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**Rewriting Symbolic Psychoneuroses: Carmen de Burgos's
*Quiero vivir mi vida***

Amy J. Bell
Texas Wesleyan University

In her 1931 novel *Quiero vivir mi vida*, Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932),¹ a prolific (if little-known) pioneer of Spanish feminism, uses contemporary scientific viewpoints on "intersexuality," a term employed by contemporary scientists such as Sigmund Freud and Spanish biologist Gregorio Marañón to denote homosexuality,² as a framework for her depiction of the protagonist Isabel's psychological descent from anxious newly wed bride to unfaithful wife and eventually to depressed, obsessed murderer. It is not surprising that Burgos would turn her attention to the theme of intersexuality, given that the author, a friend of Marañón's and an active participant in literary circles, was interested in the psychological currents of the day and was surely aware of the fin de siècle scientific and artistic obsession with figures who deviated from bourgeois norms.³ On the surface, Isabel's alleged intersexuality accounts for her often self-indulgent and increasingly irrational behavior. Elizabeth Starčević, however, has shown Isabel to be not a frivolous, neurotic wife plagued by intersexual impulses but a victim of a society that forces her to repress and reject certain elements of her personality for the simple reason that these elements have been arbitrarily defined as "masculine." Starčević convincingly attributes Isabel's apparent capriciousness, moodiness, vanity, coquetry, marital infidelity, nervous episodes, and even her murder of her husband to her unequal access to "todo lo que tiene el hombre—libertad, derechos, poder" (133).

I agree that Isabel's sense of powerlessness as a woman in a man's world—rather than any inclination toward homosexuality—is at the heart of her otherwise inexplicable behavior. I would further contend that, while Isabel's character certainly articulates the sense of subjection and repression with which many contemporary middle-to-upper class women were faced, her plight can be interpreted on yet another level; she can also be construed as a manifestation of Burgos's latent dissatisfaction with the prototypical heroines found in male-authored novels of Restoration Spain. Despite the fact that Burgos, according to Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, professed an inclination towards "la literatura macho" and a love for the works of nineteenth-century naturalistic authors such as Benito Pérez Galdós (191; emphasis in the original), it is evident that some of her male literary predecessors' treatment of their female protagonists negatively affected Burgos more than she might have acknowledged. In this essay I intend to illustrate the way Burgos addresses and explodes several male-authored stereotypes

of the nineteenth-century female protagonist, including the narcissist, the obsessed consumer, the sick woman, and the mad mystic—stereotypes that can be found among the pages of some of the most important novels of Restoration Spain—including Benito Pérez Galdós's *La desheredada* and Leopoldo Alas's *La Regenta*.

A brief synopsis of Isabel's life up until her unhappy marriage with Julio goes a long way toward explaining her inability to cope with and effectively remedy the "confusión y contradicción en su espíritu" (25). Having been brought up principally by her father, don Ricardo, who through this daughter had sought to replace his sons who had each died at only a few months of age, Isabel, unlike other girls her age, had learned how to hunt, fish, load weapons, and roll cigarettes. Don Ricardo had chosen "aquella educación varonil" (23) for his daughter in an attempt to "fortalecerla" (24). Despite having instilled "una especie de virilismo" (24) in his daughter, don Ricardo had worried that Isabel and her more domestically inclined sister Rosa would mature and "despert[ar] pasiones" (24) in men. Because of this fear, don Ricardo "trataba de prolongar su infancia" (24), often remarking that a daughter's love for another man is more insulting than a wife's infidelity. Despite don Ricardo's influence on his daughter's socialization, Isabel had also been inculcated by the women around her with a certain "astucia femenil" (49), which gave rise to a feeling that her only power as a woman resided in her virginity and in knowing how to exploit men's "deseo insatisfecho" (20). Now that Isabel has married and lost her "secreto íntimo" (20)—and with it all sense of authority—she feels compelled to manipulate her husband by alternately throwing tantrums and seeking "caricias que no le agrad[an]" (49). A number of factors, including her father's death, a move from the provinces to Madrid, her younger sister's marriage and subsequent motherhood, and her hasty marriage to Julio—more her mother's idea than her own—have exacerbated her sense of displacement and unease. Having had the "masculine" freedoms of her childhood revoked, Isabel now frequently laments the fact that she is a woman in a man's world, and often entertains thoughts of suicide.

