FAUSTIAN FIGURES: MODERNITY AND MALE (HOMO)SEXUALITIES IN SPANISH COMMERCIAL LITERATURE, 1900-1936

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FAUSTIAN FIGURES:
MODERNITY AND MALE (HOMO)SEXUALITIES IN
SPANISH COMMERCIAL LITERATURE, 1900-1936

Dissertation

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Jeffrey Zamostny

Lexington, Kentucky

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2012

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

FAUSTIAN FIGURES:
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I contend in this study that commercial novels and theater from early twentieth-century Spain often present male (homo)sexual characters as a point of constellation for anxieties regarding modernization in Madrid and Barcelona. In works by Jacinto Benavente, Josep Maria de Sagarra, El Caballero Audaz (José María Carretero), Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent, Carmen de Burgos, Álvaro Retana, Eduardo Zamacois, and Alfonso Hernández-Catá, concerns about technological and socioeconomic change converge upon hustlers and blackmailers, queer seducers, and chaste inverts. I examine these figures alongside an allegorical interpretation of Goethe’s Faust in Marshall Berman’s book All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (1982) in order to foreground their varying responses to modern innovation. They alternately sell themselves to prosper under consumer capitalism, seduce others into savoring the pleasures of city life, or fall tragically to the conflicting pressures of tradition and change. In the process, they reveal the fear and enthusiasm of their creators vis-à-vis rapid urbanization, fluctuating class hierarchies, the commercialization of art, and the medicalization of sex from the turn of the nineteenth century to the Spanish Civil War.

From a methodological standpoint, I argue that close readings of commercial works are worthwhile for what they reveal about the discursive framing of modernity and male (homo)sexualities in Spain in the early 1900s. Hence, I use techniques of literary analysis previously reserved for canonical writers such as Federico García Lorca and Luis Cernuda to discuss texts produced by their bestselling contemporaries, none of whom has been equally scrutinized by subsequent criticism. Existing scholarship on modernity and sexuality in Spain and abroad helps contextualize my detailed interpretations. Although my project is not a sustained exercise in comparative literature, I do situate Spanish works within historical and literary trends beyond Spain so as to acknowledge the interplay of transnational and local concerns surrounding modern change and sexual customs. By considering the primary texts in relation to varying temporal and geographic contexts, the dissertation aims to be of interest to a readership in and outside Hispanism, and to supplement important studies of modernity, (homo)sexualities, and literature that overlook Spain.
KEYWORDS: early twentieth-century Spain, modernity, male homosexuality, mass culture, Álvaro Retana

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January 26, 2012
FAUSTIAN FIGURES:
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January 20, 2012
To my family

To Susan Larson, Thomas Deveny, and Dayna Lane
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Chapter One

Introduction

faustian, adj. Of or pertaining to Johann Faust (in Latinized form Johannes Faustus), a wandering astrologer and necromancer who lived in Germany c1488-1541 and was reputed to have sold his soul to the Devil: later, the hero of dramas by Marlowe and Goethe.

figure, n. I.6. A person as an object of mental contemplation; a personage.

II. Represented form; image, likeness.

—Oxford English Dictionary

José-María is standing on the platform in a subway station in Paris. Moments ago, the jostling of the crowd on the train made a paper crinkle in his coat pocket. He opened the envelope, read the letter, and stepped out of the locomotive. Now he must make a vital decision. On the one hand, he could keep his date with the young man waiting for him at the exit of the station. They met recently while José-María was cruising the city streets for a lover after many years of chastity at home in a provincial Spanish port. Alternately, he could break the appointment and heed the advice of the missive, a reminder from his brother-in-law about preserving the reputation of his aristocratic family. The options are equally problematic, and José-María seeks a way out. When the headlights of the next train illuminate the platform, he has positioned himself near the edge in order to simulate an accident. He falls onto the tracks to the alarmed shouts of the surrounding multitude.

