally the Neira family—with the majority of the novel focused on the development of the free-spirited and intellectual Fe Neira. In contrast to Fe’s higher faculties and academic pursuits, the illicit affairs of two of her sisters, Argos and Rosa, make up important subplots of the novel. Rosa establishes a sexual relationship with the wealthy moneylender Baltasar Sobrado, who, in addition to taking her virginity, extends to her exorbitant amounts of money in order to appease her obsession for beautiful dresses and other adornments. After Baltasar marries someone else, Rosa is left disgraced and her family in financial ruin. The reckless nature of Baltasar’s womanizing implicates the social mores that permit this behavior, while Rosa’s empty existence, as a young woman who cannot find a proper mate, underscores her plight as a poor girl of marrying age. In a manner similar to that of her sister Rosa, Argos has an illicit affair with a local politician, Mejía. When Benicio learns of his daughter’s liaison, he immediately demands that Mejía marry her, but when the politician refuses, Benicio is so enraged that he stabs and kills him. It is Benicio’s heavy conscience after this violent act that ultimately takes him to his grave. The predicament in which both of these women find themselves implicates the social mores that train them for nothing more than the husband chase. Moreover, their unfortunate circumstance as lovers of these wealthy men shows that the double moral standard that endorses the men’s behavior works against marriage, since these men have little reason to give up their independence if they can fulfill their sexual needs outside of marriage. The marked disparity between the social standards to which Benicio’s daughters are held and those that determine the behavior of the men of Marineda is striking. Baltasar Sobrado, Mejía and their friend Primo Cova spend much of their time carousing and attempting to seduce women, and, in many



cases, they succeed. The complete impunity with which they engage in these illicit affairs underscores the laissez-faire nature of the social mores that endorse male promiscuity.

As *Memorias de un solterón* opens, it appears to be an open critique of bourgeois marriage. Indeed, even the title of the work highlights its protagonist's rejection of this social institution. Mauro, the novel's autodiegetic narrator, describes himself as an effeminate thirty-something architect who entirely rejects marriage, convinced that it will ruin his leisurely and self-absorbed lifestyle. He confirms that he does not want to marry because "es insoportable el pensamiento de que la mujer a quien yo pudiese llevar al ara, fuese a ella conmigo [...] buenamente porque no iba con otro" (458). In other words, he finds it highly problematic that a woman's only choice in life is to become a wife and mother, which prompts some women to accept a proposal from a man whom they do not truly love. In order to avoid becoming a victim of one of these insincere pairings, Mauro decides to remain a bachelor. During the first part of the novel his elaborate reflections on the bourgeois practice of marriage, in which he repeatedly asserts that economic considerations carry more weight than sentimental ones, show the problematic nature of this social institution. Furthermore, Mauro's comments often highlight the lack of autonomy of young women, who are required to wait for a man to solicit their company, must rely on a husband or male relative for economic stability, and are often raised to be simple adornments on men's arms.

In contrast to the limiting roles that most women experienced during this timeframe, the character Fe Neira does not fall prey to any of the traditional trappings of female experience: conspicuous consumption, illicit sexual liaisons or a meaningless existence.<sup>10</sup> Instead, her determination to pursue her own intellectual development leads her to discover a truly fulfilling existence as a private tutor. Likewise, the novel suggests that her success is directly linked to her rejection of a traditional female role. Reminiscent of the regenerative theses of some of Galdós' novels, such as *Lo prohibido*, Fe shows how meaningful a small income and a renewed sense of purpose in life can be. However, just as Fe is making plans to set off on her own in Madrid, away from the scandalous and immoral activities of her older sisters, her father dies and, out of a sense of familial duty, she decides to stay in Marineda and attend to the administration of her family's home. It is at this point in the narration when Mauro, the confirmed bachelor of the novel's title, asks for Fe's hand in marriage.