Increasingly disheartened with her situation, Isabel searches for an outlet for her frustration. In the beginning, Isabel turns to the few socially acceptable escapes for an upper-class woman of the day: accumulating costly material objects, cultivating her beauty, and attending parties and other public events where she is able to showcase both her possessions and her appearance. Unfortunately, engaging in these pursuits contributes to the perception that she is relentlessly frivolous and vain. On more than one occasion Isabel is deemed a narcissist: "[T]enía un narcisismo exagerado, un ferviente culto a su belleza. Solo la inquietud de sus trajes y de sus adornos era capaz de sacarla de los estados depresivos" (107). In this way Isabel is not unlike a similarly named nineteenth-century female protago-

nist with whom Burgos was presumably familiar: Isidora Rufete, in Benito Pérez Galdós's 1881 novel *La desheredada*. Galdós presents Isidora as a beautiful woman who, in addition to being delusional, suffers from a voracious appetite for material possessions and often spends her money in a reckless manner. Isidora, like Burgos's Isabel, cannot resist stealing a glance at herself, whether in a mirror or in a shop window: "Isidora se detenía ante los escaparates para ver lo mucho y vario que en ellos hay siempre. También era motivo de sus detenciones el deseo oculto de mirarse en los cristales [. . .]" (62). As Galdós critic Michael Schnepf has explained, the author, through many characters in his novel, and in particular through Isidora, "presents a textbook case of narcissism" and "is consciously lecturing his readers on the ramifications of this particular problem" (232). Schnepf argues that Galdós, in an effort to convince Spaniards of the pitfalls of self-absorption, makes Isidora "[pay] dearly for her narcissistic behaviour; she stumbles into the Madrid streets and quickly disappears into whoredom" (237).

Burgos, however, apparently takes a more sympathetic view of her protagonist's dependence on material diversions and on mirrors. A closer examination of Isabel's "excesivo narcisismo" (63) reveals that her persistent concern with her appearance does not stem from an inflated ego but from the complete lack of one. A close scrutiny of the many instances in the novel when she looks into mirrors corroborates the impression that, far from being self-centered and vain, Isabel in fact lacks a strongly defined sense of self. Her poorly defined self-image results, for the most part, from having learned to exalt and exploit her beauty as an inadequate compensation for the "masculine" instincts she has been obliged to repress, in particular her desire for autonomy. Isabel's reflection does not empower her or impart any real self-satisfaction or self-knowledge to her, as is sometimes implied in the numerous passages that describe her gazing into a mirror, but only allows her a glimpse of which representation of Woman she embodies for a given onlooker at a given moment. Considering the negative stereotypes of women with which Isabel had been consistently bombarded throughout her childhood, it is not surprising that, when Isabel looks in the mirror, she does not see an independent, self-assured adult but a reflection of what others want or perceive her to be. In this way Isabel can again be likened to Galdós's Isidora and to many other nineteenth-century female protagonists, who exist, as Jo Labanyi has stated, "only as an unstable signifier 'woman,' whose meaning is different for different people, and can never coincide with any inner sense of self, ever lacking" (91).

The first instance of Isabel consulting a mirror occurs on her honeymoon: "Se había mirado muchas veces al espejo con miedo de haber perdido toda su hermosura al convertirse de doncella en dueña" (33). Clearly, this passage underscores Isabel's fear that she has been rendered worthless by losing her virginity. In addition, these first of Isabel's many glances in the

mirror establish a pattern throughout the novel of her difficult search for self in a world that repeatedly defines her in relation to her social status: daughter, wife, scientific puzzle, love-object, savior, hysteric.

On the second occasion upon which Isabel contemplates her image in a mirror, it is not herself that she sees at all. Rather, “el espejo le enfrentó la silueta de su marido” (42). Significantly, Isabel has only moments before been musing about how much her life has changed since her marriage. Displeased by the thought of having lost her identity, her face contorts into “un gesto de disgusto” (42), and she hurriedly throws away the knotted handkerchief that she had been grasping. It is then that she turns to the mirror, presumably seeking to reassure herself that, despite the changes she has undergone, she is still the same person as before. When she sees Julio instead of herself, it seems that the looking glass confirms that Isabel’s former self has been invaded and overtaken by her husband. Additionally, the fact that the mirror confronts her not with a clear image of Julio but with his “silueta” suggests that, since becoming a wife, Isabel literally and figuratively lives in her husband’s shadow.

