

## ABSTRACT

Abuse, Exposure, and Female Agency in the Short Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyze the short stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán. This nineteenth century Spanish writer uses narratives, historical retellings, fables, and other notable stylistic elements to expose the controversies surrounding women in the nineteenth century Spain. She confronts abuse, incest, the lack of female agency, problems with gender stereotypes and other inequalities women faced and continue to encounter today. Analyzing Pardo Bazán's short stories: "The Torn Lace," "The Red Stockings," "Memento," "First Love," "The Oldest Story," "Sister Apparition," "Piña" and "Revolver" reveals to readers the variety of styles Pardo Bazán employs, as well as her profound statement on the status of genders in Spain.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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EMILIA PARDO BAZAN

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Honors Program

By  
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Waco, Texas

May 2014

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Paul Larson for all of his support and wisdom. He has been not only a great thesis director, but also a great life mentor. I would also like to thank Dr. Frieda Blackwell for her extensive editing help, and Dr. Lenore Wright for her committee assistance.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Female Agency

“Spain is essentially a man’s land. Few are the women who have emerged from the quiet life of home and church into public positions. This is especially true in literature, where only two modern Spanish women, Concha Espina and the countess Emilia Pardo Bazán, are known outside Spain.”—Susan Walter

Female agency is a truly interesting phenomenon. While similar to autonomy, agency refers more to a social context and the rights allowed to individuals in the culture; autonomy refers to the rights exercised by people in general. Female agency, referring specifically to the female’s capacity to act physically in the world, has been an issue from the moment Eve took the fruit from the tree of knowledge. She was given the right to choose, and she exercised her agency as an independent person. Free will and female agency will continue to be an issue through Hillary Clinton’s second Presidential campaign, and female agency will continue to be a pressing issue regarding a woman’s right to choose in a pregnancy, the use of birth control, equal pay for equal work, domestic violence, the glass ceiling in business, gay marriage, and single mothers. One cannot forget all of the work done in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by suffragettes who bravely fought for the right to vote, which did not happen in the United States until 1920 when the nineteenth amendment was ratified. Agency in the twenty-first century is all about a woman’s ability to run her own life, make her decisions, and be in control of her own life. This thesis will discuss the earlier, less ambitious view of female agency in nineteenth century Spain, and how one writer, Emilia Pardo Bazán,

through the medium of the short story, openly in some cases and indirectly in others, advocated for the rights of women and denounced domestic violence and inequality in her native Spain.

Emilia Pardo Bazán, Spain's nineteenth century naturalistic writer, promotes the idea of female agency throughout her short stories, exposing the mental and physical abuse women experience. Her tales are timeless—unfortunately stories of abuse and violence appear in every century, country, and culture. Pardo Bazán understands and unveils the true nature of abuse by describing explicitly masculine violence in such stories as “The Red Stockings” in which a young woman's father physically brutalizes her so that she cannot emigrate from her native Galicia. Abuse happens to single women—but also to married women, to young girls, to elderly widows. Abuse is verbal, physical, and sexual. By examining the different types of short stories Emilia Pardo Bazán writes: narratives, historical accounts, and fables—and how she envisioned, described, and constructed—readers come to understand that obviously Pardo Bazán believes women should be in control of their own decisions. Emilia Pardo Bazán exposes both the lack of female agency and excess of masculine abuse in nineteenth century Spain while promoting women's independence and rights.

Emilia Pardo Bazán was born in the mid-nineteenth century in La Coruña. Born into wealth, at an early age she cultivated a love of knowledge, specifically literature and reading. At the age of 15, she published her first short story. At the age of 18 Emilia Pardo Bazán married José Antonio de Quiroga y Pérez de Deza, though the two later separated. Her works featured feminist themes. Examples of masculine abuse, social structures and expectations for women, marriage, Madrid society, and the impact of

genetic determinism are prominent topics in her writing. In 1908 Pardo Bazán inherited the title Countess from her father. Her life's achievements include being the first woman to hold an endowed chair at the university level, being appointed to the Senate, and receiving multiple literary awards; however, because she was a woman, she never received the Nobel Prize for literature, and was blocked from joining Spain's prestigious Real Academica de la Lengua.

Two of Emilia Pardo Bazán's short story narratives showcase opposite extremes of female agency and explain Pardo Bazán's tendency to condemn the status of women in her society. "The Torn Lace" and "The Red Stockings" both present female characters making their own decisions in life and in the latter story a woman's having her decisions in life taken away from her. When compared, the two stories describe the bleak situation of woman in nineteenth century Spain; women were controlled either by the threat or the reality of domestic violence. "The Torn Lace" follows a woman's decision to retain her independence and forfeit her chance at marriage. In the story, a young woman, Micaela becomes the object of town gossip after leaving her fiancé at the altar by saying, "no." Three years later she reveals to the narrator (also female) why she called off the wedding: "It was the silliest thing....so silly I wish I didn't have to talk about it. People always attribute revelations to profound causes and transcendental moments without realizing that often it is the smallest thing" (Pardo Bazán 62). Of course, calling her reason "silly" is totally ironic since domestic violence was and still is a serious problem in Spanish society. Micaela says that she knew that she loved her fiancé, but she was unsure of his character: "the only thing was that I had not been able to study his character. Some people saw him violently, but I had always seen him soft, bland like a glove" (63). On



the day of the wedding Micaela accidentally ripped a piece of lace on her beautiful dress:

It was only then that I saw something else, the face of Bernardo, contrite and disfigured--madder than life; his pupils dilated, his mouth dropped open and a reprimand was on the tip of his tongue--although he caught himself because there were people around; that one moment was all I needed to see his soul, the honesty of his character (64).

This is Micaela's visceral explanation: in the end, the reason it was a secret for so long was because not only was it her own business, but she preferred the town's people to think it was something society considered extravagant or more important. Micaela feared a life of domestic violence with Bernardo, but masculine violence was such a conventional part of Spanish society that Micaela feared that society would not consider an abusive character as reason enough for her to reject him. Micaela has said "no" to Bernardo because she refused to live in fear, knowing full well that he might explode again in the future and she would have to bear the brunt of his evil temper. Since the world of Pardo Bazán is essentially a world driven by male discourse and patriarchal values, no one would believe Micaela, a woman, giving a negative review of a man. Micaela does not have the social standing within the social hierarchy of the time to reject publically a marriage that would have benefitted her, perhaps economically or in terms of social prestige, even if the man were violent.