Mauro and Fe demonstrate how a relationship based on mutual respect and common goals can solve many of the problems that the illicit affairs of Fe's sisters create. Mauro's progressive ideas about gender roles and his open acceptance of Fe's desire to continue to engage in intellectual pursuits make him an ideal mate for her. Moreover, the development of Mauro's character, from a somewhat reactionary position when Fe first informs him of her desire for economic independence and freedom, to his wholehearted acceptance of her goals as he falls in love with her by the end of the novel, shows that a woman who forges a new path, and rejects the typical female roles of her social milieu can be an ideal wife.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Charnon-Deutsch posits that Mauro's most striking characteristic is his ability to change, and it is this transformation that turns him into Fe's ideal mate by the end of the novel (*Narratives* 157). It is also significant that by the end of

the novel the confirmed bachelor of the narration's title openly embraces the institution of marriage, but only because his union with Fe stands apart from the common practice of marriage by most bourgeois couples. Ayala agrees with this assertion, noting that by the end of the novel: "El lector comprende que no era el matrimonio en sí lo que Mauro rechazaba, sino la forma de ser y actuar de las jóvenes de su época" ("Resonancias" 228). Therefore, a key to Mauro's decision to marry is his ability to form a union with a woman who rejects traditional female standards of conduct.

The novel pairing that *Memorias* presents in its closing chapter stands apart from all other relationships described in our author's longer narrative works because it is the only truly equal partnership based on mutual love and respect that Pardo Bazán creates.<sup>12</sup> Charnon-Deutsch describes this union: "Mauro is not taking the place of Fe's father. Mauro and Fe together are assuming that role, with Fe posed to play the more active part" (*Narratives* 157). If one traces a trajectory from "Cuento primitivo" through the two novels of the "Adam and Eve series", man and woman's relationship has been transformed from its misogynistic beginnings in Pardo Bazán's rewriting of the story of creation to Mauro and Fe's ideal union at the end of *Memorias de un solterón*. The misogyny inherent in Adam's view of Eve in "Cuento primitivo" has been transformed, mainly due to a woman's rejection of traditional female roles. The decision to close the "Adam and Eve series" with the creation of this marriage of equals can be interpreted as a prescriptive model for the future. The novel suggests that it is only through a reformulation of a woman's traditional role in society that a marriage based on mutual respect and common goals is possible.<sup>13</sup> As Ayala asserts: "Estamos ante un relato de dos seres que se niegan a aceptar la forma de vida que impone la sociedad contemporánea" ("Introducción" 71). While Fe ultimately was not able to fully realize her dream of living on her own in the capital as a "new woman," nevertheless, she does decide to marry a man who supports her quest for personal development. Therefore, what supplants Fe's personal quest for freedom is her newly defined relationship with Mauro, who adores her intellect and determination while he also accepts her as his equal and, with this as the foundation of their marriage, Mauro and Fe come together to offer an ideal model for the future—(not Fe alone as the "new woman" but) the two of them together as the "new couple."

### **"La culpable"**

Now that I have discussed the development of these themes in the two novels of the "Adam and Eve" series, I shall shift back to Pardo Bazán's short fiction to analyze two short stories that explore the relationship between women's inferior status and female sexuality. Indeed, in several of Pardo Bazán's short stories of the early 1890s, two common themes are the double moral standard and the socially-imposed rejection of their own sexuality that many female characters experience. One of the tales that treats the double moral standard is "La culpable," published in September of 1893, just six weeks after the publication of "Cuento primitivo." In this tale a young attractive woman, Elisa, decides to run off with her boyfriend of five years, Adolfo. The young couple spends twenty-four hours alone together on a train and then is quickly and quietly married after the authorities find them.

Elisa is never able to forgive herself for her lack of judgment and eventually dies at a young age, after learning that Adolfo is having an affair. She never reproaches her husband for his infidelity, and on her deathbed the only thing she asks of him is forgiveness for her one and only transgression. Her husband, however, does not appease her and instead simply kisses her forehead as she quietly expires. In a statement reminiscent of Adam's treatment of Eve "after the apple," the story's narrator censures Adolfo's heartlessness: "[L]a absolución del Cielo no bastaba a Elisa: ya se sabe que Dios es muy bueno; pero, en cambio, los hombres jamás olvidan ciertas cosas, y la mancha de vergüenza allí está, sobre la frente, hasta la última hora del vivir" (I: 303). In this passage it is significant that the "mancha" on Elisa's forehead is not referred to as a sin, since she has long since been forgiven by God. Instead, what remains on her conscience is the stain on her honor that society has imposed, while her husband, who was guilty of the same transgression, seems to have suffered no consequences whatsoever. Through this narratorial comment, then, the story highlights the inequity of social mores that never hold Adolfo responsible for the same sin that irrevocably stained Elisa's name. Moreover, the presence of the priest in the last scene of the story, in which he insists to Elisa that God has forgiven her for her sin, highlights the inequity of man's laws that hold women to a higher standard than men are held to, while divine law makes no distinction between the sexes.