The third instance of Isabel studying her reflection deals more directly with the issue of her supposed vanity. In the scene that precedes Isabel’s glance in the mirror, she is attempting to convince her husband to abandon his duties at the bank in order to spend the day with her in Toledo. Although Julio initially resists the idea of missing work, Isabel finally manages to charm him into accepting her proposal. When Julio pulls her towards him, anticipating a kiss as a reward, “Isabel sonrió satisfecha en su amor propio, y, en vez de devolver el beso a su marido, sus ojos buscaron el espejo, como para convencerse de la razón de su triunfo. Quedó satisfecha de su examen” (50). This “triumph,” however, is not one that can be claimed in the name of self-esteem. Both Isabel and the reader know that she would rather not spend the day with her husband. The choice of the word “razón” is particularly indicative of Isabel’s mental state and can be construed in two ways, both of which contradict the notion that Isabel derives any true and enduring sense of satisfaction from looking in the mirror. On the one hand Isabel could be examining herself in the mirror to see what it is about her that finally causes Julio to concede to her wishes (i.e., the reason for her triumph). In this case, the mirror shows her that Julio has agreed to accompany her because he sees her for what she is pretending to be: “una mujer enamorada y sensual” (49). On the other hand the use of the word “razón” also implies that Isabel is consulting the mirror in an effort to convince herself that her “triumph” is justified (i.e., that having persuaded Julio to spend time with her was the right thing to do). Her justification for convincing Julio to spend the day with her is not that she yearns to be close to him but that she believes that “su interés estaba en mantener viva la pasión de Julio” (49). Either way, when analyzed carefully, the thoughts

that accompany Isabel's glance in the mirror reveal that her apparent vanity and capriciousness mask the fact that Isabel is a woman who, instead of knowing herself, knows only what others—in particular men—see in her and expect of her.

Another example of Isabel's habit of defining herself according to men's perceptions of her occurs after she meets Enrique, the adolescent from the provinces with whom she will have an affair. Noting Enrique's obvious attraction to her, Isabel "se miró en el espejito que lucía al lado del búcaro y sonrió, aprobando su belleza. Comprendía la impresión profunda que había causado a Enrique" (114). Despite the fact that Isabel takes some pleasure in being beautiful, she clearly seeks out the mirror in an effort to discover Enrique's perception of her. Again, the reader is left with the impression that Isabel observes her image not because she is self-absorbed but because, like her beholder, she sees herself as an object.

The more passages we read that involve Isabel and mirrors, the clearer this pattern of her attempt to identify and validate herself through the eyes of her onlookers becomes. When Julio is searching for Isabel before a party they are hosting, he finds her exasperated "en su tocador, frente al espejo" (81), where she has been for over an hour trying on dresses, coiffing and recoiffing her hair, and changing shoes. By the time Julio appears, Isabel breaks into tears at the slightest provocation. Obviously her time in front of the mirror, rather than having served to strengthen her self-esteem, has damaged it. Alone with the looking glass and unable to construct a satisfactory self-image, Isabel becomes a prisoner of what Gilbert and Gubar call "the distorting mirrors of patriarchy" (*Madwoman* 284). For Isabel, as for the Victorian women the two critics describe, the mirror is a symbol of enclosure or imprisonment, a cell that leads to women's inner fragmentation. "To be caught and trapped in a mirror," say the authors, "is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self" (37). Once again, Isabel's "vanity" is brought into question and replaced with the notion that she relies on mirrors not to admire and fortify her self, but to make her reflection conform to the image of woman that others—the partygoers, her husband, Enrique—expect.

The only occasion upon which Isabel looks into a mirror and does have a true moment of self-recognition and knowledge occurs after a terrifying dream in which she witnesses a drama that she interprets as "ibseniano" (201). Isabel describes the actor in the drama as both "el espejo de las almas" and "el espejo de la Humanidad" (201). For Isabel the actor's voice represents "el eco del dolor de todos los corazones heridos por la traición" (201). When the actor begins to have a terrible seizure, Isabel sees a woman whom she identifies as "la Muerte" (202). This woman tells Isabel that she should be able to relate to the actor's suffering: "¿Ves? Ese hombre expresa lo que les pasa a todos. Lo que te pasa a ti. ¿No te han engañado?"

