



## **Women and *Huevos*: Matters of Food, Religion, and Gender in Emilia Pardo Bazán's "Los huevos arrefalfados"**

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"Los huevos arrefalfados" (1890) forms part of a body of short stories on domestic violence published by Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921), yet it has received scant critical attention.<sup>1</sup> As Margot Versteeg observes, the author's short stories reflect a changing perspective on gender violence, evolving from more reserved to more outspoken in their condemnation of such treatment of women (137). The publication of "Huevos" in 1890 marks a point of inflection in this subset of Pardo Bazán's work; it portrays neither the strictly passive victim of earlier texts, nor the more fully independent female seen in later ones. Instead, "Huevos" offers a stereotypically gendered depiction of society that begins to integrate alternatives for the subjugated female character. This essay discusses this gendered portrait of society by examining the principal imagery in "Los huevos arrefalfados," which is culinary and religious. The cooking imagery in this story highlights customary models of masculinity and femininity by portraying the stratified positions of women and men, both in the kitchen and in society at large. The implicit parallel between food and sex serves to reinforce this stratification. On the other hand, the story presents a crafty reimagining of traditional Catholic gender paradigms through the evolving relationship of Martina, the female protagonist, with saintly authorities. By reproducing stereotypical roles for women and simultaneously introducing glimpses of female agency, Pardo Bazán exposes and denounces domestic violence and addresses the complicated roles of men and women who attempt to remedy this social ill.

Rural Galicia stands as the thematic, linguistic, and geographic backdrop, as Pardo Bazán's extradiegetic, third-person narrator recounts the afflictions of the industrious housewife Martina. Under the controlling hand of her husband Pedro, Martina is regularly beaten for menial reasons.<sup>2</sup> The turning point occurs when she is unable to make eggs in his chosen style of *arrefalfados*, a neologism coined by Pedro that illustrates the invented, and therefore impossible, manner of preparation. When Martina runs to the local tavern for help, the owner Roque offers to intercede, which highlights the essential, if still problematic, role of community in the cessation of domestic violence. In exchange for implied sexual favors, Roque helps Martina. He recruits a friend and, while costumed as saints Peter and Paul, the two perform an extreme "miraculous" intervention on

Pedro. Pardo Bazán substitutes the classical attributes of Peter and Paul, keys and a sword, respectively, for *trancas* with which the two men chasten Pedro blow by blow. They finally announce the real identity of “huevos arrefalfados”: “¡Pega tú, San Pedro!’ ‘¡Pega tú, San Pablo!’ ‘¡Estos son los huevos...!’ ‘¡Arrefalfadoos!’” (“Huevos” 18).

The limited extant critical commentary on the work has helped to situate the story among others by Pardo Bazán that center on gender violence. The earliest commentaries are brief, calling the story a “precioso cuento” (“Boletín bibliográfico” 555) and also a depiction of “the wretched existence of the humble” (Matulka 87). Carmen Servén, decades later, assesses “Huevos” as a tale of “la justicia poética y la broma” (5).<sup>3</sup> Servén’s reading, which notes the humor in an otherwise grave situation of abuse, can be feasibly linked to the saintly ruse that Martina and Roque concoct which proves Pedro far more credulous than he initially appears. In creating the possibility for readers’ amusement, Pardo Bazán is more strategically able to educate her audience on domestic violence without boring them or turning them away, a tactic studied at greater length by Erika Sutherland (10-11). While other short stories by Pardo Bazán addressing *maltrato* have also been considered comical, Versteeg successfully challenges this type of critical reading in her study of “Piña” (1883), a story whose simian protagonists reproduce very troubling gendered patterns of human behavior (141). Ángeles Quesada Novás offers perhaps the most thorough analysis of “Huevos,” describing the suspicious—or, rather, knowing—sarcasm of the narrator as part of a strategically veiled critique of misogynist thought processes (195-96).