The scene is the tragic denouement of the novel El ángel de Sodoma [The Angel of Sodom], published in Madrid in 1928 by the Spanish-Cuban writer Alfonso
Hernández-Catá. It powerfully elucidates the imbrication of modernity and male (homo)sexualities found in commercial literature from early twentieth-century Spain, the topic of *Faustian Figures*. This project draws upon Marshall Berman’s meditation on modern experience via Goethe’s *Faust* (1772-1832) to examine how literary texts situate male (homo)sexualities in debates concerning modernity.¹ *El ángel de Sodoma* intervenes in these polemics by constructing a distinction between traditional and modern ways of life. According to its binary logic, tradition is synonymous with the honor code of a small Spanish port, a semi-feudal space where José-María must contain his desire for other men to avoid damaging his family name. Modernity is located in Paris, whose boulevards invite the protagonist to get lost in the crowd and seek anonymous homosexual encounters. The distance between the two is spanned by the train, an index of technological modernization, and the vehicle for the final tragic reversal. After transporting José-María to the French capital and to the brink of satisfying his same-sex desire, the locomotive helps him uphold a heteronormative sexual regime in his birthplace at the cost of his own life. In short, the train both facilitates and crushes possibilities for homosexual contact for the protagonist.

José-María’s story recalls other narratives of its time in the way it defines modernity and tradition through a series of contrasts. In addition to the oppositions between France and Spain, metropolis and province, and anonymity and distinction mobilized by Hernández-Catá, writers like Jacinto Benavente, Josep Maria de Sagarra, El Caballero Audaz (José María Carretero), Carmen de Burgos, Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent, Álvaro Retana, and Eduardo Zamacois explore conceptual divides between scientific reason and religious faith, work and leisure, or economic and symbolic capital. These
binaries do not line up in a predictable way when comparing their texts, nor do they always withstand analysis in individual works. As a result, it is futile to look for a single understanding of modernity in Spanish commercial literature from the early 1900s, or to ascribe truth value to any particular dichotomy. It is more useful to treat modernity as a dynamic construction and a site of struggle in texts from this period.

_Faustian Figures_ is concerned with tracing the diverse views on modernity in the works under study. Yet it also contends that all the primary texts are caught up in an overarching historical process laid bare with great force in the conclusion of _El ángel de Sodoma_. Like the train in the Parisian subway, modernization both opened and closed chances for male (homo)sexualities to emerge as visible and viable life options in Spain from the turn of the century to the Civil War. Commercial literature of the era registered and contributed to this dynamic by construing modernity in a number of ways, but always with a combination of fear and enthusiasm for modernization. In the texts included below, male (homo)sexualities are a crucial point of constellation for these conflicting anxieties. Time and again, concerns about consumer capitalism, urbanization, fluctuating class hierarchies, and scientific reason converge upon hustlers and blackmailers, queer seducers, and chaste inverts. For reasons that shall become apparent shortly, these characters merit the adjective _faustian_. They provide the structure for the following chapters, each of which draws upon and extends inquiries into modernization and modernity, male (homo)sexualities, and commercial literature, on a theoretical level and in the context of Spain between 1900 and 1936.

Critical discussions of modernization and modernity invariably signal the difficulty of defining these terms and the danger of associating them with universalizing
notions of unabated progress (Barriuso 14-17; Felski 11-15; Graham and Labanyi 10-12). For my purposes, modernization refers to technological, socioeconomic, and political changes that modify the material conditions of human existence: “scientific and technological innovation, the industrialization of production, rapid urbanization, an ever expanding capitalist market, the development of the nation-state, and so on” (Felski 13). Far from being a continuous process of improvement over ostensibly outmoded tradition, modernization takes place unevenly across time and space. Although the rapid acceleration of modern change in the late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries makes that period key for studies of modernization in Europe and North America, even then innovation had a disparate impact on people according to factors such as their socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, race, and nationality. Modernization implied prosperity, instability, and misery in varying doses for different individuals.

Marshall Berman’s study All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (1982) captures the ambiguities created by the manifold effects of material change. For Berman, modernity is “a mode of vital experience” riddled by “paradox and contradiction” (15, 13). In response to the shock of innovations wrought by modernization, modern people are at once “alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and to hold on to something real even as everything melts” (13-14). Ironically, to be modern is also to cling to the past, “to be anti-modern” (14). By insisting that modernity involves multi-directional impulses towards change and stasis, this uncompromisingly dialectical definition fulfills the imperative voiced by other scholars to destabilize “the false opposition of modernity and tradition” (Graham and
Labanyi 11). In doing so, it explains why efforts to sustain the dichotomy are varied and conflicting in texts that rely on binary logic, including those studied here. Berman’s definition of modernity also draws attention to excitement and misgivings \textit{vis-à-vis} modernization in commercial literature from pre-Civil War Spain dealing with male (homo)sexualities.