¿No te han traicionado? ¿No te han hecho pedazos? Reconoce tu propia historia" (202). The reader realizes that Death's admonitory and somewhat cryptic discourse refers to the deceit perpetrated on Isabel by her husband Julio, who is having an affair with a young woman named Matilde. This dream can also be interpreted on a deeper level, especially considering Isabel's tendency to look in mirrors without really looking at herself. Symbolically, Death and the actor who serves as the "mirror of the souls" in the "Ibsenesque" drama intervene in Isabel's denial and advise her to become more self-aware, to see the real Isabel and not merely the beautiful object that her onlookers see. While this move might initially be painful, it could eventually lead (as in the case of Ibsen's *Nora*), to her liberation. In effect, when Julio turns on the light, Isabel has her first opportunity to examine herself in the mirror, not as a thing of beauty but as the woman she is, a woman tormented by depression and dissatisfaction with the limits that her gender impose. Evidently, she does not like what she sees. When she is faced with her pallor and with "su semblante alterado, sus ojos desorbitados" she implores, "Ese espejo [. . .], hay que quitar ese espejo" (202).

From this distressing moment of self-recognition up to the point when she receives confirmation of Julio's infidelity, Isabel steadily retreats into the safety of religious obsession, sickness, and madness, and, rather than seeking out mirrors, opts to neglect her appearance completely. Isabel's reaction after her jolting postdream encounter with the mirror is not dissimilar to Isidora's in Galdós's *La desheredada* after her face has been cut and she has been sent to prison. As Schnepf reminds us, after this assault on her "narcissistic shell," which includes having lost her beauty and her dream of assuming her place of nobility in the Aransis family, Isidora sinks into a severe depression and desires complete anonymity (236-37). One may accept Schnepf's assertion that Galdós uses Isidora's relentless obsession with mirrors, her disturbing moment of disillusionment and self-recognition, and her subsequent desire for self-annihilation to warn his countrymen, whom he saw as narcissistic, to "somehow overcome their egotism, affectation, and personal capriciousness" (238); yet the parallel trajectory of Burgos's strikingly similar protagonist suggests an entirely different interpretation of the issue of narcissism in her case. As we have seen, Isabel's fixation on her image does not stem from any inflated sense of self-love or preoccupation with her own individualism. On the contrary, Isabel studies her image in an attempt to define herself through the expectations of others.

If Isabel's self-esteem and mental stability are, at best, fragile before her affair with Enrique, the adolescent with whom she attempts to distract herself from her marital dissatisfaction and from her unfulfilling life, the young man's suicide will drive her to the brink of insanity. Isabel's guilt, coupled with her mother's and sister's urging her to become a more devoted Catholic, triggers a "manía religiosa" (213) that drives her to shun the

secular pleasures that had once kept her from sliding into depression. Ridden by an ineluctable feeling of culpability, she replaces her former "triumfos femeninos, su hermosura, su lujo, sus coqueterías" (194) with an unprecedented religious fervor. After turning to religion, she rarely leaves the house, unless she is going to Mass, to confession, or to a church benefit. Even her room at home "se había convertido en una especie de capilla, llena de cuadros con imágenes de santos" (209).

In fact it seems that one of the most damaging influences on Isabel's psyche, particularly in the latter part of the work, is the Catholic Church. From approximately halfway through the novel, Isabel falls victim to a religious passion that in many ways is similar to that of the protagonist of Leopoldo Alas's 1884 novel *La Regenta*. Alas's novel recounts the story of Ana Ozores, an aristocratic woman married to the absent-minded and asexual Víctor Quintanar. Crushed by the boredom and sexual repression she suffers in her native Vetusta, Ana turns to mysticism as a substitute for sexual passion. She incessantly visits her confessor, reads books about the lives of saints, and becomes obsessed with emulating Saint Teresa of Avila. As her passion deepens, her behavior becomes more and more fanatical; she goes as far as practicing self-flagellation. Soon Ana begins to experience black-outs and deliriums, eventually falling sick and becoming bedridden for long periods of time. Partly because he realizes that his wife's increasing religious ardor makes her susceptible to bouts of sickness and hysteria and perhaps partly because of Ana's pledge to her confessor to embark on the project of "convertirle poco a poco y hacerle leer libros santos en vez de patrañas de comedias" (458), Ana's husband insists that she limit her exposure not only to mystical literature and to her confessor but to all things religious.