As part of the broader feminist *cientística* of Pardo Bazán, “Huevos” challenges a one-dimensional characterization of women by showing a housewife who fulfills her roles while simultaneously drawing attention to the perceived normalcy of being beaten while doing so. Martina explains to Roque, with a dose of the narratorial sarcasm noted by Quesada Novás, “Que me reprendiese y me pegase cuando notaba faltas, andando...Pero tenérselo todo á voluntad, matarme á hacerle bien la comida y todos los menesteres, y ahora inventar eso de los huevos arrefalfados, que un rayo me parta si sé lo que son...” (12). Martina’s character suggests there may be something in between the two predominant models of women, as identified by María Elena Ojea Fernández, in Pardo Bazán’s oeuvre. According to Ojea Fernández, women in Pardo Bazán’s short stories either complacently accept traditional roles or defy them (175). Martina, however, both agrees to her wifely duties and, purportedly, even accepts a wallop for her mistakes, but draws the line at what she considers senseless abuse. “Huevos,” then, cannot be read as the fatalist tale of Antonia in Pardo Bazán’s “El indulto” (1883), which centers on a female protagonist who mysteriously dies shortly after her husband receives a pardon for his prison sentence, or of Ildara in “Las medias rojas” (1888), whose dreams of moving to America come to a brutal end after her father beats her for perceived indecency. Nor is “Huevos” the representation of full “agency and autonomy” that Versteeg notes of Dolores in “Casi artista” (1908), which tells the story of a woman who manages to earn her own living and accidentally kills her intractable husband. Instead, “Huevos” depicts a female protagonist and victim of domestic violence who exists between the extremes of inaction and agency. Martina will advocate aloud for more humane treatment and express her disgruntlement in the face of abuse, chiefly by fashioning herself into a mediator of divine retribution, promoting change in her situation through her

relationship with the saints. However, she will also find herself subservient to another man, Roque, in a context only slightly better, if at all, than her starting place, which reflects a still nagging reluctance on the author's part to allow for an autonomous female character to break through in this (fictional) world.

In order to demonstrate this story's tensions between passivity and autonomy, this article proposes food and religion as axes of analysis because of their historical association with the feminine and their ability to mirror social norms.<sup>4</sup> As a story fundamentally about appetite and the gendered culture that surrounds it, "Huevos" is well suited to the sociological lens of food culture proposed by Carole Counihan. Counihan's research in the last decades has demonstrated that, by examining "foodways"—attitudes and actions related to diverse facets of food from creation to consumption—one reveals matters of power, sex, and gender in society (6). Counihan makes plain that eating and intercourse, as two processes centered on the crossing of bodily boundaries, share symbolic weight. Likewise, both food and copulation can act as a metaphorical stand-in for the other (9). Pardo Bazán also understands cooking to be a symbolic act, an ethnographic document of the nation (Ingram, "Popular Tradition" 264-65). Ingram summarizes that, for Pardo Bazán, "cooking and cuisine reveal things about a people not observable or quantifiable through scientific research" (*Spain on the Table* 43). Pardo Bazán, then, acknowledges *la cocina* as a site where norms of nation, society, and gender manifest.

As this essay will demonstrate, the plural symbolism of food and cooking in "Huevos" paints distinctive portraits of men and women in terms of their relative autonomy. Cooking showcases Martina's identity as a housewife, her efforts and abilities, and also her continued subjectivity and sexual servility. For Roque, the male "chef" in the story, cooking will reveal his authority and control, as well as his capacity to manipulate Martina, calling into question the "goodness" of the community he purportedly represents. As an employee of a local tavern, his work also brings him into contact with the public. By contrast, Martina's dutiful food preparation is unremunerated and relegated to the space of the home. Gendered norms permeate the culinary and sexual relationships between the characters of "Huevos," reflecting an uncompromising patriarchal organization of society.

Martina's relationship with food production and other domestic responsibilities shows her position as an "enslaved" housewife, similar to Antonia and Ildara, protagonists of "El indulto" and "Las medias rojas," respectively.<sup>5</sup> Although the male protagonists, Pedro and Roque, both have public, labeled professions—*carretero* and *tabernero*—the narrator provides little information about their daily labors. In contrast, Martina's long list of domestic chores is described in great detail, repeating her name to emphasize her many responsibilities in the household economy and to individualize her universal story: "Martina criaba los chiquillos, los atendía, los zagaleaba; Martina daba de comer al ganado; Martina hacía el caldo, lavaba en el río, cortaba el tojo, hilaba el cerro, era una esclava, una negra de Angola...y con todo eso, ni un solo día del año le faltaba en aquella casa á San Benito de Palermo su vela encendida" ("Huevos" 6).<sup>6</sup> This rich portrayal of her daily life and duties as a poor, rural, Catholic housewife draws attention to the irreplaceable role of an overworked and overlooked woman who is a veritable slave, thus underscoring the bondage of the woman in the home.