In "The Torn Lace" Pardo Bazán gives us a female narrator as well as a female protagonist. The narrator's being a woman is important because she is the mirror through which we understand the secret of Micaela. A female narrator undermines the patriarchal discourse of the typical male voice that would probably defend Bernardo as strong and logical, while dismissing Micaela as emotional, irrational, and foolish--rejecting a marriage that obviously favored her in many ways. The unnamed female narrator

disunderstands the fear that drove Micaela to make the decision she did. Although it is typical of Pardo Bazán to have one character discover another, “a very frequent procedure is to make a character investigate some mystery or unusual behavior of one of his acquaintances” (McKenna 95), so it is interesting and important that both the narrator and the protagonist, or the discoverer and the discovered, are both female, subverting the male voice and rejecting feminine stereotypes promoted by male writers and the patriarchal status quo. Micaela comes across as cool and logical, perceptive and intelligent, wise and shrewd in her decision-making. The narrator also serves as a critique to the social conventions of the era. While the narrator was unable to attend the wedding, she recounts the day with extreme intricacy. Susan Walter, author of *From the Outside Looking in: Narrative Frames and Narrative Spaces in the Short Stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán*, explains that the narrator’s ability to describe the wedding without having attended “implies that social conventions are so predictable that she did not need to actually attend the wedding to know what took place there” (72). Without the reader’s delving too far into Pardo Bazán’s social conditions, it becomes apparent that she is mocking the social convention of weddings and their importance to women. Pardo Bazán was married, though her own thoughts on marriage and her experience with the institution seem rather pessimistic.

Micaela exemplifies both the benefits and damages done by female agency of the time. Absolutely notorious as the woman who said “no” to Bernardo, she is able to choose a solitary life for herself where she lives in relative peace rather than constant fear of being brutalized by her husband. She exercised her agency and chose not to marry Bernardo. Realistically, it is doubtful a woman in these conditions would have been able

to do the same— would have chosen a nomadic life of solitude over the social conventions of marriage of the time. She also chose to keep her secret. No one beat the truth out of her, demanding an explanation for her refusal of Bernardo. However, from the day of her rejection Micaela becomes an outsider. She is constantly the topic of conversation, has few friends due to the scandal surrounding her, and never has another opportunity to marry. Even in this situation where a female used her voice and decisions to pave her own path, she is still suffering the repercussions of a patriarchal society. However, she apparently has a fairly pleasant life since the narrator meets Micaela in a “balneario” or spa, a place frequented by middle and upper-class women.

Other elements in “The Torn Lace” further denounce the subjugated role of women as pawns in society. The prologue of the story says that “such elements as the choice of the image of torn lace for the the story’s title...convey an explicitly feminine sensibility” (Pardo Bazán 58). In this case, the lace, which is deemed a feminine item, is ironically lent to Micaela by the groom’s family, becoming a symbol of his authority and control over her. The fact that she accidentally “tears” the lace could be a foreshadowing of her unwillingness to submit to Bernardo’s authority. “The Torn Lace” is one of several stories in which Pardo Bazán explores the notion that a seemingly insignificant action or even a small gesture can provide us with sudden insight into a person’s character” (58). In this story readers can clearly see how an insignificant facial expression or gesture becomes important in helping the female protagonist decipher the male’s character. Bernardo’s grimace of anger was a visceral reaction that opened up his soul to an ever-observant Micaela, who, we might assume, suspected that there might be problems with her husband-to-be. Micaela was right, of course, but she also realized that her opinion

was not sufficient to convince anyone that Bernardo was a bad man, so she decided to let everyone think that her decision was nothing but caprice on her part. Micaela, by understanding the public's perception of her decision was actually able to pull off her negative answer by letting the world think she was just another typical female. "The Torn Lace" is arguably Pardo Bazán's most generous story towards women. It is one of her only stories with a positive female agency, yet the result may still be bleak. Nevertheless, Micaela can go to a spa, where she meets the narrator, implying that she is fairly well-to-do and certainly not suffering as a result of her decision.

In complete opposition to the relatively peaceful ending of "The Torn Lace", "The Red Stockings" is one of Pardo Bazán's most violent short stories. It begins by presenting a young girl, Ildara, who, in the place of her deceased mother, is cooking dinner for her father, while he is self-absorbed, rolling a stinking cigarette. Implicit in this story is an unpleasant whiff of incest that hangs silently over the narration. The old man's wife has died, probably of hard work, and the young girl has assumed the role of pseudo-wife to her violent father. While Ildara is starting the fire, Tío Clodio notices she is wearing red stockings. He is immediately upset that Ildara would spend money on such a luxury and begins striking her. He also berates her, suggesting she is worthless, vain, a slut. When he has finished abusing her, Ildara goes outside to the pump to wash away the blood stains—she has lost her vision in one eye and a tooth. The story concludes with Ildara realizing she will never make the trip "towards new horizons of joy and luxury" (2).

In this tale, her father tio Clodio is everything from emotionally abusive: causing Ildara to be most frightened of what her father could do to her, to physically abusive:

And with his fist closed he struck first her head, then her face, parting the small, fearful hands, still unmarked by labor, with which Ildara tried in vain to shield herself, trembling. The hardest blow fell upon an eye, and the young girl saw, like a starry sky, thousands of brilliant dots, enveloped in a haze of muted color on a black velvet background. Then the laborer struck her nose, her cheeks. For one furious instant, he would sooner have killed her than watched her go, leaving him alone. (Pardo Bazán 1)

The violence visited upon the young girl is both shocking and horrific. Ildara is never leaving her pueblo; Tío Clodio will kill her before that happens. He knew where the stockings came from—he knew they represent Ildara’s desire to make something better for herself, her hope to exercise agency and leave the cultural backwater of the Galician countryside. By the end of the story, Ildara loses a tooth and the vision in one of her eyes, which represents only a small portion of what Ildara really loses. In this moment, Ildara loses her spirit. She will never dream of a better future again, she will never spend time primping her hair or buying stockings to look pretty, and she will never make another decision or action for herself. In “The Torn Lace” Pardo Bazán showed the difficulties of exercising female agency for a bourgeoisie woman in the late nineteenth century, and here she shows the picture of the more common complete lack of female agency, especially for poor peasant girls, seen throughout the world in the same time period.