The essence and consequences of Isabel's religious compulsion are not unlike Ana's. In the throes of this religious zeal, Isabel lives by the commands of her confessor, no matter how distasteful she finds them. One of her most important missions, according to her priest, is that of saving her husband's soul, a task that includes persuading Julio to read Catholic magazines instead of his "libros poco edificantes" (192). Isabel is also instructed to make certain that Julio "le acompañe al templo y viva de acuerdo con los mandamientos de nuestra Santa Madre Iglesia" (192). Perhaps the mandate she sees as the most unpleasant is that of performing the sexual duties expected of a wife. As the confessor reminds Isabel, she is "la responsable de los actos que por causa de su esquividad o su falta de celo cometa su esposo" (192). Julio, certain that Isabel's newly found "monomanía religiosa" (194) exacerbates her nervous episodes and depression, discourages her fervor. Once he learns that Isabel's priest often warns her that she is responsible for any extramarital relationships in which her husband might engage, Julio, nervous about his illicit relationship with Matilde, forbids his wife to confess altogether.

Eventually, however, Isabel receives confirmation of Julio's infidelity, and her religious passion and hysteria become inextricably intermingled. Outraged but powerless to lash out against her unfaithful husband, her first thoughts turn to suicide. These thoughts quickly vanish, however, as Isabel dreads "la condenación eternal, con la que la Iglesia amenaza al suicida" (237). Instead, Isabel turns to what she perceives as the only available way to deal with her ire and, at the same time, punish Julio: sickness. Isabel opts to become sick because infirmity is "la única forma de suicidio que podía darle tiempo de arrepentirse y de salvar su alma" (238). Not long after she makes her decision, Isabel achieves her goal of becoming sick by bathing herself in cold water and standing outside in the frigid night air. When she awakens from her twelve-day trance, a nun and her friend Berta at her bedside, she feels peaceful, enjoying the fever-induced sensation of "no [tener] cuerpo" (239). She begins to ask the nun questions about her vocation, and, listening to the woman's soothing voice, dreams of becoming a nun herself, thinking she has finally "encontrado la manera de no ser la mujer de Julio, sin tener que condenarse por eso" (243).

Clearly, the similarities between the course of Isabel's and Ana's mysticism are numerous. For one, both women use religion to escape an unsatisfactory reality and to avoid addressing disturbing personal issues. In Ana's case, her religious rapture enables her to suppress her unsatisfied sexual appetite. In Isabel's case, focusing on religion mitigates her guilt over Enrique's suicide and affords her some sense of control over her circumstances. In essence, Isabel's religious fixation enables her to stifle and redirect the rage she experiences but is not allowed to enact as a woman in a patriarchal society. It should be noted, however, that religious fervor only temporarily allows the two women to deny their true sentiments and instincts. Each novel ends in the collapse of its protagonist's resolve. Ana, ultimately incapable of repressing her sexuality, eventually yields to the dissolute Alvaro Mesías's seduction, and Isabel, unable to smother her anger any longer, finally kills Julio. Up until the inevitable breakdown of their unstable religious convictions, both women obey their confessor's orders, which include taking responsibility for their husband's souls as well as for their own. Both women attempt to persuade their husbands to accompany them to church and to read edifying books, and both men, as a result, forbid their wives to confess. In addition, both characters eventually harm themselves (Isabel's self-induced illness parallels Ana's self-flagellation), and each woman suffers prolonged sickness and episodes of hysteria that stem from their religious fervor and become virtually indistinguishable from it.