Pardo Bazán employs a second image traditionally associated with women in the home: the wife as beast of burden. Subsequently, Pardo Bazán magnifies the effect of this image by making Martina subject to *palizas* and *varazos* when she fails to comply with her husband's demands. Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr assert that the selection of meals by the male head of household is an important symbol of status and control as he subjects other family members to his wishes (226), an accurate reflection of Pedro's behavior in "Huevos." The most dramatic consequence for any supposed "non-performance" of the task assigned by the male head-of-household will be domestic abuse, as Rhian Ellis explains in her research on food in the violent home (165).<sup>7</sup> Nearly a century before Ellis's observations, Pardo Bazán's narrator records the same phenomenon: Pedro engineers guilt on behalf of his bewildered housewife when he demands she prepare the invented dish he calls "huevos arrefalfados." By employing a term that has no comprehensible linguistic significance (but a clear sexual connotation), his obscure language will frustrate his wife's compliance and, thus, becomes yet another way to assert his power over her. He first reproaches his wife for her failure to cook his eggs properly and then he attacks her with firm blows that strike progressively lower on her body, seeking to diminish her ability to stand up to him: "¡Condención del infierno! ¿No tengo dicho que los quiero arrefalfados?" A esta frase siguió un recio varazo en las espaldas de Martina, seguido de otro que se quedó un poco más cerca del suelo" ("Huevos" 11). Straightforward descriptions of inhumane treatment preclude the reader's ability to deny or to ignore the clear portrayal of unjust violence. In order to connect this instance of abuse with Pedro's later whipping of his oxen team, the narrator notes that he uses "la misma vara" both times (17). The identity of the housewife in "Huevos" is thus characterized by a condition of animalistic servitude to a patriarchal authority, which extends from the kitchen to the rest of the home.

Martina's exacting performance of domestic labors demonstrates her almost paranoid attentiveness to the controlling demands of a man who has achieved absolute authority through physical and emotional abuse. Yet, her industry has no effect on Pedro's attitude towards her. The housewife's repeated efforts to satisfy the insatiable appetite of her husband are useless; the narrator explains that she will be beaten regardless: "Procuraba no incurrir en el menor descuido; era activa, solícita, afectuosa, incansable, la mujer más cabal de toda la aldea. No obstante, Pedro había de encontrar siempre camino para el vapuleo" (6-7). Despite the lamentable physical condition caused by such abuse, Martina possesses diverse intellectual skills which she applies towards pleasing her husband: "[...C]omo también las costillas doloridas y brumadas infunden sutileza, Martina, á fuerza de paciente estudio, de hábil observación, de minuciosa solicitud y de eficaz memoria, llegó á amoldarse á los menores caprichos, á las más ridículas exigencias de su cónyuge, que el tío Pedro no acertaba ya á buscar salida para enfadarse" (8-9). Martina's ability to perceive, to remember, and to adapt to Pedro's ridiculous demands demonstrates that she far surpasses the performance of a more "mediocre" housewife and positions her as a woman cognizant enough to identify the injustice of her situation. Because contemporary society at large lacks the vision to see women outside of the kitchen, as Pardo Bazán notes in the prologue to one of her cookbooks, one way to demonstrate the ability of women to think and to act is to position these skills as restricted to the culinary realm where they are still "safely" confined by their circumstances and subject to male impositions.<sup>8</sup>

As part of Martina's studious efforts to improve her service to her husband, the narrator notes Martina's creation of a new "apetitoso guiso" for Pedro's eggs ("Huevos" 10). This stew is one example of the rich mine of double entendres surrounding the preparation of "huevos" in the story, alluding both to a meal and to a pleasing new sexual favor. As Counihan affirms, symbols of food and sex often collide and overlap because they respond to similar instinctive behaviors (9). The coded language in "Huevos" signals Martina's ongoing subjectivity and sexual servility, seen also in the narrator's description of the couple's daily dinner: "Consistía generalmente la cena de los esposos en una taza de caldo guardado de mediodía, y unos huevos fresquitos, postura de las gallinas de corral. Deseosa de complacer al amo y señor, Martina se esmeraba en variar el aderezo de estos huevos, presentándolos unas veces fritos, escalfados otras, ya pasados, ya en tortilla" (9).

On the surface, one observes a devoted housewife who prepares dinner differently each day. When eggs are considered as male genitals, however, the reader finds a housewife who exerts herself to *complacer*: bring pleasure to her husband in different manners.<sup>9</sup> By juxtaposing "huevos fresquitos" and "postura de las gallinas," Pardo Bazán positions a more vulgar term alongside a more "ladylike" one, a concept that Mariano Barreto satirizes in his 1904 story "Lectura para hombres" in which a young woman washes her mouth out and confesses for accidentally uttering "huevos" instead of "postura de gallina" (112). Furthermore, Camilo José Cela explains how "huevos fresquitos" suggests a robust and youthful sexual act (545).<sup>10</sup> Understanding "huevos" as something more than just a kitchen dish in this story reveals that Pedro's demand for "huevos arrefalfados" can be read as a demand for a novel sexual service that his wife is unable to provide because of her aforementioned incomprehension of the term. Martina's obligatory, daily preparation of Pedro's eggs points to her total subjection to her husband's appetite for food, or sex.<sup>11</sup> Continuing along this evocative line, his desire for the "indefinable" sex act may suggest some kind of perversion, or at the very least, a kind of congress deemed socially or morally decrepit or "unmentionable." This could be linked, then, to Pardo Bazán's critique of gendered forms of subjugation.