Among the many symbols used in “The Red Stockings,” the fire at the beginning symbolizes Ildara’s passion for life. As Bonnie Gasior explains in her analysis of the story, “the unburdening of the wood in combination with the lighting of the fire is clearly literal but also symbolic: it alludes to the ignited desire within Ildara, which stands in contrast to the blandness of her life” (748). The other important symbol in this story is the stockings, and they are as important to this story as the lace was to the last. Gasior

goes on to suggest that in addition to the stockings symbolizing Ildara's coming-of-age as woman, they represent the external sign of Ildara's internal hopes and passions to change her life and to create for herself a new life far from the smoldering and stinking embers under the stew she is cooking. Ildara tells her father she was able to buy the stockings from selling eggs to the priest. At this point, Tío Clodio gets angry. He understands that she is lying, and he assumes that she has prostituted herself to attain the money. Tío Clodio prides himself on being the sole male in Ildara's life. He is her father, and he seems to enjoy "owning" Ildara. Since incest is still such a taboo topic for mainstream literature, one must assume that it was completely taboo during the nineteenth century when Pardo Bazán wrote the story. Yet, the story does suggest that Ildara has taken on the role of "wife" for Tío Clodio, and what is implicit in this suggestion is that they are having sexual relations as well. Once Clodio realizes Ildara has ventured into the world and encountered other men, he is upset. He is not upset that Ildara besmirched herself by entering the world of prostitution; he is upset because from the time Ildara was with a man (and each subsequent encounter she has with men), Clodio loses his grasp on her. He is jealous to put it simply. Eventually, Ildara could realize that she does not need either Tío Clodio or his sexual abuse in her life. However, he needs her to assume all the roles of a wife—physical, labor division, economic—so that he can remain on his little piece of farmland.

Pardo Bazán uses a single sentence in the story to clarify that Ildara's tale isn't unique: "The...young girl's greatest fear was that her father would scar her, as had happened to her cousin Mariola, marked by her own mother on the forehead with the burnt circle of a hot sieve" (2). Pardo Bazán seems to suggest that domestic violence is

ubiquitous within rural Galician culture. For Ildara, even within her own family, abuse was common, and she was grateful—believing herself better off than her cousin. In her mind, she could withstand the beating and pain so long as it left her beauty intact. This sentence is arguably the most telling of the story. Within it, Pardo Bazán exposes another facet of abuse through Mariola’s mother. The mother, while probably an agent-less product of society—is the result of what abuse creates: violent women who enforce the rules of the male dominated hierarchy by torturing the young women under their control. While readers do not have a complete understanding of what Mariola did to deserve burns to her forehead, it is probably not worthy of such a violent reaction which disfigured the young woman. The mother only knows one way to handle uncontrollable situations, and it is with violence. When Mariola diverged from whatever her mother expected of her, there was no understanding. There was no love, no conversation, and no second chances. Mariola’s mother, probably herself a victim of violence, had learned from her society to give her daughter only one chance and to expect only one result. Violence scarred Mariola’s mother and left her emotionally handicapped to handle a conflicted situation in any other way. In the end, violence became her only way of reacting. The mother exemplifies what Mariola, and Ildara, will become. Pardo Bazan understands that even if Ildara lives through this horrible upbringing, she will never be right. She will always be a product of a broken situation, and she will learn to use violence to cover her own scars. Poverty, then, and the violence generated out of it, become a vicious cycle, with one generation “teaching” the next that the only way to deal with the young is through violence and torture.

One interesting difference in the two stories examined is the setting. “Torn Lace”

takes place in an upscale, urban environment of an upper-class spa. There are multiple characters present, the wedding takes place at a church, the dialects of the speakers are undifferentiated by regional variations, and the women discuss the events at a salon. The entirety of “Red Stockings” occurs outside of town in a small shack. Ildara is trying to start a fire so that she can cook dinner. With the exception of a reference to a doctor at the end of the story, Ildara and Tío Clodio are the only characters. Susan McKenna explains in her novel *Crafting the Female Subject* that the “threat of violence inherent in the rural countryside is hardly a new topic in Pardo Bazan’s oeuvre” (143). McKenna goes on to suggest that rural settings bring out violence in men, just as with animals. Perhaps the number of people in the town where Micaela lives explains why she was unable to understand Bernardo’s personality for so long. It is unlikely that Micaela was able to spend large quantities of time alone with Bernardo, and when surrounded by others, Bernardo surely kept a pleasant face and appearance for the other townspeople. In contrast, Tío Clodio has no reason to hide his unhappiness. No one but Ildara sees his anger, and she is too scared to expose him.

The biggest similarity between these two stories is Pardo Bazan’s use of fabric to symbolize the social situations of the characters. The lace and its destruction, represent Micaela’s worth in Bernardo’s eyes. Lace, an item of luxury, represents wealth, convention and tradition. Bernardo’s family, owners of the lace, want to show with ostentation that they are rich and willing to lavish their money on Micaela, a future trophy wife for Bernardo. The lace is part of the opulence of Bernardo’s family. Micaela is an object that he has acquired, and he expects her to remain in pristine condition, an object of desire, only for him. Through the incident of the ripping lace, Micaela comes to



realize that Bernardo is not the man she thought he was. Similarly, once Clodio saw the stockings, he became an incredibly violent man. Up to that point, he was nonchalantly rolling a cigarette, which is, ironically, a New World vice. The stockings are a metaphor for Ildara's hope of a better future. At the same time, though they ironically represent her developing sexuality. In nineteenth century Spain, society expected a male to exercise power over her as a sexual object, a commodity that could be traded on a market. Her future will never be better, and if it were not Clodio's beating her, some other man would have power over her. In addition, the lace and the stockings are a symbolic representation of social class indicators. Micaela was wealthier, and lace is a luxury item. Wool stockings, however, are a common garment among the working class of rural Galicia. While the fabrics represent the completely different kinds of lives the women lead (the white lace of the innocent Micaela versus the red stockings of the tarnished Ildara), they tell more about the characters and their possible problems than either of the narrators do.

From the picture Emilio Pardo Bazán painted with "Torn Lace" and "Red Stockings," nineteenth century Spain was a bleak place for independent women who were interested in living their own lives. Women rarely had the opportunity to make their own decisions. When women did make their own decisions, they were suppressed by violence, lack of understanding, and isolation. Pardo Bazán uses narratives to argue for a stronger female agency as well as asserting that women need not allow themselves to be used as targets of male violence in the patriarchal world in which they live.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Patriarch

While Emilia Pardo Bazán used female narrators to expose abuse and the lack of female agency seen in the nineteenth century in “Red Stockings” and “Torn Lace,” she takes a radically different approach in two other short stories. In “First Love” and “Memento,” Pardo Bazán utilizes a male narrator to expose the troubles women experienced during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and further her feminist ideals. Joyce Tolliver explains that Pardo Bazán employs: “narrative ventriloquism” (109) in her short stories, using both female and male narrators. Using this ventriloquism, speaking through her characters, she is able to “project a certain sort of masculine discourse in such a way that the effect is that of an ironic interrogation of the ideology inherent in that discourse” (109). Pardo Bazán creates a pseudo-masculine discourse that deconstructs itself by exposing the flaws of the masculine double standard inherent in such a discourse—deconstructing masculine exceptionalism, as it were. In addition to using the male narrators, she also problematizes the idea of women as objects and the problem with the patriarchal mentality—all to propose and expose the lack of gender equality experienced by women and to propose a more equitable situation for women.