Perhaps the most remarkable similarity between the two characters is that each woman's religious zeal and ensuing hysteria become forces that possess them and rob them of themselves. Whether Ana is in the midst of

her periods of religious rapture or in the throes of her nervous attacks, she loses control of her body and her mind, becoming overtaken by an alien volition that fragments her sense of self: "Cerraba los ojos y dejaba de sentirse por fuera y por dentro; a veces se le escapaba la conciencia de su unidad, empezaba a verse repartida en mil" (Alas 407). For Ana, mystical rapture and hysterical attacks become virtually indistinguishable, both experiences having in common, as Jo Labanyi notes, "the sensation of self-annihilation" (37). There are a number of factors, including her repressed biological drives and an "original lack of ego boundaries," asserts Labanyi, "that leave Ana so vulnerable to the states of 'possession' represented by mysticism and hysteria" (41). Ana's submission to mysticism and mental and physical sickness might have made Burgos wonder, as Labanyi does, whether for Alas the states of hypnotic possession by rapture and neurasthenia represent "a loss of the female self; or whether the usurpation of self is precisely what constitutes femininity" (41).

Burgos grapples with this question through Isabel, whose hysteria and religious manias, like Ana's, gradually possess her and contribute to the destruction of her self. Ironically, it is Isabel—the eventual victim of her own mysticism and hysteria—who early in the novel establishes and scoffs at the connection between the two. When Julio asks her to see a doctor about her nerves, she refuses, complaining that the physician "saldría con la socorrida neurastenia; me recetaría tila o azahar, como si me mandara que rezase un padrenuestro" (43). It is not until well after Enrique's death, however, that the reader becomes aware that the association of mental illness with religion that Isabel makes early in the novel in fact foreshadows her gradual decline into fanaticism, madness, and loss of self. Initially uninterested in religion, it is not long after she redoubles her efforts at being more devout that "su carácter vehemente fue demasiado lejos, en lo que se le aparecía como un camino de perfección. *No era ya dueña de su voluntad*" (193; emphasis mine).

Isabel's confessor condones the idea of her relinquishing control of her will and her body to a male authority, whether to God or to her husband (Julio, unlike Ana's asexual and eccentric husband Víctor, fervently desires his wife). Consequently, despite her obvious resistance to the idea, Isabel's confessor constantly admonishes her to tend to Julio's sexual needs, an order that requires Isabel to surrender control of her body: "Tiene usted un marido y una obligación en el mundo, hija mía. Piense en la Epístola de San Pablo. *Su cuerpo no le pertenece*. Tiene usted que cumplir los fines del estado que eligió" (192; emphasis mine). The confessor's advice would seem to favor Julio; Julio, however, sees matters from a different perspective, fearing that Isabel's "estados depresivos eran más peligrosas desde que *la poseía la monomanía religiosa*" (194; emphasis mine), and he is vexed by the idea of his wife's religious fanaticism because he feels

that religion has usurped his rightful place as Isabel's possessor: "Ninguno de sus caprichos ni de las extravagancias lo habían separado de ella como aquella mania religiosa. Ahora se sentía como echado de su casa por aquel nuevo espíritu que *la poseía*. Estaba seguro de que hasta en sus momentos de mayor pasión Isabel cerraba los ojos a la realidad y le ofreció a Dios su sacrificio" (213-14; emphasis mine).

From a feminist standpoint, this passage is especially disturbing because it demonstrates that Isabel, simultaneously possessed on the religious as well as on the sexual level, has lost all control over her mind and body, and has become little more than a reluctant receptacle for male—whether spiritual or physical—influence. To a great extent, Isabel submits herself to the masculine domination represented by God's and Julio's respectively figurative and literal possessions of her, principally owing to her acute fear of condemnation to hell. Perhaps to an even greater degree than with Ana, whose "virtuousness," according to Noël Valis, "stems in part from fear [of divine punishment] and vacillating timidity" (50), Isabel's blind adherence to her confessor's commands springs from her terror of eternal damnation. Her visits to the confessional, instead of satisfying her need for forgiveness and comfort, only produce more guilt and anxiety in Isabel and increase her perception that the church represents more of a threat than a support system. She sees her priest's recommendation that she engage in sexual relations with Julio in order to keep him faithful to her (and, consequently, to save both of their souls) not as helpful advice but as coercion: "Aquella amenaza asustaba a Isabel. No encontraba en la Religión, tal como se le presentaba, el consuelo que buscó en ella" (193). Despite her ever-increasing religious devotion and her reluctant adherence to her confessor's instructions, Isabel "tenía miedo. Pensaba que el demonio se podía meter en su cuerpo y dominarla" (209). Significantly, it is evident that for Isabel there is little difference between God and the Devil, given that both act as violating forces that instill fear in her and that possess her, usurping her will.