Delineating the nature of these attitudes in the works under analysis requires research into the historical conditions of modern experience in Spain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recent contributions to Hispanism dispute the longstanding notion that modernity in Spain was belated and insufficient (Delgado et. al.; Ginger; Larson \textit{Constructing} 20-23; Larson and Woods 4-5). This dubious comparison with Britain, France, and Germany presents two obstacles to evaluating the Spanish case. First, it fails to acknowledge that modernization involved parallel developments in major cities in Spain and abroad, to the point that “Madrid and its myriad representations” between 1900 and 1936 “are remarkably similar to those of other major urban centers of the time” (Larson \textit{Constructing} 23). Additionally, it perpetuates a simplistic vision of modernity as “a product peculiarly of the efforts of a culturally distinct elite group of nations” (Ginger 124). This notion occludes the way modernization produced uneven results in central Europe, not to mention on a wider scale. Reconceptualizing modernity as a network of transnational processes marked by the “mixed speeds and spaces” of modernization helps see historical change across Spain’s diverse geographic, linguistic, and cultural terrain “as a series of inflections and components of wider Atlantic and world developments” (Larson and Woods 1; Ginger 125).
The present project supports current attempts to rethink modernity in Spain in several ways. In order to provide contextually sensitive interpretations of the works at hand, I read them alongside historical studies showing that material changes associated with modernization took place in Spain, especially in Madrid and Barcelona. To name a few representative statistics, the population of Madrid grew by 80 percent between 1900 and 1935, expanding from 540,000 to 953,000 inhabitants, and that of Barcelona grew by 87 percent to surpass one million city dwellers. Between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of Spaniards employed in agriculture dropped from 67 to 47.4 percent, while the numbers for industry and the service sector increased to 31.2 and 21.3 percent, respectively (Aubert 38-39). The first Spanish rail line opened in 1848 and connected Barcelona and Mataró, and the second joined Madrid and Aranjuez in 1851 (Resina 11-19). Forty five years later, La llegada de un tren [The Arrival of a Train] was the first film shown in Spain (Larson and Woods 9-10). In it, the Lumière brothers exemplified how new technologies including cinema, photography, radio, and improved printing capacities could facilitate the mass reproduction of images of modern life around the turn of the century (Aubert and Desvois; Salaün 139-66). Scholars rightly emphasize the gulf between the appearance of prosperity communicated by many such representations and the reality that large sectors of Spain’s urban and rural population provided the labor for capitalist modernization without receiving access to its benefits (Larson and Woods 6; Magnien “Ciudad” 136). Still, texts studied in this project show that commercial culture could express reservations about darker sides of modernity also explored by Spanish intellectuals in the wake of the loss of empire in 1898, ongoing colonial wars in Africa,
and the crisis of the liberal regime after 1917, as well as by European writers more generally.³

Although this dissertation does not claim to be a sustained exercise in comparative literature, it seeks to situate Spanish works from the early 1900s within historical and literary trends beyond Spain so as to acknowledge the interplay of transnational and local concerns regarding modernity and male (homo)sexualities. In Chapter 2, I draw on feminist reflections about the female prostitute in writings by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin to see how hustlers and blackmailers in texts by Benavente, Sagarra, and El Caballero Audaz become a means of evaluating modernization in Madrid and Barcelona. Chapter 3 reads narratives by Burgos, Hoyos, and Retana in conjunction with debates about Decadent literature and sexualities among writers such as Jean Lorrain, Oscar Wilde, and Max Nordau. Finally, allusions to science in novels by Zamacois and Hernández-Catá in Chapter 4 respond to initiatives in sex reform and eugenics whose development across national borders culminated in the World League for Sex Reform and its Spanish chapter, founded in 1928 and 1932. By considering the primary texts in relation to varying temporal and geographic contexts, this project aims to be of interest to a readership in and outside Hispanism and to supplement important studies of modernity, (homo)sexualities, and literature that overlook Spain.⁴