Elisa's complete subjugation to her husband after their transgression is another notable element in this narration. It is Elisa's indoctrination in patriarchal culture that requires her to assume this inferior role, echoing the same process that Eve undergoes in "Cuento primitivo." In "La culpable," Elisa is convinced of her inferiority after society systematically condemns her for giving in to her sexual desires. Her family's reaction is indicative of society's censure: her father no longer recognizes her as his progeny, her mother always lets out a long sigh when stating her name, and her sisters are confined to their home for months after Elisa's transgression. The inferior position that Elisa willingly assumes deprives her of any pleasure in her life: "No hubo esposa más tierna y solícita que Elisa, ni casa mejor gobernada que la suya, ni señora que con mayor abnegación prescindiese de sí propia y se eclipsase más modestamente en la sombra del hogar" (I: 303). In this way Elisa does what society expects her to—she resigns herself to being a perfect wife and mother, always placing her family's happiness and well-being before her own.

### **"La novia fiel"**

The opposite scenario is described in "La novia fiel" (1894), which immediately follows "La culpable" in Pardo Bazán's story collection *Cuentos de amor*. In this story the protagonist does not give in to her carnal desires as Elisa did in "La culpable." Instead of becoming the fallen woman, Amelia makes a conscious decision to abide by sexual standards of conduct in order to remain "la novia fiel." This tale narrates the story of a young, attractive woman Amelia who has been engaged to Germán for several years. The beginning of their relationship seems to be out of a romance novel: they are endlessly content spending time together, their families believe them to be a good match, and they both behave as they are expected. Problems begin when Germán decides to prolong his

studies beyond the six years he has already spent away from Amelia in Santiago, and complete doctoral courses in Madrid. After he moves to the capital, Amelia notes that Germán's attitude toward her changes: his letters are much less frequent and also lack the intimate sentiments that his correspondence always contained in the past. But as soon as Germán returns from Madrid Amelia quickly forgets about her doubts and once again enjoys her fiancée's company.

Unfortunately, Germán is not able to find employment once he returns home, and yet again their nuptials are postponed. It is during this period that Amelia's family and friends notice a drastic change in her: her health suffers and she is prone to strange and extreme moods. Not even Amelia understands, at least at first, what it is that is causing her distress, but she quickly determines that "[s]u mal no era sino deseo, ansia, risa, necesidad de casarse" (I: 306). This statement is preceded by a long question in which the narrator queries: "¿Qué mínimos indicios; qué insensibles, pero eslabonados, hechos [...] hacen que...la ayer ignorante doncella entienda de pronto y se rasgue ante sus ojos el velo de Isis?" (I: 306). When this veil of innocence is finally torn away from her eyes, she finally understands that she too has sexual desires. Amelia's reaction to the revelation of her own sexuality is absolute shame and disillusionment. Why does Amelia experience such a strong reaction to an innate part of human nature? As the other texts analyzed here have shown, patriarchal culture has taught Amelia that proper women are defined by their virtue, chastity and devotion. Since sexual desires are antagonistic to these essential female traits, social mores dictate that women must suppress their sexuality. Therefore, Amelia's reaction to the discovery that she too has sexual needs and desires is resolutely negative.

In the story world, Germán's patience with the infinite postponements of their nuptials contrasts with Amelia's impatience and worries her at first. She is not able to understand how he can maintain such a passive attitude while their wedding continually seems to slide farther and farther into the future. At this point in the text the narrator underscores the role that Amelia's upbringing plays in her ability to maintain self-control: "[N]ecesitó Amelia todo su valor, todo su recato, todo el freno de las nociones de honor y honestidad que le inculcaron desde la niñez" (I: 306). Given that she has been taught since childhood that her chastity and virtue are her most important traits, she cannot imagine violating the social norms that so highly value her innocence. Germán, however, is expected to adhere to a very different code of conduct. The ubiquitous acceptance and hypocritical nature of the double moral standard is underscored when it is a priest who confirms Amelia's suspicion that Germán is able to be so patient because he has been fulfilling his sexual needs outside of marriage. In this conversation her confessor disapproves of Amelia's decision to call off the wedding, noting that Germán's youthful transgressions are such common practice for young men that Amelia should not concern herself with such trivialities.