The condition of Spanish women in Pardo Bazan’s time, according to Pattison was dismal: “Men have not permitted women to be educated or to enter the professions, because of such, Spanish women are ignorant, superstitious and then only at such menial tasks as housemaids, seamstresses, and street vendors” (66). This kind of sexist misogyny was prevalent in Pardo Bazán’s time and is well expressed in her short stories

“First Love” and “Memento.” “First Love” was written around 1895 and was one of Pardo Bazán’s first short stories (Davis 390). The story follows a boy who “falls in love for the first time.” A young boy ventures into his aunt’s room one day while she is at mass. A bit of a voyeur, he likes to rummage through her things, and eventually stumbles upon a portrait of a beautiful woman. The young boy, not quite a young man yet, is mesmerized by the beauty of the woman. Pardo Bazán gives an eloquent description of the boy’s finding the portrait:

But one day--I remember as well as if it were today--in the corner of the top drawer, and lying on some collars of old lace, I saw something gold glittering--I put in my hand, unwittingly crumpled the lace, and drew out a portrait, an ivory miniature, about three inches long, in a frame of gold. I was struck at first sight. A sunbeam streamed through the window and fell upon the alluring form, which seemed to wish to step out of its dark background and come towards me. It was the most lovely creature, such as I had never seen except in the dreams of my adolescence. The lady of the portrait must have been some twenty odd years; she was no simple maiden, no half-opened rosebud, but a woman in the full resplendency of her beauty. Her face was oval, but not too long, her lips full, half-open and smiling, her eyes cast a languishing side-glance, and she had a dimple on her chin as if formed by the tip of Cupid's playful finger. Her head-dress was strange but elegant; a compact group of curls plastered conewise one over the other covered her temples, and a basket of braided hair rose on the top of her head. This old-fashioned head-dress, which was trussed up from the nape of her neck, disclosed all the softness of her fresh young throat, on which the dimple of her chin was reduplicated more vaguely and delicately. (Pardo Bazán 4)

From the moment the boy encounters the portrait he is entranced and in love with the woman. In an ironic passage, Pardo Bazán shows how superficial the boy’s love is, based purely on appearance, as well as the fine line between love and lust. The denouement of the story rests on the fact that the young woman in the photo is completely unknown to the boy, but he is instantly in love with her image, an example of the male gaze gone crazy.

As the story continues, the boy grows more and more infatuated with the portrait,

and readers are witness to the power of patriarchal discourse that panders to the young man's desires as if they were either legitimate or real. He clandestinely sneaks into his aunt's room to see the portrait every day and it becomes an object of sexual fetishism for the boy; eventually he becomes so seduced by the photograph that he can no longer bear to see it infrequently. He steals the portrait. The boy's "love" for the woman grows strong and stronger. Eventually the boy ceases eating and becomes ill because of his obsession for the woman. One day, he faints after summoning the courage to kiss the portrait for the first time. His parents and aunt find the boy in the floor. The parents are immediately worried about their son, but the aunt is more worried about the portrait. She demands that he return the portrait, announcing that it is a portrait of herself as a young woman. The boy faints a second time due to his surprise at discovering that his elderly aunt was the young woman. Again, Pardo Bazán suggests a convoluted, pseudo-incest in the relationship between the older aunt and the younger nephew. The boy is disgusted that he fell in love with his aunt (now elderly and therefore deemed unattractive by society) and decides he will never return to her room.

Emilia Pardo Bazán uses this simple and seemingly funny tale to explain a bigger problem with society. Upon realizing his aunt is the woman in the picture, he loses all respect for her. The boy has spent so long thinking of this anonymous woman as an object of his sexual fantasies that he goes into shock when he realizes that he has been fantasizing over his mother's old sister. He cannot cogently rectify the cognitive dissonance between his old aunt and the beautiful woman in the portrait. In a very real sense, and what makes this story so objectionable and enlightening at the same time, he has committed, at least in his mind, incest with his aunt. Readers are able to see into the

male mind—a gift given to us through Pardo Bazán use of a male narrator.

The boy, and presumably men in general, value and cherish women while they are young and beautiful objects that can be held off at a distance, as is the case with the portrait. Once a woman grows old and loses her looks—she becomes horrific, monstrous. Society has trained the boy to understand women as objects and not to value them for their intelligence or personalities. However, seeing women as sexual objects becomes a problem for the boy when he realizes the beautiful woman is actually his aunt. Ironically, Pardo Bazán shows the problem with this philosophy: women are to be seen as sexual objects, but not family members. Since the patriarchal society only saw women for their sexual worth, they devalued the worth of their mothers and elderly female family members. As men grew in worth with age, women became decreasingly valued. The male gaze is an example of the asymmetrical nature of the power distribution between the sexes, and readers are witness to the objectification of the aunt's photo that turns monstrous when she reveals the truth about the portrait's identity to her nephew.

The young boy feels betrayed by his thoughts of incest, and he is horrified by the monstrous truth of lusting after someone whom he perceives to be an old woman, a hag. The use of the male narrator allows Pardo Bazán to express her opinions on the unequal status of gender equality. Dana Livingston writes about women's sexuality and explains that Pardo Bazán uses a male narrator and a dualistic female construction (the beautiful woman in the picture and the elderly religious aunt) to allude to the typical gender roles—all the while rejecting their validity. Susan Walter simplifies the issue, stating: "one enigmatic element of Pardo Bazán's short stories is the regular use of conservative male perspectives in them" (42). Throughout "First Love", Pardo Bazán makes it

difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the voice of the older narrator and the voice of the young boy. This dichotomy can be seen as another tool she employs to suggest that male opinions are largely similar and do not differ based on the age of the male. Walter summarizes this concept of the male narrator by stating that: “the effect of the use of these narrative perspectives is that many female characters are depicted as objectified and one-dimensional; giving a voice to the dominant, patriarchal worldview of this time frame while offering an alternative space that rejects this intolerant viewpoint” (42). By using a male narrator, Pardo Bazán exposes and rejects the problems of the male gaze, patriarchal discourse, and gender inequality in “First Love.”