Organizing the following chapters using Berman’s reading of Goethe’s Faust is one means of examining Spanish works within a transnational panorama. All That is Solid Melts into Air elaborates its dialectical understanding of modernity through reference to fears and longings towards modernization in canonical works by Goethe,
Baudelaire, Karl Marx, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, among others. The analysis of Faust appears early in the book and interprets the play in allegorical terms (37-86). Berman argues that Faust, Mephistopheles, and Gretchen represent three positions available to individuals as they “become subjects as well as objects of modernization” (5). While Faust’s pact with the devil displays his willingness to embrace change at any cost in order to achieve his goals within a nascent capitalist economy, Mephistopheles is the force of modernization itself, with all its pleasures and risks. These dangers are especially acute for Gretchen, who succumbs to the pressure of conflicting loyalties to Faust and the traditions of her small-town milieu.  

*Faustian Figures* is structured around an analogy between Goethe’s protagonists and characters in Spanish commercial literature. I call male prostitutes and extortionists studied in Chapter 2 *little Fausts*, for their interactions with wealthy clients and victims trivialize Faust’s liaison with Mephistopheles. Like Goethe’s character, these men are willing to enter perilous relationships with men and women to prosper under capitalism; unlike him, their intention is not to improve human existence on a grand scale, but to consolidate their own place in volatile class hierarchies. Chapter 3 casts Retana and figures in his short novels as *Mephistophelean seducers*, individuals who take advantage of their privileged socioeconomic position to draw others into city life and consumerism, both economic and (homo)sexual. Just as Mephistopheles offers Faust “money, speed, sex and power,” these characters develop a queer pedagogy to market modernization (Berman 50). Finally, chaste inverts in Chapter 4 occupy *Gretchen’s place* between time-tested and modern ways of life, neither of which allows them to act upon their desire for other men. José-María’s suicide in *El ángel de Sodoma* recalls the demise of
Goethe’s heroine, whose refusal to flee execution is another tragic solution to the dilemma posed by a perceived choice between tradition and change.

If I linger on Berman’s interpretation of *Faust*, it is because his allegory and Spanish literature illuminate each other by underlining salient themes in the texts, as well as important omissions. Although some academics would like to endow Goethe with “an inviolable image” of grandeur as a “figurehead” of “canonical” literature, *Faust* first became known in Spain among middle- and low-brow readers (Tobin viii; Kuzniar 31). Prior to the appearance of Spanish translations for an intellectual audience around 1859, a serialized rehash had already been published by the progressive journal *Las Noticias* [The News] (1856) (Pageard 35). Titles by authors studied below testify to the Faust legend’s persistent appeal in mass culture in the early 1900s. “La noche de Walpurgis” [“Walpurgis Night”] (Hoyos, 1913), *Mefistófela* [Ms. Mephistopheles] (Benavente, 1918), and *El tercer Fausto* [The Third Faust] (Hernández-Catá, 1924) clearly allude to the story, and *El hombre que vendió su cuerpo al diablo* [The Man who Sold his Body to the Devil] (Hoyos, 1917) has Faustian overtones. These works confirm that *Faust* is not as far removed from Spanish commercial literature as it could seem at first glance. Although my primary texts yield few direct references to the play, they feature figures whose modern experiences come into sharp relief against Berman’s ideas about Goethe.

Analyzing these works in tandem with Berman also has the advantage of enriching the latter’s argument about modernity. The theorist mentions sex and eroticism throughout his discussion of *Faust*. He explains that the title character wants a “more erotic” connection with the world at the beginning of the drama, and that Mephistopheles helps him become “more masculine” and “more sexy” (42, 50). But Berman overlooks
scenes cited in queer interpretations, including the one where the devil loses the protagonist’s soul while admiring an attractive male angel (Goethe l. 11794-11800; Falkner; Tobin 132-46). Moreover, he misses opportunities to transform passing references to sexuality into a nuanced examination of the relationship of sex and gender to modern life.