Surprisingly, even the man positioned as Martina's rescuer, Roque, will keep her held sway to his fancies, muddling any impression that the reader may have of him as a benevolent neighbor. Initially, the narrator draws Roque as a foil to Pedro, characterizing the tavern owner as an "hombre viudo, de tan benigno carácter como agrio y desapacible era el de Pedro" ("Huevos" 7). It soon becomes clear, though, that this is an unreliable description of Roque. In contrast to true saints, the biographies of what appear to be great men get murkier and murkier the closer one looks, as Pardo Bazán explains in her hagiography *San Francisco de Asís* (144). Roque will be exposed as a manipulator who controls Martina according to his needs, not hers. The positive community intervention he espouses, then, is a tenuous one. The lithic names of Pedro and Roque further underscore the similarities between the two men who are both privileged to be members of the brotherhood of the liberalizing Spanish state. Thus, both men seem unlikely to change or to prioritize a woman's right to safety and equality in the home.

Similar to Pedro, Roque obliges Martina to fulfill his desires; in addition, he exploits her precarious position as a woman working to end her abuse. Roque's longing for Martina

has been apparent since the beginning of the story, when the narrator reveals how he favors Martina over his deceased wife: “¡Ah, si él hubiera tenido la fortuna de encontrar mujer así, y no su difunta, que gastaba un geniazo como un perro!” (“Huevos” 7). Later, the “encandilados ojos” (13) with which he gazes upon Martina the night she arrives desperate for help betray his continued attraction. Loosening her up with one *pinga* after another, he invites Martina to take shelter overnight and partake in his “castañas nuevas” (13), a term with a long-standing association with testicles.<sup>12</sup> Martina’s response to this invitation is particularly revealing: “Tan cansada, dolorida, asustada y hambrienta estaba [...] que se dejó convencer” (13). Utterly devoid of the vital energy that would be required to dissent, the desperate housewife seems to recognize that the only way out of her daily horrors is to submit yet again, and to allow another man to manipulatively “provide” for her through his offers of sex or food. At the same time, she uses the resources available to her—concretely, her mobility and her body—to help solve the larger problem of her mistreatment at home.

The dinner and chestnuts Roque offers Martina, unlike the dinners she had prepared for her husband, are subject to neither her desires nor her critiques. Instead, they serve to underscore the authority of men in the kitchen, who abide solely by their own rules. Mirroring the trends Marjorie DeVault observes in her research on men and women in the kitchen, Roque cooks free of “external standards” (149), preparing whatever pleases him without considering, in the way Martina does for Pedro, what his dining companion might like to eat. Furthermore, he clearly expects generous reward for his provisions of food and basic safety: “Que me muera si dentro de dos ó tres días no ha de estar aquel brutón más amoroso que la manteca. Ya me dará las gracias” (“Huevos” 13). As DeVault recognizes, “There are no terms within which men think of cooking as service for a woman” (162). Though Martina has prepared countless meals for Pedro with no thanks other than a cold *bofetada*, when Roque is in the kitchen, an entirely different set of cultural expectations accompanies him. The undefined *gracias* he expects of Martina again positions her as subject to male authority.<sup>13</sup>

The conclusion of “Huevos” emphasizes the unequal, gendered relationship between men and women and certain foodways. Upon pronouncing, over the beaten body of a defeated Pedro, “¡Esos son los huevos...!” ¡Arrefalfadoos!” (“Huevos” 18), the culinary capacities of Roque (and company) evolve from literal to symbolic. The “huevos arrefalfados,” which before had represented Pedro’s petty and aggressive control over his wife, come to signify his terrifying quasi-castration. According to Freud’s theory of the uncanny, the familiar becomes frightening when a symbol, once considered fantastic or unreal, gains reality and, thus, the “full function and significance of what it symbolizes” (150). As the narrator unravels the function and meaning of “los huevos arrefalfados,” it becomes clear that in more ways than one, the man responsible for wooing Pedro’s wife has corrupted his virility. Jennifer Smith emphasizes that violence against women in the time of Pardo Bazán demonstrates a socially sanctioned assertion of masculinity (703). Thus, in taking control over the perpetrator of this violence, as Roque does, he subsumes Pedro’s masculinity into his own. In sum, Roque’s metaphorical cooking of Pedro highlights his own growing authority in a continuation of male dominance that permeates the culinary imagery of “Huevos.”