As we have seen, Ana and Isabel, each dissatisfied with her realities, undergo a "possession" by the external forces alternately represented by hysteria, mysticism, and men. Considering the close similarities between the two women's circumstances and character evolution, it seems probable that Burgos modeled her protagonist on Alas's widely known main character. The final scenes of *Quiero vivir mi vida* heighten the impression that Isabel is Burgos's response to Ana Ozores. The concluding paragraphs of Burgos's novel recall those of Alas's famous work but reveal a completely distinct authorial intent. In the last scenes of *La Regenta*, Ana will withstand one further possession by an alien will. Celedonio, the effeminate and morally reprehensible acolyte, encounters Ana, who has fainted in the chapel, and feels a sudden "deseo miserable, una perversión de la perversión

de su lascivia" (700). Curious to determine if he would find kissing a woman to be pleasurable, he gives in to his latent heterosexual desire: "[I]nclinó el rostro asqueroso sobre el de la Regenta y le besó en los labios" (700). Noël Valis asserts that Celedonio's violation of la Regenta heralds the destruction of "any vestige of Ana Ozores's romantic, idealizing soul" (33). Celedonio's final, stolen kiss from Ana represents the culmination of the widespread moral degeneracy among Vetustan society, and with it Alas encapsulates the novel's intent: to brutally criticize "the profound pervasiveness of evil and decay in Spanish Restoration society" (Valis 24).

The conclusion of *Quiero vivir mi vida* bears undeniable similarities to the final scene of *La Regenta* and may be interpreted as Burgos's reinscription of Celedonio's kiss. In the last pages of the novel, Julio attempts to persuade the convalescent Isabel to forgive him for having engaged in a sexual relationship outside the bounds of matrimony. Isabel, in turn, wonders aloud if Julio would pardon her for the same offense. It seems that Isabel would gladly admit to her affair with Enrique if she could first be assured of Julio's forgiveness and of a clean slate between them. To her chagrin, however, Isabel does not receive the answer she seeks from Julio, who contends that marital infidelity for men and women "[n]o es igual" (245). Furthermore, Julio, in true Calderonian fashion, assures his wife not only that he would not forgive her for taking a lover but that, because he adored her, he would kill her for being unfaithful to him (248). During this conversation, Isabel becomes increasingly agitated; her eyes bulge and burn, her face contorts, and she begins to exclaim, "¡No soy Isabel! Isabel se murió! . . . ¡Se ha condenado! ¡La ha castigado Dios. . . por sus pecados y por los de su marido! . . . ¡Porque era mujer! . . . Es un asco ser mujer. . ." (248). When Julio attempts to embrace and calm her, Isabel suddenly seizes a pair of scissors from a nearby table. Now completely entranced, fully possessed by madness, "[d]ió un grito salvaje y clavó las tijeras en el pecho de su marido" (249). As Julio lies dying Isabel, "sin conciencia de lo que hacía" (249), approaches him. Like Celedonio, she plants a kiss on her unconscious victim: "[A]proximó sus labios a los labios del moribundo y le sorbió el último aliento en un beso largo, largo. . . aspirado, profundo. Quería apoderarse de su espíritu. . . beberse. . . hacerlo suyo, lograr su aspiración suprema. . ." (249). When Isabel finally removes her lips from Julio's, evidently believing that she has finally reached her ultimate goal, she shouts triumphantly, "¡Al fin le he robado su alma de hombre!" (249). With these words, the novel ends.