In her short story “Memento,” she employs many of the same techniques to further explain her ideas. “Memento,” a story that directly addresses the taboo subject of sexual desire in older women, was written several months after Emilia Pardo Bazán wrote “First Love.” In the story, Gabriel (again, a male narrator), remembers spending his childhood with his aunt and her “tertulia” of three older ladies, all in their sixties. Gabriela, the aunt, and her three friends meet daily at four o’clock. Gabriel remembers each of the women. Candidita is the youngest of his aunt’s friends, though she is also the least attractive. Doña Aparición had gout and dressed in eccentric clothing; Doña Peregrina was cheap, and Gabriel remembered that she was the funny woman of the group, as well as happiest of the friends. Usually, the young Gabriel leaves the women to themselves during these meetings, but one day, he decides to join them. He recites romantic poems and lines from novels to the women, with huge theatrics. The women blush and are taken aback, though happy at the memory of the “beautiful ghost of distant youth” (Pardo Bazán 56). At the end of Gabriel’s time with his aunt, Candidita pulls Gabriel aside and

kisses him passionately on the mouth. Echoing the mother/son incest of “First Love,” Gabriel is immediately disgusted with her, gives her a nonchalant hug, and sprints away, unwilling to recognize sexual desire in an older woman. Women of a certain age, say post-menopausal, are expected to act, within this culture, in certain asexual ways that do not have anything to do with young men. Gabriel is horrified by the sexual overture of the older woman whom he perceives initially as asexual, and he plans never to return to his aunt’s social events. Just as the boy in “First Love,” Gabriel rejects elderly women and subscribes to the common patriarchal mentality of the era, does not value older women, and has tossed them aside as sexually and socially irrelevant. All of women are without families, children, or men, and they get together because no one else will have them.

Pardo Bazán exposes gender inequalities by suggesting that elderly women may still harbor feelings of a sexual nature. The elderly women in both stories are presented only indirectly through the male narrators’ thoughts, and the females’ true thoughts about sex and their sexuality go unexplored. The fact that Candidita is attracted to Gabriel is a stunning revelation because older women are expected to behave in a different way—more motherly, never sexually. Livingston provides an explanation, saying that the stories are “dominated by images of marginal sexualities elaborated in full contrast with the occurrence of what can be seen as typical, institutionally authorized sexual roles” (269). In both of these stories, Emilia Pardo Bazán confronts the idea that women lose value with age. In the first story, the boy falls in love with a picture. The woman in the picture is not a being with emotions, thoughts, or intellect, but rather a beautiful object trapped within a frame and clasped in the hands of a man. In reality, the elder aunt

attends church and has a lifetime of experience and wisdom. According to the boy, the young aunt is the only enticing woman—showcasing Pardo Bazan’s belief that men do not care about a woman’s intelligence or characteristics outside her youth and physical beauty. In the second story there is no younger woman with whom to compare Candidita, but the woman herself is portrayed as elderly, weird, and extravagant, as if she were three-day-old funeral flowers. Rather than it being Gabriel’s fault for “leading on” Candidita by adjusting her shawl and reciting romantic poetry in front of the women, the situation is Candidita’s problem, proving that as a woman she is not logical and still obsessed with her sexuality—*estrafalaria* in Spanish. Yet, since time immemorial, society has never had a problem with a younger woman marrying an older man. Men of a certain age, say after sixty, are still considered handsome, virile, and stately, not *estrafalarío* (odd and crazy). In a time when gender inequality and sexism were rampant, Pardo Bazán “effectively challenges typical power relations whereby discourse establishes the basis for knowledge of, and authority over, the sexualities of specific groups” (Livingston 275). In an ironic turn, Pardo Bazán uses the societal norms and male narrators to expose gender inequalities.

In the first chapter we discussed the problem of abuse and how Emilia Pardo Bazán confronted the issue. Here, we see her confronting the spurious nature of social norms regarding age and sexuality. While Pardo Bazán exposed abuse from perspectives of the females, she exposes social inequalities from the perspectives of the male narrators. In the Spanish culture, men grew more estimable with time, while women grew more obsolete. Pardo Bazán does an exemplary job of showcasing this injustice, while also condemning it, in her two short stories “First Love,” and “Memento.” Next, an analysis



of the more abstract stories of Pardo Bazán and how she examines further the plight of females in Spanish society will be discussed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Retelling

Another technique Pardo Bazán employs in exposing the lack of gender equality in 19th century Spain is found in her stories “The Oldest Story” and “Sister Apparition.” In both of these short stories, Pardo Bazán retells historical accounts that primarily portray women in a negative way. In the first, she uses the opening of Genesis and in the second she uses details of the life of the writer Espronceda. Emilia Pardo Bazán uses the differences between the traditional versions of the stories and her new versions to further show the lack of female agency and to advocate for feminism. The jarring dissonances between the ‘new’ version and the story the reader knows point to the critique Pardo Bazan makes.

“The Oldest Story” is a retelling of the first chapters of Genesis and the entrance of sin. In the original story of creation, God created Adam in His image to “rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth” (NIV Gen. 1:26). The following verse goes on to explain that Adam was created in God’s image--God created male and female. God formed man out of the dust and breathed life into his nostrils. God tells Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge, and then He decides that “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is like him” (Gen. 2:18). God then allows Adam to name all the creatures, but Adam is not satisfied with any of the animals to be his helper. Finally, God put Adam to sleep, took one of his ribs, and made a woman, Eve. As time goes on, a serpent asks Eve God has really forbidden them the fruit from the tree of knowledge. The woman is tricked by the

serpent and eats the fruit. Her eyes are opened to the world, and she convinces Adam to eat the fruit as well. When God comes to the garden, Adam blames Eve for the blunder and Eve blames the serpent. While both the man and woman have severe consequences for eating the fruit, the woman's consequence is that her husband "will dominate you" (Gen. 3:16).

In Pardo Bazán's version, a traveler in a tavern narrates the tale. He learns from an older stranger. The latter explains that Adam, as a male protagonist, is not happy with the vast, but boring, world God has provided for him. Eventually, God creates for him a female, Eve, and he is temporarily content. Eve guards the fruit of the tree of knowledge until one day when her beauty is no longer enough to distract and keep Adam away from the tree. Adam overpowers Eve and eats the fruit of knowledge. When God arrives, Adam blames Eve for the entire ordeal, and repeats it to her often enough that Eve begins to see herself to blame, "The case is that, by dint of hearing, Eve also began to believe it; she began to take the blame, and lost memory of the truth" (Pardo Bazán PP). As she blames herself more and more, she lets herself submit to Adam's dominance. The quote suggests strongly that men and women are made of the same basic elements, and the story rejects the biblical version of Eve's being made from Adam's rib.

The differences between Pardo Bazán's "Oldest Story", and the biblical tale of the fall are striking. The first and biggest difference between the stories is that of the underlying theme. In the biblical account of the fall the focus is on disobedience and the fact that human nature is sinful. In Pardo Bazán's account: "the emphasis is on the origin of misogyny rather than of sin" (Pardo Bazán 25). Pardo Bazán makes a deep accusation with this theme change. The question of human nature being inherently sinful is one of

the most discussed philosophical issues in human history. By changing the biblical story from an important reference for a time-old debate, to a statement of the origin of men's hatred of women, Pardo Bazán is stating artistically that misogyny is as important an issue as that of human nature. Further, she suggests that the issue of women's perceived inferiority to men is as timeless as the idea of sinful human nature.