After this exchange of power from cuckolded husband to crafty neighbor, one must ask how Martina's position will change. Given that divorce is hardly a feasible option for the nineteenth-century Spanish woman (Scanlon 137), it comes as no surprise that Martina ends up precisely where she started: living with her abuser and serving his meals. Like in "El indulto" or "Las medias rojas," the female protagonist's rebellion is not rewarded with freedom from household duties. However, one important change does take place, as the narrator affirms: "[...L]o único en que se le conoce que no pierde la memoria de la zurra es en que, cuando Martina le presenta cariñosamente el par de huevos de la cena, preguntándole si 'están a gusto...' él contesta aprisa y muy meloso: 'Bien están mujerina; de cualquier modo están bien'" ("Huevos" 19). The narrator describes Pedro's evolution in culinary terms: his abusive initial character is called "agrio" (7), while his milder, final temperament is referred to as "meloso" (19). Her husband is left notably sweeter after his symbolic castration. As an effect of Pedro's physical change, it appears Martina's constant victimization has also come to an end. Though she remains tethered to gendered household duties, Martina does achieve a middle-of-the-road improvement: her daily activities no longer result in *palizas* or *varazos*.

In contrast to the traditional depiction of foodways in "Huevos," this story inscribes new meaning in important symbols of the Catholic faith, the saints, and shows new possibilities for women in the religious realm. In this essay, saints are approached from a sociological perspective as icons of religious power. Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead explain that power can be seen as the ability to "bring about an *intended* effect" (emphasis in original 148). This type of power inheres in saints, according to Pardo Bazán. Saints achieve perfect alignment in thoughts and deeds, which underscores their authority and "tan poderoso dinamismo social" during their lives (*San Francisco* 144). When saints die and enter heaven, they become intercessors for the living due to their newfound proximity to divine power. Riis and Woodhead affirm that divine power can challenge earthly, perhaps even patriarchal, claims to authority and help its recipients surmount personal hardships (156), such as domestic violence in Martina's case. Although, as Tolliver explains, the efficacy of women's devotion to the Church and her saints often proves dubious for Pardo Bazán, and rarely seems to protect women from oppression (*Cigar Smoke* 16), if saints, as mediators of divine will, could be made to advocate for women, the Church would then be obliged to follow their holy precepts. Indeed, Fatima Mernissi affirms that when interpreted according to the needs and concerns of women, saints and sanctuaries serve to advance their cause (104). The "saints" in "Huevos," then, represent a way to advocate for social change while operating within Church teachings.

When Martina first beseeches the aid of the real Saints Peter and Paul, her prayers effect no lasting changes, as might be expected in a work of naturalist fiction. Later in the story, however, she becomes actively involved in the interpretation of the will of the costumed saints, as well as the crafty realization of their presence and the moderation of their vengeance on her husband. Her direct communication with these very terrestrial "saints" grants her access to their power and reflects her growing agency. Despite the fact that Martina and her "saints" achieve a positive outcome—concretely, the cessation of her abuse—the narrator also complicates the idea of the "holiness" of men and women by depicting saints who turn out to be clearly flawed and, occasionally, even brazen sinners. Considering Pardo Bazán's close relationship with the Church, patriarchal institution *par*

*excellence*, and her simultaneous forward-thinking advocacy for women in society, “Huevos” can be seen as an example of how this author tailors Catholicism to fit, in the words of Denise DuPont, her “brand of feminism” (21).

Martina’s first prayers to the saints serve to illustrate the status quo of a rural Catholic housewife. As part of her daily routine, which includes childcare and meal preparation, she offers prayers to San Benito de Palermo (“Huevos” 6), who reflects her position as a servant and preparer of meals. An African descendent, San Benito worked as a lay Franciscan cook after being freed from slavery (Pridgeon 116), suggesting that while Martina can pray for some reprieve, her responsibility to serve her family will never change. Prayers for acute needs also go unattended; during the abuse that proceeds her attempt at cooking “huevos arrefalfados,” the narrator notes the minimal effect of her exclamations to Saints Peter and Paul:

Algún efecto produjo en el carretero la invocación, porque conviene saber que en la parroquia se profesaba devoción ferviente á las imágenes de estos grandes Apóstoles, dos efigies muy antiguas que adornaban la iglesia desde tiempo inmemorial.<sup>14</sup> Pero poco duró el respeto religioso, pues el marido, volviendo á enarbolar la vara, alcanzó a su mujer de un varazo en la cintura, tan recio y cruel, que Martina hubo de echar á correr [...]. (“Huevos” 11)

The aged effigies, long-present in the church, suggest a certain frigid impotence: the fervent devotion of the town can do little to rouse the unresponsive, immobile saints. The pause in violence they bring about only postpones Martina’s beating: they offer a temporary salve, if any at all. While Martina prays to endure her situation, Pedro continues to act at will, rejecting the authority of the religious figures invoked.<sup>15</sup> In an editorial published by Pardo Bazán in the same year as “Huevos,” the author explains that while women are expected to be faithful Catholics, men share no such obligation to believe (“La mujer española” 110). As Scanlon details, it is women, not men, who learn reverent submission from their faith (160), which Pardo Bazán fully dramatizes in this episode.

In contrast to her first passive invocations of the saints’ power, after conspiring with Roque in the tavern, Martina begins to actively interpret the will of God and the words of “Saints” Peter and Paul. When Pedro demands to know where she has been the previous night, she answers stridently: “[...] Dios consuela a los en felices [sic] y castiga a los sayones rematados como tú; ya te llegará la tuya verdugo” (“Huevos” 14). She interprets the will of God as one that aims to tangibly improve the position of those suffering; he not only consoles the miserable, but also actively punishes perpetrators. When Pedro accuses her of conspiring with witches, Martina is quick to legitimize her actions by asserting that she has directly conferred with the saints—which, of course, in some sense she has, after spending the night with one man who will later “become” a saint.<sup>16</sup> Pedro begins by showing his doubt that his wife has indeed heard from God, and Martina responds:

“‘Mismamente Dios te vino á ti con el recadito.’

‘Dios, no; pero San Pedro y San Pablo, sí; que los vi tan claros como te estoy viendo, y con la mar de angelitos alrededor, y unas caras muy respetuosas, y unas barbas que metían devoción; y me dijeron que ya te ajustarán las cuentas por estarme crucificando.’” (15)

Although she has not received the words of God, Martina emphasizes her unfettered communication with Peter and Paul. Unlike Martina’s first and ineffectual one-way prayers to these holy men, made in a desperate “voz de agonía” (11), the confident “tono y acento” (15) of this second appeal to the saints begins to undermine Pedro’s control over her. Cautiously, Pedro responds with strong words but no strong arm, “A callar y á tu obligación, lenguatera [sic]” (15). Pedro is ill-prepared to accept this changing of the guards, and subsequent loss of authority, and may also be intimidated. Though he demands that she go back to her submissive roles, it is too late, as Martina and Roque already have other plans. Martina’s departure from literal invocations of God’s mercy and her increasing participation in the symbolic interpretations of religion show important glimpses of her development as a more powerful woman in her growing ability to produce a desired effect (Riis and Woodhead 148). She seeks and helps bring about her own solution because she understands the limited efficacy of prayers alone.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, religion in “Huevos,” unlike its foodways, will begin to disrupt traditional gender roles and reveal new possibilities in a realm long considered constraining to women, that of religious belief.

After her interpretation of the will of God and the saints, Martina cunningly works to convert the planned apparition of Saints Peter and Paul into reality. On the night of the holy retribution, Martina’s role again illustrates her growing agency in the religious domain. The narrator emphasizes that she assists Roque and his accomplice: “Ya se habían disfrazado los dos cómplices, riendo a carcajadas y auxiliados por Martina, que ajustó al uno las barbas largas y el manto rojo de San Pablo, y al otro la sábana y el pelucón del primer pontífice” (“Huevos” 16). Martina’s role in the costuming of the saints suggests that she not only understands what is behind the mask of religion, but also that she is now participating in the artifice, in the symbolic realm. Her devotion to Saints Peter and Paul—the ones to whom she had once cried out as Pedro beat her—no longer takes the form of passive pleas; rather, she works to bring about a living version of these same saints. Riis and Woodhead explain that symbols, like those of the saints, “represent a form of power and inspiration that transcends the limitations of human power” (155). Following this logic, it appears that by participating in the realization of these new religious symbols, Martina also establishes a new way to connect with divine power. Importantly, this power is no longer mediated by a patriarchal Church hierarchy, but directly accessible to women. Only a year before this story is published, Pardo Bazán herself uses a theatricalized version of another saint, Teresa, to promote the feminist cause in an entirely different context: the admittance of women to the *Real Academia* (DuPont 102). In both of these cases, Pardo Bazán, a devoted and lifelong Catholic, employs the undeniably holy figures of the saints as a way to debilitate patriarchal hierarchies in the domestic, social, and religious realm.