Amelia's response to the realization of her fiancée's immoral behavior is self-abnegation. She does not allow herself to step beyond the boundaries that patriarchal society has defined for her, instead she decides to break off her relationship with the man that she loves, in an attempt to guard herself from emulating his behavior and becoming the fallen

women. Therefore, at the end of the story she is still “la novia fiel”: she chooses to adhere to the paradigm of female virtue and chastity and never speaks out against the biased social conventions that strictly censure women’s open expression of sexuality while allowing men to fulfill their sexual needs outside of marriage.<sup>14</sup> Her actions, however, do protest these social inequities when she decides to break off her engagement to her unfaithful fiancée. Although the priest has made it clear that social mores sanction his behavior, Amelia has decided that she will not.

## Conclusions

Pardo Bazán’s rewriting of the story of “Genesis” suggests that the root cause of misogyny is Adam’s changed perception of Eve after their sexual encounter. This shift in Adam’s view of Eve, therefore, can be connected to the double moral standard, which dictates that all proper women must reject their sexuality, while their male counterparts are taught to explore openly this part of their identities. Because nineteenth-century patriarchal culture teaches women they must reject their sexuality, the result is an internal conflict in many women who must repress an essential part of themselves in order to conform to what society deems to be proper female behavior. It is precisely this predicament that lies at the heart of many women’s acceptance of their inferior social status, often without question. Through the subtle presentation of these two important issues in the rewriting of one of the foundational stories of all cultures, “Cuento primitivo” succeeds in highlighting the weight that these two themes carry in the feminist struggle that was just beginning at the end of the nineteenth century in Spain.<sup>15</sup>

What brings together the different works of Pardo Bazán’s fictional corpus that I have studied here is their subtle critique of the socially-imposed repression of female sexuality. All four of these works explore the same primary theme that is presented in “Cuento primitivo,” the role of female sexuality in misogyny, but rather than treating it in an allegorical context, they translate Eve’s experience in the Garden of Eden to very real contexts in Spain’s nineteenth century. The important role that society plays in modeling and imposing the prohibition of female sexuality is explored in various ways in these novels and short stories. Only a few works have been analyzed here, but there are many others that treat these same topics, including the novels *Insolación* and *La madre naturaleza*, and several short stories that were all published within a year or two of the publication of “Cuento primitivo” in 1893.<sup>16</sup>

In the two novels of the “Adam and Eve series” we see how the predicaments of the Neira girls are complicated by their poor economic status, which leads many of these young women to explore their sexuality outside of marriage. These novels succeed in highlighting the unjust nature of the double moral code by juxtaposing the experience of the young male characters to that of their female counterparts. All of the narrations studied here link the difficult predicaments of many bourgeois women and these same women’s very limited roles in the cultural milieu of Spain’s nineteenth century. In contrast to these other characters’ experiences, Fe Neira in *Memorias de un solterón* is a “new woman” character who rejects traditional female roles and sets out on her own to find personal fulfillment in intellectual and professional pursuits. In addition to finding self-