The second difference between the biblical account of the fall and Pardo Bazán's retelling is seen when Adam overpowers Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge:

This situation lasted until Adam, without need for the treacherous snake, began to crave the apple that Eva was guarding with great care. I know that Eve defended it carefully and would not turn it over to anyone; this passage of the writing is the most prevaricated. In sum, in spite of her defense, Adam won, and the apple was gobbled (32).

From her creation, Adam sees Eve as a beautiful creature. Eventually, Eve's beauty is not enough to captivate him and he overpowers her. Once again Emilia Pardo Bazán showcases the patriarchal view of women as sexual objects. Upon her creation Eve is captivating and beautiful. As time goes on, she loses her "newness" and Adam grows bored with her—he becomes enticed by another object, the apple. Like a child who is excited by one Christmas present for a few minutes, only to realize he has more to open, Adam casts Eve aside in finding a new object with which to fascinate himself.

A further difference in the story, according to Susan Walter, is that taking the fruit, or the apple, in Pardo Bazán's version becomes as a symbol of sexuality. Walter suggests that via the quote above, Pardo Bazán sees the apple as Eve's virginity. She was cautiously guarding it, and he violently took it. Walter says that: "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” (Walter 90). According to Walter, it is vital readers see the apple as Eve’s virginity in Pardo Bazán’s story, because it explains Adam’s change in attitude after “gobbling up the apple.” Rather than seeing Eve as the beautiful creature he once believed her to be, he now perceives her defiled and worth even less. If she had lost her newness before he ate the apple, she lost her worth after he consumed it.

Pardo Bazán’s account of the original sin, as Susan Walter elucidates, exposes the lack of female agency in nineteenth century Spain. She states that: “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” (91). This belief furthers the idea that women in the 19th century were seen as primarily sexual objects, as well as explaining why Pardo Bazán changed the theme of the story to one of misogyny. Pardo Bazán illuminates that the lack of female agency experienced by women extended into all aspects of her life: her occupational life, as well as her sexual life.

As the story progresses, Adam blames Eve for his consuming of the fruit. Eve believes him, loses her self-worth, and begins to believe the prophecy that women will be dominated by men. “Pardo Bazán suggests a notion she elaborates in several other works: that woman’s victimization is partially caused by her being brainwashed at the hands of the patriarchal culture. Having been told so often that she is inferior, a woman begins to believe it” (Pardo Bazán 25). Rather than using “The Oldest Story” as a justification as to why women are so often seen as inferior to men, Pardo Bazán explains the repression of women through the story. Given the differences between Pardo Bazán’s account and the biblical account: misogyny versus human nature: Adam taking the fruit

on his own accord, and the fruit being seen as sexual, the story encapsulates Pardo Bazan's rejection of the biblical explanation as a valid justification for the victimization of women. If anything, it becomes apparent through these differences that it is the patriarch's fault that women have long been abused and deprived of agency.

Emilia Pardo Bazán uses a similar retelling technique with another short story to expose further female plights. "Sister Apparition," written in 1896, is the fictional account of the real life story of Jose de Espronceda. The editor explains how the story is undoubtedly based on Jose de Espronceda's biography:

The village of A\*\*\* could refer to Almendralejo, where the poet was baptized; the reference to Badajoz as the provincial capital makes this almost certain. The fictional Camargo's work "Arcángel maldito" suggests one of Espronceda's most famous poems, "El diablo mundo," and evokes a common Esproncedian image for woman... The most obvious indication that Camargo is Espronceda is the similarity in their public personae, for Espronceda, like Camargo, was at least as famous for his prolific sexual adventures and his subversive political activities as he was for his poetry (41).

The story, narrated by an old nun (a fact not revealed until the very end), tells about Juan Camargo (the male character based on Jose de Espronceda), who flirts with a young innocent girl. The young girl falls in love with Camargo who leaves town. Eventually, her parents take her to the city where the two reconnect. Camargo seduces her in his parents' house. After the sexual encounter, he opens the curtains to reveal a group of male friends, who watched the entire seduction of the young girl and laugh at her. When she realizes they were hiding the whole time and witnessed her seduction, she is horrified and runs home naked. Eventually, the girl joins a covenant and becomes Sister Apparition. She spends her days crying and praying for forgiveness.

Rather than using the differences between Espronceda's life and Camargo's story to make her point about the lack of female agency, Pardo Bazán used the acclaim and fame

of Espronceda's life to make her point in this story. "Sister Apparition" further develops the theme of sexual repression of women, which Pardo Bazán begins formulating in "The Oldest Story," by exposing the suppression and prohibition of female sexuality. The editor of the English translation for "Sister Apparition" explains that the story is designed to illuminate the "confirmation of male subjectivity through sexual conquest" (Pardo Bazán 41). The young girl in the story feels incredibly guilty after losing her virginity, while Camargo thinks the entire situation is a joke. Camargo has debased and dehumanized the young girl by violating the intimacy of the encounter through inviting his friends to witness his conquest. He has objectivized the female as a commodity of conquest and not as an individual of worth and dignity. The female's objectification underscores the strength of the masculine double standard regarding the value of feminine chastity and virginity versus the social credibility of a shameless *don Juan* who gains further masculine respectability with the public knowledge of his conquests. The young girl enters a covenant and spends her entire life praying and trying to right the wrong she believes she did in Camargo's home. Presumably, as seen in Espronceda's life, Camargo continues life with no second thoughts about the entire occurrence. Here lies the similarity of the double standards for men and women seen in "The Oldest Story." Camargo, as the male character, can experience sex without repercussions or guilt while the young girl feels the societal constraints and guilt associated with her action.

This story is arguably the most malicious and misogynistic of the stories examined this far. Because of the story's overt sexual encounter, it is a more intimate tale than many of Pardo Bazán's other short stories. The complete public exposure of the intimacy

that forces the young girl who is forced to flee the scene of her disgrace without her clothing is not only disheartening, but a horrible indictment of patriarchal culture. As Carmen Bravo-Villasanta writes: “Bazán’s generally pessimistic attitude is revealed particularly in her portrayal of love. Women are the victims” (97). The young girl perceives the moment as full of love and intimacy while the male sees it as a moment of debasement and mockery and uses the girl as an object of sexual gratification for himself, a way of increasing his reputation as a virile and powerful male, and as a mocking entertainment for his friends. The fact that young girl, Irene, eventually flees to a convent in search of sanctuary shows that the only way she could exercise her own personal agency was to enter a world where men were either irrelevant or absent. In a society in which female agency was rarely considered, and when considered only in terms of a female’s life outside the home, Pardo Bazán uses retelling through “The Oldest Story” and “Sister Apparition” to expose the darker side of patriarchal society which blocks female agency and leaves women feeling guilty and powerless.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Culmination

As discussed in the first three chapters, Emilia Pardo Bazán uses narratives to expose domestic abuse and lack of female agency in the 19th century of Spain. In order to really focus on the damage that domestic abuse causes without explicitly or openly accusing Spanish men of being so barbaric, Pardo Bazán employs the literary genre in the fable “Piña.” By substituting animals for people, Pardo Bazán is able to expose more honestly the injustices she sees, as well as to defamiliarize the controversy generally associated with stories of feminism. By using a fable, Pardo Bazán displaces male of female abuse guilt and comes at domestic violence indirectly via the use of monkeys in her story.