In addition to upending existing gender-based power structures, Martina is also able to limit the autonomy of the “saints.” When Roque and his companion are hiding near the bridge where they plan to attack Pedro, Martina steps in to direct their vengeance: “Martina tuvo un escrúpulo, y les dijo con suplicante voz: ‘No me manquéis á mi hombre, que al fin él es quien gana el pan de los rapaces. Escarmentailo [sic] un poco, para que sepa cómo duele” (“Huevos” 16-17). The will of Martina now influences these terrestrial saints, like the will of God influences the heavenly ones. Like a god who is both benevolent and just, Martina desires a modicum of mercy for her husband, but she also bids that he understand how she has felt. Under her guiding hand, “Saints” Peter and Paul will carry out Pedro’s punishment. Martina’s increasing involvement with the symbols of her faith along with her voicing of a divine will that promotes the well-being of women show a valuable alternative to the suffering petitioner seen elsewhere. She has worked to bring about her own civic miracle. After his beating, Pedro does not end up dead, like the husband in “Casi artista,” yet neither will he be granted total clemency, like the husband in “El Indulto.” Instead, with “las costillas medio hundidas, la cabeza partida por dos sitios, la cara monstruosa” (18), he hobbles with new humility and respect for Martina’s access to divine power and, as previously mentioned, becomes more *meloso*.

There remains an important addendum to be made with regard to Martina’s newfound access to “divine” power and Roque’s “saintly” actions: both are based on illusion, not reality. Religious tradition is depicted as valuable and effective insofar as one can appropriate its heavenly symbols to achieve earthly change. The figure of the saint, as the holy middleman between heaven and earth, emerges as an ideal intercessor. Yet, the saints of “Huevos” are neither redeemed nor holy, but rather are everyday sinners in disguise. Martina, despite her initial depiction as a housewife who is a virtual saint and nearly a martyr, is also a woman who regularly colludes with, and at least once sleeps with, a man who is not her husband.<sup>18</sup> The text evidences their close, if still unequal, relationship from the beginning of the story: “Solía Martina desahogar las cuitas y las penas domésticas con su compadre el tabernero Roque” (7). As previously mentioned, the narrator implies she exchanges sex for his help and, despite the trying circumstances, this can be read as a serious betrayal of her husband. Thus, while perhaps symbolically saintly or even divine in some senses, Martina is hardly irreproachable. For his part, Roque essentially obliges Martina to commit this adultery. He is far from Pardo Bazán’s definition of an authentic saint who naturally displays “perfecta armonía entre sus pensamientos y sus obras” (*San Francisco* 144). Rather, he suffers from what the author calls the “moralidad dudosa” and “móviles mezquinos” of ordinary men (144). “Saints” Peter and Paul in this short story are, of course, no saints at all, and Martina, no real God (or saint), but rather everyday villagers who share the “vicios y delitos” of those Pardo Bazán refers to as “grandes hombres” (144). While real saints would certainly maintain more harmony between their thoughts and actions and, consequently, more power to cause a desired effect, “Huevos” seems to suggest that one does not have to be a saint to make a significant change in a situation of injustice, nor does one have to be perfectly holy to deserve it. Women, especially, need not aspire to exacting standards, moral or otherwise, to be deemed worthy of basic rights. Despite the flaws of its protagonists, this short story advocates for solutions to the problem of unequal and violent treatment of women at home.

Though Martina is denied access to authority in the kitchen, she does gain an important position as an interpreter of the will of God, as expressed through the voices and the deeds of the saints. The undeniable role of Catholic rituals in the story accentuates and complicates the gendered spheres it portrays. Traditional mores, such as the belief in God the Father as guardian and the saints as intercessors, are reinterpreted as the true guardians emerge from saintly simulacra. At the same time, the behavior of these guardians offers little in the way of exemplary morality and even resembles traits of the questionable middleman of “Las medias rojas.” While “Huevos” works to create a space for a female protagonist who can work through and around a patriarchal system, ultimately it becomes clear that full female agency comes when the protagonist builds the strength to find her own solutions—as seen in works published in Spain in the following decades, such as Pardo Bazán’s “Casi artista” (1908) or Caterina Albert i Paradís’s “Pas de comèdia” (1930)—instead of relying on male intercessors with dubious motives.