realization in her role as a tutor, Fe also is the only female character who establishes a fulfilling union, thus linking the success of bourgeois marriage to a revision of women's roles in society. Indeed Fe's future husband, Mauro Pareja, had entirely rejected the social institution of marriage until he met Fe and discovered that with her he could establish a union based on the enduring qualities of mutual respect, common responsibility and love. It does not seem to be by chance that Emilia Pardo Bazán completed the "Adam and Eve series" with this unique coming together of two equals who may even create their own paradise on earth.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The second chapter of Charnon-Deutsch's book *The Nineteenth-Century Spanish Story* studies some of the rewritings of the story of creation by Spanish writers of the nineteenth century.
- <sup>2</sup> Clarín's tale is a science fiction account of the last two beings on earth. The antithetical nature of the titles as well as the content of the two stories, Pardo Bazán's feminist rendition in contrast to Clarín's misogynist one, stand out as proof of this likely relationship between the two narrations. Charnon-Deutsch asserts that Pardo Bazán's rewriting of the Biblical story responds directly to Clarín's: "[I]n *Cuento primitivo* Pardo Bazán gamely accepts Clarín's challenge to create a new concept of Eve" (*Story* 69).
- <sup>3</sup> Ayala notes that "the Adam and Eve series" is Pardo Bazán's attempt to do what many of her contemporaries had done, including Balzac, Zola and Galdós, that is, create a series of novels that explores the same themes, timeframe, locales and contains the same characters. In addition, Ayala describes the themes common to both of the novels in this series: "[G]uardan una estrecha relación al centrarse en la descripción y análisis de las relaciones entre hombre y mujer, sin prescindir de la debida atención a la institución legal que por antonomasia las regula: el matrimonio" ("Introducción" 16).
- <sup>4</sup> In "Genesis" there are two versions of the story of Creation. This study will explicate the one found in the second and third chapters because "Cuento primitivo" references this version.
- <sup>5</sup> Joyce Tolliver has also suggested that this is the primary theme of "Cuento primitivo": "The thematic emphasis is on the origin of misogyny rather than of sin" (*Torn lace* 26).
- <sup>6</sup> As my discussion here shows, and Pagels also confirms, the early Christians interpreted the story of creation in various different ways over the centuries, even creating antithetical readings at times (xxii).
- <sup>7</sup> Eva Acosta asserts that important elements of Pardo Bazán's feminist ideology can be found in these two novels: "Con un intervalo de dos años, *Doña Milagros* y *Memorias de un solterón*, el llamado *Ciclo de Adán y Eva*, dan forma de ficción a sus inquietudes feministas a través de las hijas del apocado hidalgo Benicio Neira" (383).
- <sup>8</sup> In his discussion of original sin and its connection to the biological determinism of naturalism in the novels of the Adam and Eve series, David Goldin asserts: "Adam and Eve's fall from paradise becomes a governing metaphor for a dramatization of the theme of the force of instinctual sexual desire" (37).
- <sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Ordóñez seconds this assertion: "*Doña Milagros*, with its pairing and almost-pairings, affirms the power of sexual attraction and desire felt with equal fervor by woman and man [...]" (320).
- <sup>10</sup> Eva Acosta suggests that the character of Fe Neira is based on Pardo Bazán herself (383).
- <sup>11</sup> María de los Ángeles Ayala has argued that the development of Mauro's character throughout the novel is one of the text's best qualities: "[L]a evolución que sigue Mauro desde su posición inicial hasta el matrimonio con Fe es uno de los grandes aciertos de la escritora" ("Resonancias" 228).
- <sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Ordóñez convincingly argues that Mauro and Fe's relationship is based on that of John Stuart Mill and his wife Mrs. Harriet Taylor, a relationship that Pardo

Bazán highly praises in her introduction to the Spanish translation of Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Women*. She notes that Fe's character is very similar to Mill's description of his wife's intelligence and disparagement of anything she believes to be unfair or "tyrannical" (158-9).

- <sup>13</sup> Maryellen Bieder has noted that the nouns with which Mauro refers to Feíta highlight her independence and concomitant rejection of traditional female roles: "Despite the enthusiasm with which he sings her praises here, Mauro continues to refer to her throughout his memoirs as *la extravagante*, *la independiente*, *mujer indómita* and *ese talento macho*, so stressing the distance between Feíta and traditional female attributes, and revealing his own innate feelings towards her nonconformity" (98).
- <sup>14</sup> In her study that analyzes the feminist message hidden in the passive and active syntactic modes of this story, Joyce Tolliver notes the subtlety of the story's critique of the double moral standard: "[A] criticism of these restrictive values in this story is encoded linguistically in the narrator's discourse [...] At the same time, however, the story may be read as upholding the status quo, Pardo Bazán thus manages to expose the 'secret' of feminine sexuality without exposing herself to harsh moralistic criticism" ("Knowledge" 909).
- <sup>15</sup> See the essays "La mujer española" and "La educación del hombre y la mujer," found in *La mujer española*, for Pardo Bazán's discussion of women's status in Spanish society of this period.
- <sup>16</sup> The stories "La hierba milagrosa" (1892), "El tesoro" (1893), "Cuento soñado" (1894), "La inspiración" (1894) and "Sor Aparición" (1896) also make reference to the suppression and prohibition of female sexuality. It is worthy of note that the first four of these stories take place in Medieval times, a context sufficiently removed from nineteenth-century society that it allows for a more direct exploration of this otherwise taboo topic.

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