The origins of animal fables are lost in the ancient literary history of the Greeks and Hindus, and there are multiple hypotheses about how these stories with talking animal characters developed as stories with a didactic purpose. Similar to ancient Biblical parables, fables use plants, animals, or inanimate objects as a substitute for human beings. Parables, such as the well-known “prodigal son” are generally spiritual in teaching while fables, such as Aesop’s famous “The Tortoise and the Hare,” are designed as moral guides for behavior. Fables are generally short and direct, often exposing the moral in one sentence at the end. By using fables, an author is able to offer directly a moral or a political viewpoint in an indirect way that might be considered obvious or controversial if delivered more directly through human characters. Readers and listeners get a chance to “discover” the moral lesson for themselves. More than five hundred

fables have been popularly attributed to Aesop, a slave in ancient Greece. Philostratus explains the purpose of fables well, saying:

“... like those who dine well off the plainest dishes, he made use of humble incidents to teach great truths, and after serving up a story he adds to it the advice to do a thing or not to do it. Then, too, he was really more attached to truth than the poets are; for the latter do violence to their own stories in order to make them probable; but he by announcing a story which everyone knows not to be true, told the truth by the very fact that he did not claim to be relating real events” (Philostratus V:14).

In other words, a fable is simply a story that makes the facts of an issue easier to bear.

One of the most famous of Aesop’s fables is “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.” As most know, the story follows a village boy who tricks the other villagers into believing a wolf is attacking his cattle. Again and again the boy calls to the villagers to help with the nonexistent wolf. Eventually, a real wolf comes to devour his cattle. When the boy calls for the villagers, they think he is lying again and do not come to help. The hungry wolves eat all of the boy’s cattle. Fables always contain morals, and the moral of this fable is that if you lie, no one will believe you when you tell the truth. Another incredibly famous fable is the tale of “The Tortoise and the Hare.” In the fable, a hare torments a turtle—repeatedly asserting how slow the turtle moves. The two race and the hare sprints off. He gains a good lead, and takes a nap. During his nap the tortoise passes him. The two leapfrog a couple of times until eventually, the tortoise arrives at the finish line before the hare. The story is summarized in the proverb: “slow and steady wins the race,” meaning that when one takes their time and does good works, they will eventually reap greater benefits than the person who rushes through their tasks. Aesop’s Fables are probably the most well known and classic of the fable genre, but medieval Spain had a long tradition of fable writing that we can access directly in books such

*Calila e Dimna* and *El Conde Lucanor*. Thus Pardo Bazán reached back not only to ancient Greece but also to her own literary tradition to rework the genre of the fable.

Pardo Bazán employs fables to further expose the injustice women experience. In her short story “Piña”, Pardo Bazán uses the apes, perhaps with a nod to Darwin, as an allegory for abuse in human relationships. The story focuses on a female ape bred in captivity. The narrator tells how little she is upon arrival and how she is never happy. Her owners see melancholy in her eyes and believe she needs a companion. They bring a mate, Coco, into her pen. He steals her food and will not let her out of her corner. He beats her into submission. Piña, the female ape, grows more and more unhappy. She loses weight and becomes pale. In the end, Piña dies.

Clearly the fable of Piña is not very subtle, being a simple allegory concerning a male abusing a female. The female ape was sad in her solitude. Upon receiving a male companion, she realized how much freedom she had before he arrived, since he was overbearing and abusive. She was not allowed to eat or play while he was around. In the end, her soul died from torment and abuse at the hands of her new mate. He stomped the life out of Piña, and she gave up on life. Like the other fables examined earlier, Piña has a moral. Whether the moral is that people need to be content with whatever life they might have, or that if one is unhappy single, he/she will never be happy as a couple, or perhaps it is better to live alone than badly accompanied, or that men will always try to dominate women—Pardo Bazán makes various points with the fable. In “Torn Lace” Bernardo never physically hits Micaela because he never had the opportunity, but Micaela can see the future and knows domestic violence when she sees it. His distorted face upon discovering the torn lace is the very picture of uncontrolled violence. As witnesses,

readers see his anger and understand the underlying tones. However, the audience does not experience the pain and journey seen in *Piña*, in which the abused female ape slowly loses all hope of escaping her dire situation. In “The Red Stockings,” readers witness Clodio’s anger and violent abuse. This story, however, is more horrifying and eye-opening than is “*Piña*” because the protagonists are human rather than apes. Since Pardo Bazán uses apes instead of humans, readers are able to focus on the abuse she suffers and witness the slow series of changes *Piña* undergoes rather than just a single violent moment. Upon first reading “Red Stockings” the violence (and possible incest) are disturbing; the story is an enlightening view into an all too prevalent abusive patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the story only exams one moment in Ildara’s life, and readers do not witness the slow mental breakdown that occurs over a period of time they see in “*Piña*. There is more to consider in Ildara’s life—her dreams, friends, plans for the future—but because we are only privy to about thirty minutes of her life, it remains bland and unknown. *Piña* is a firsthand example of the long-term toll that constant abuse takes on its victims. By the end of the story *Piña* is nothing more than a shell—she has lost her desire to live, play, and love. By using apes, Pardo Bazán is able to tell a longer, more tragic story, that affects thousands of women each day and actually humanizes the story of abuse, gives it a face, albeit a simian one.