“Los huevos arrefalfados” presents a housewife on the cusp of revolution and, until now, this story has been missing from critical discussions of domestic violence in Pardo Bazán’s oeuvre. The author’s culinary discourse points to much more than the materiality of foodstuffs. As Lara Anderson observes, it is also an anthropological and historical window into the rapidly modernizing Spanish nation (97-98), a nation whose rural communities (among others) continue to be held back by uncultured, brutish treatment of women. “Huevos” presents and problematizes two areas thought of as “women’s space” and, in doing so, asks the reader to interpret unexpected paths and barriers to female autonomy in the kitchen, the church, and society at large. Neither light nor insignificant, this story portrays a strategic, if disguised, break in traditional gendered behaviors so ingrained in the *finisecular*, patriarchal Spanish nation.<sup>19</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Margot Versteeg cites an ample list of Pardo Bazán's short stories dealing with domestic violence, such as "Las medias rojas" (151 n3), and analyzes five others: "El indulto," "Piña," "El revólver," "Sin pasión," and "Casi artista." Related to Pardo Bazán's non-fiction work, Jennifer Smith includes a telling excerpt from a 1907 journal article that also denounces spousal abuse (698).
- <sup>2</sup> This behavior recalls that of Rivas in "Sin Pasión" (Versteeg 146).
- <sup>3</sup> Research from María del Carmen Hernández Valcárcel (325 n410) and Máxime Chevalier (169) insightfully demonstrates another aspect of "Huevos": namely, how the work performs a calculated revisioning of Galician-Portuguese and sixteenth-century Spanish folklore.
- <sup>4</sup> Discussing *Los pazos de Ulloa*, Joyce Tolliver underscores "the chapel and the kitchen" as spaces where women have long sought shelter ("Relics" 181).
- <sup>5</sup> See Versteeg for an analysis of Antonia as household slave (140).
- <sup>6</sup> Martina's story, though certainly not "universal" for all women in Spain in the late nineteenth century, faithfully represents the daily labors of rural farmwomen in Galicia whose toils remain largely anonymous in history. See also: Pardo Bazán's "La gallega."
- <sup>7</sup> In *Pazos de Ulloa* (1886), for instance, a late meal is a partial pretense for don Pedro's violence towards Sabel (Sutherland 180).
- <sup>8</sup> In *La cocina española antigua*, Pardo Bazán admits: "la opinión sigue relegando á la mujer a las faenas caseras" (ii).
- <sup>9</sup> *Complacer*, according to the 1884 edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana por la Real Academia Española*, is "acceder uno á lo que otro desea y puede serle útil o agradable" ("Complacer").
- <sup>10</sup> Cela references Quevedo's "Capón que quiere agradar damas" to illustrate the contrast between "los huevos hueros" from "los amantes pasos," while those eggs that are "frescos y llenos" belong to "los jóvenes pujantes" (545).
- <sup>11</sup> Sarah E. King insightfully notes that eggs become an apt "instrument of satire" and an erotic symbol in naturalistic texts (79). In another example from this story, the narrator explains Martina's regular consultations with Pedro regarding his preferences for the daily *guiso* (9), and her efforts to learn a new *estilo* from an "excocinera de un rico hacendado lugués" (10). Despite these efforts, this housewife fails to please her petulant husband. Instead, she remains under his thumb and subject to his fists.
- <sup>12</sup> Louise O. Vasvari illuminates the sexual symbolism in Juan Ruiz's "Cruz, Cruzada, Panadera" (ca. 1330), and highlights that *castañas*, among other fruits and nuts, connote testicles (308 n26).
- <sup>13</sup> This is not the only time a self-interested "middleman" appears in Pardo Bazán's short stories. Bonnie L. Gasior provides a compelling and historically-based reading of the role of the exploitative middleman in "Las medias rojas" (750-51).
- <sup>14</sup> Indeed in Lugo, there is a church dedicated to these saints, providing a recognizable setting for Galician readers.
- <sup>15</sup> Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead explain that failing "to feel what is expected in a particular ritual setting" can stem from an individual's unwillingness "to accept the authority of the [religious] community" (9).

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- <sup>16</sup> Witchcraft is one supernatural force traditionally associated with women. See: Riquer Fernández (341).
- <sup>17</sup> Tolliver reveals the inefficacy of religious invocations by women as part of a broader trend in the work of Pardo Bazán (*Cigar Smoke* 16) and also one that pervades other works written by women, such as *Solitud* by Caterina Albert i Paradís (“Relics” 179).
- <sup>18</sup> Ángeles Ezama Gil explains the link between *maltrato* and modern martyrdom (242).
- <sup>19</sup> The author would like to thank Irene Gómez-Castellano for her insightful feedback on this article.

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