Even a cursory reading of this shocking final scene would seem to contradict the assessment that Gregorio Marañón, evidently oblivious to the resonances of *La Regenta*'s plot and conclusion in Burgos's work, makes of Isabel's maritidal impulse in his introduction to Burgos's novel. Marañón interprets Isabel's murder of her husband as he does that of the

typical jilted woman who kills her lover: "[N]o es ella, sino su componente viril el que lucha con el otro varón, para defender a su propia feminidad disminuía de la feminidad triunfante de 'la otra', de la amante" (11). A look at Isabel's murderous compulsion in the context of her unaddressed anger and frustration throughout the novel would suggest that Marañón grossly misinterprets Burgos's ending.⁴ Isabel does not stab Julio in order to defend her own belittled femininity from Matilde's triumphant maternity, as Marañón proposes, but because she can no longer control the repressed rage and dissatisfaction that she experiences as a woman in patriarchal fin de siècle Spain. Up until this final explosion of fury, Isabel has attempted to bury her discontent, finding temporary outlets in flaunting her beauty, in the pursuit of material objects, in a brief love affair, in religion, in sickness, and eventually, in hysteria. One cannot ignore the fact that in her experimentation with what Starčević deems the "válvulas de escape" (143) of narcissism, consumerism, marital infidelity, mysticism, infirmity, and psychoneurosis, Isabel's actions closely coincide with those of familiar male-authored female protagonists (concretely, with those of Galdós's Isidora Rufete and Alas's Ana Ozores). The fact that Isabel, no longer able to contain her resentment by means of the aforementioned "feminine" behaviors, ultimately stabs and kills her husband in a burst of wrath suggests that Burgos—whether or not she does so consciously—uses her main character to protest the literary and societal norms exemplified in the novels of her famous male precursors.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar recognize this phenomenon as a recurring pattern in the works of Victorian women authors. Gilbert and Gubar have observed that, by consistently creating women characters who fiercely rebel against existing patriarchal structures, even the most conservative Victorian women authors vent their own "covert authorial anger" (77). The fact that women authors often project these rebellious desires onto the characters of mad or monstrous women, according to Gilbert and Gubar, reflects their own self-division and their simultaneous desires to accept and reject patriarchal norms. This projection of anger and rebellion onto the character of the madwoman, insist Gilbert and Gubar, in some sense makes her

the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, much of the poetry and fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own sense of discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be. (78; emphasis in the original)

It is through the madwoman character's inevitable eruptions of violence, write Gilbert and Gubar, that "the female author enacts her own raging de-

sire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained" (85). In accordance with the theory of the two critics, then, when Isabel, the madwoman in Burgos's novel, finally succumbs to an eruption of violence and stabs her husband (notably with a pair of scissors, a household item most often associated with women's domesticity), Burgos is expressing her own frustration at common social and literary patriarchal structures regarding women.

Both Alas and Galdós meet the didactic purpose of depicting the moral degeneration in Restoration Spain by highlighting the many shortcomings of their characters and by tracing the ethical and social decline of their female protagonists. In realizing their moralistic intent, both authors inevitably sentence their female main characters to undesirable behaviors and consequences. Although Isabel exhibits many of the same manias displayed by Ana and Isidora (mysticism, hysteria, narcissism, and consumerism), her preoccupation with mirrors and material objects, as well as her later religious obsession and her mental and physical illness, should be seen neither as behaviors representing the social ills of Restoration Spain nor simply as frivolous or typically feminine kinds of conduct but as ill-fated defense mechanisms that gradually chip away at her individuality and eventually lead to the collapse of her sanity. Through Isabel's experience Burgos shows her own frustration with the loss of self that is imposed on women in men's literature, whether such a loss is represented by excessive consumerism, narcissism, hysteria, physical malady, or mysticism, and regardless of whether such a loss serves the purpose of the author's pedagogical moral intent, as it does in the works of Alas and Galdós considered in this article.

Notes

¹ For more information on Carmen de Burgos, see her "Auto-biografía." For critical studies on the work of Burgos, see the works by Maryellen Bieder, Nelly Clémessy, Judith Kirkpatrick, Concepción Núñez Rey, María Pilar Rodríguez, Elizabeth Starčević, and Michael Ugarte in the list of works cited.

² For a theory representative of fin de siècle psychoanalytical views on intersexuality, see Sigmund Freud's "The Sexual Aberrations" in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.

³ "Carmen de Burgos conoce," Marañón assures the reader in his prologue to *Quiero vivir mi vida*, "al pormenor todas estas orientaciones de la psicología de ahora" (10).

⁴ Starčević has also noted that Marañón's assessment of *Quiero vivir mi vida* as a "novela de celos" (133) is a mischaracterization of the work.

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