Emilia Pardo Bazán states that: “freedom does not suit everyone, but only those who can enjoy it moderately” (Pardo Bazán PG). While specifically referencing *Piña*’s escape from her pen and the terror she causes in the house (breaking lamps, drinking oil, etc.), Pardo Bazán is making an insightful comment on the plight of women in the domestic circle. It is ridiculous that *Piña* was penned in the beginning. Ideally, she

would have been taken to a geographically suitable area and released into the wild. Humans, however, wanted to study her. They put her in a cage and watched her every move. When Piña escapes, it is her fault, and freedom is too much for her. Women in the 19th century were in the same situation as Piña. They were expected to stay home, cook, clean and tend to the family. When women, such as Pardo Bazán, left the home and entered the political and educational men had to compete with women, and the men were not happy. The prevalent opinion of the time was that women were not suited for freedom. Women did not understand how to moderately enjoy the “luxuries” they had with moderation and therefore were better suited simply to staying home and fulfilling their sexually stereotypical roles of mother and housekeeper. While fables are generally obvious about what they teach, the lessons regarding “Piña,” are more ambiguous. Pardo Bazán does not explicitly state that it is the captors’ fault that Piña is suffering, but the captors are obviously the scientist and business people who are vested financial interest in keeping Piña caged, just as the established traditional and convention patriarchy is interested in keeping women “caged” in the private sector while they occupy the public sector with all its privileges and freedoms. There is an unequal distribution of power between the captor and captives, between Piña’s captors and Piña. In the end, Piña is a metaphor for all women trapped in bad, violent relationships--living in a society that gives them no recourse for getting out of the bad marriage, even when their situation takes them to the point of dying.

The themes found in “Piña,” as well as those of the other short stories thus far examined, culminate in Pardo Bazán’s devastating story of domestic abuse, “Revolver.” The narrative encompasses elements that include a female narrator, the torment and the

threat of abuse, and the complete lack of female agency for the narrator, similar to that portrayed in “Piña,” due to the oppressive mature values of her male counterpart. By looking at this story, readers will understand the importance of Pardo Bazán’s politically-charged writings, and how she used narratives to make a profound statement on the status of women in nineteenth century Spain.

“Revolver” tells the story of a young wife, Flora and her unfortunate marriage to Reinaldo. Reinaldo was much older than the young woman and was incredibly jealous of his wife. Reinaldo is emotionally and verbally abusive to Flora, and eventually tells her that he has a revolver and will shoot her if she angers him. She is terrified, but because she has no recourse to external help of any kind—the police, justice, social services—she is unable to act. Reinaldo eventually dies in a horseback riding accident, and the wife learns, bitterly, that he never bought ammunition for the gun. Flora admits that she loved Reinaldo despite the abuse, and she announces “an unloaded revolver shot me, not in the head, but in the center of my heart” (Pardo Bazán 56). She is alluding to the mental torture she endured, never knowing if every day were her last. She lives in a continual state of fear from which she cannot free herself because the authorities, masculine authorities, would disregard her claims as hysterical and unwarranted, protecting the husband at all costs. It was a common practice up until 1975 and the death of Franco for the Spanish police to return a runaway wife to the husband for discipline.

Similar to “Torn Lace,” the female protagonist only conveys her story after the fact in the safety of a neutral social space for women, a spa. She has suffered little physical abuse, but the threat of murder has hung over head for years and she has had to live in constant fear of losing her life. The revolver is at once a psycho-sexual phallic

symbol which the husband has used to terrify his wife and a brutally real reminder that she could die at any moment as a whim of her husband. The emotional abuse she experiences is equal to that of Ildara in “Red Stockings.” Flora’s husband sees her as a sexual object, like the other male characters in previously analyzed stories understand women—especially in “Memento” and “First Love.” While “Revolver” itself is not a retelling of a particular, well-known story or fable, the situation it recounts is age-old. A woman has an oppressive husband, is metaphorically (and/or physically) beaten into submission by the husband, and eventually admits that she loved him through it all. The interesting take on the version of the tale is her acceptance that her husband killed her. The wife admits that she was shot by the empty revolver, yet stands by the fact that she loved him. Pardo Bazán makes an interesting statement with this situation. It is unacceptable for women to be abused and to stay in those relationships. By exaggerating the abuse in this story (death), she brings to light the extent of absurdity of these situations. Pardo Bazán also acknowledges, however, that the wife did not have the agency to leave. She did not have anywhere to go, and would not have been able to support herself without relying financially on her abusive husband.

Interestingly, the narrator notes that she “began to suspect that there was something more than the physical in her ruin. As a matter of fact, she spoke and expressed herself like someone who had suffered a good deal, and I know that the ills of the body, when not of imminent gravity, are usually not enough to produce such a wasting away, such extreme dejection” (Pardo Bazán 74). Pardo Bazán uses this third person to explain the difference between physical and emotional abuse. The narrator states that the wife was more dejected and withered than if she had a life threatening

disease. Pardo Bazán exposes the physical impact of the mental torment and abuse of the wife.

Finally, in the symbolism of the revolver, Pardo Bazán makes clear her stance on the lack of female agency in her society. The revolver represents the threat of abuse. As soon as the husband shows the wife the revolver, she begins dying. Flora loses her hopes of a better future and any confidence in herself from the day the revolver enters the scene. She begins losing her health at the sight of the revolver, and with that, she loses her beauty and youth. Once she begins to lose her beauty and youth, Flora also loses her value as a woman in patriarchal society. Through the symbol of the revolver, readers should understand why Pardo Bazán spent years writing numerous short stories about abuse. Domestic abuse, both mental and physical is ubiquitous and ongoing, and until women have their own agency to stand up and act for themselves, men will continue to abuse them. The social function of these stories which chronicle a series of sad cases is to remind readers of both sexes that this is an ongoing problem: in 2013, a hundred years and several regimes after Pardo Bazán with laws and social agencies on their side, 48 women were murdered in Spain by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends.<sup>1</sup>

The stories Emilia Pardo Bazán tells are incredibly important to both modern society and to the society in which she lived. Pardo Bazán used her short stories to push the limits on what was acceptable in her time. She confronted abuse, incest, female sexuality, gender stereotypes, and the patriarch. The author exposed these hard issues in order to heighten social consciousness. By pushing boundaries in her literary work, Pardo Bazan was able to gain freedoms for women. In our modern society, we see women like

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<sup>1</sup> <http://blog.corcases.com/violencia-de-genero-2013/>



Lady Gaga acting similarly. Lady Gaga dresses in extravagant costumes and says scandalous things to draw attention to herself. Her songs are about abuse and sexuality. Just as Pardo Bazan used her writing to lobby for women's rights, Lady Gaga uses music. With small exceptions, like Wendy Davis, women are largely still silent to issues of gender inequality. Topics such as incest are completely taboo in our culture. By using artistic mediums, women are able to speak things, both today and historically, that are not suitable for outright conversation. The work of these women is admirable, however, it is unlikely that gender inequalities and abuse will cease until the issues becomes discussable. In the 1800's Emilia Pardo Bazan resorted to allegories and fiction to discuss women's hardships. Today, the issues are still being discussed in a similar manner. Female agency has traveled a long way in the past centuries—and it is important to note the past so that we, males and females can focus our future efforts in order to help women achieve complete agency in their endeavors.

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