Literary scholar Rita Felski opens *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) with a critique of Berman’s gender politics. She believes that he installs a universalized male as the subject of modern experience by developing his concept of modernity from an “exclusively masculine pantheon” of texts (3). One place this happens is in the Faust allegory, where Felski finds “an equation of masculinity with modernity and of femininity with tradition” (2). In Chapter 4, I question the extent to which Berman actually makes Gretchen represent a “closed, narrow world” (Felski 2). Nevertheless, I agree that his work has the potential to perpetuate a (hetero)sexist view of modernity in the absence of complementary analyses more attuned to sexual and gender imbalances. By showing how fictional hustlers and extortionists, seducers, and inverters adopt subject positions comparable to those in Berman’s reading, this project expands his interpretation and insists that male (homo)sexualities are among the “possibilities and pitfalls, allures and impasses” that accompany modernization (Berman 229).

The notion that material change in the late 1800s altered sexual options for modern people emerges in texts by scholars working with varied disciplinary vocabularies on different countries and regions. Historian John D’Emilio contends that the expansion of capitalism in the United States facilitated and stigmatized the development of “a lesbian and gay male identity” by diminishing the importance of the
family as a means of economic survival while at the same time reinvesting it with significance as a source of emotional fulfillment (474). For historian Lawrence Birken, the growth of sexology in Europe acknowledged and sought to regulate “idiosyncratic desire” or “polymorphous perversion” during a period of transition from productivist to consumerist economies (12, 52). Sociologist Henning Bech explains that “modern societies” render homosexuality at once present and absent by denying the possibility of homoeroticism between all people through reference to a sub-set of “homosexuals” (38, 84). Further, literary critic Dianne Chisholm reads urban novels set in North America and Europe to trace how capitalist development of city space involves “[t]he making, and unmaking, of queer society and culture” (11). It is not my aim to reconcile divergences between these scholars, some of whose work receives attention later on. Rather, I cite them to lend credence to the thesis that modernization in Spain had ambivalent effects for the social organization of sexuality, and especially of male (homo)sexualities.

This term demarcates the range of sexual behaviors and identities in the primary texts examined below. Following Sylvia Molloy and Robert McKee Irwin’s anthology Hispanisms and Homosexualities (1998), I use the plural to stress that literature from pre-Civil War Spain does not present a unified model of homosexual relations. I add parentheses to the prefix homo to indicate that some of these bonds, like “(homo)sexual practices and identities” in New York between 1890 and 1940, resist neat classification on “a hetero-homosexual axis” (Chauncey 31, 65). Fictional hustlers perform sexual favors for rich men and women in order to achieve financial prosperity. They see their behaviors as business transactions rather than as indicators of a homo- or bisexual identity. In contrast, invertidos [inverts] believe they are victims of a natural pathology
and consider their “defect” central to their sense of self. Their desire for males takes the form of the “heterosexual instinct” filtered through “an abnormal organic prism,” since they consider themselves females trapped in male bodies (Birken 103). Effeminacy is also important for locas [fairies] or members of the tercer sexo [third sex], but less as a congenital “shortcoming” than a willful performance. These aristocrats eagerly dispute bourgeois gender norms by blurring the bounds of masculinity and femininity and pursuing cross-class relations with proletarian men. Discussions in subsequent chapters historicize the labels mentioned here and elaborate on the overlapping configurations of sex, gender, and desire to which they refer.

Academic uses of the word queer condense the complications raised by the construct (homo)sexualities. Queer theory emerged in the English-speaking academy in the early 1990s as scholars and activists appropriated the insult to vindicate an array of sexualities at odds with the heteronormative imperative for bodies to fall into the hierarchical binaries male/female, masculine/feminine, and hetero/homosexual. Since then, queer has become synonymous with resistance to culturally instituted norms that perpetuate social inequality on the basis of sexuality, gender, class, race, and other variables (Hall; Sullivan). Hispanicists Nancy Vosburg and Jacky Collins note that the term has had a limited reception among contemporary activists in Spain, many of whom rally under the GLTB banner (11). Moreover, Alfredo Martínez Expósito argues that versions of queer theory developed in Anglo-American literary studies should be used with caution in analyses of Spanish texts if scholars are to theorize Spanish idioms on (homo)sexualities (11-72).
Certainly, the term *queer* was not in circulation in Spain between 1900 and 1936. In this study, I find it less urgent to deploy the word than to come to grips with the vast lexicon that does appear in Spanish commercial literature, memoirs, and medical and legal tracts of the time. However, I draw on the work of queer theorists where appropriate, and I define and use *queer* at length in Chapter 3 to acknowledge how Retana and his *locas* anticipate deconstructive approaches to sexuality through their deliberately anti-bourgeois gender performances. Although hustlers, blackmailers, and inverters also violate normative identity categories, *queer* is an awkward label for them, since their foremost goals are to establish themselves in a comfortable middle class and to perform bourgeois masculinity.

Another reason why *male (homo)sexualities* is the best descriptor of my subject is that I interpret commercial texts that feature sexual contact between males, however problematic the identification. Studies on homosexuality often justify their focus on men on the premise that they have been able to produce “a more extensive and visible culture” than lesbians due to power imbalances between males and females which necessitate separate investigations of the sexes (Chauncey 27; see also Mira *De Sodoma* 32). Without repudiating these explanations, I recognize that my own attention to males could prolong “the invisibility of women’s relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual, throughout history,” not least in Spain (Vosburg and Collins 9). To mitigate this risk, I draw on feminist insights on gender and sexuality, examine interactions between male and female characters, and study a novel by Carmen de Burgos. I also refer readers interested in female (homo)sexualities in Spanish literature of the early 1900s to Ángela Ena Bordonada’s valuable prologue to her edition of the short novel *Zezé* (Ángeles...
Vicente, 1909), the narrative of a singer about her sexual initiation with a female friend at a boarding school. Book-length works by Inmaculada Pertusa Seva, Raquel Platero, Jill Robbins, and Vosburg and Collins focus on lesbianism from the 1960s onwards.

Important previous scholarship provides the bedrock for the present study of male (homo)sexualities in commercial literature prior to the Civil War. Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García offer a perceptive analysis of medicine, politics, and pedagogy in their book ‘Los Invisibles’: A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1939 (2007). Nerea Aresti does the same for law and journalism in a chapter on homosexuality in Masculinidades en tela de juicio: Hombres y género en el primer tercio del siglo XX [Masculinities in Crisis: Men and Gender in the First Third of the Twentieth Century] (2010) (179-252). These books provide crucial information about a 1928 law against homosexual acts opposed by Gregorio Marañón, a self-proclaimed medical authority on sexuality in the 1920s and 30s. Both the legislation and Marañón are points of reference in each of my chapters. Cleminson and Vázquez García also mention novels by Retana and Hernández-Catá, but they do not conduct readings informed by literary theory.

Alberto Mira’s volume De Sodoma a Chueca: Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX [From Sodom to Chueca: A Cultural History of Homosexuality in Spain in the Twentieth Century] (2003, 2007) goes further in this respect. In spite of its title, it concentrates exclusively on male (homo)sexualities in medical, legal, and literary texts. Sections I and II mention all the authors studied below except Sagarra, and offer readings of Hoyos, Retana, Zamacois, and Hernández-Catá to
which I attend in due course. At the same time, Mira’s encyclopedic project prevents him from situating commercial texts in center stage. Apart from research on individual works and writers cited throughout *Faustian Figures*, other studies dealing with male (homo)sexualities in literature between 1900 and 1936 discuss poetry and drama by Federico García Lorca and Luis Cernuda to the exclusion of bestselling authors of the time. Analyses of non-canonical texts center on the novel *Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* [*The Passion and Death of Father Deusto*], published in Madrid in 1924 by the Chilean Augusto D’Halmar. The work’s dense *modernista* prose and complex Biblical symbolism made it unlikely reading for a mass audience. It is not to deny the significance of these studies to observe that their attention to relatively elite writers marginalizes the contributions of mass culture to debates about modernity and male (homo)sexualities. I single out commercial literature to provide a backdrop for understanding more canonical texts, and to show that this body of work merits interest on literary grounds.

As used here, *commercial literature* designates a range of mass cultural narrative and theater. Mass culture is comprised of artifacts that have renounced the “aura” commonly assigned to “unique” or “original” art prior to the expansion of mechanical reproduction in the mid-nineteenth century. These forms replace “cult value” with “exhibition value” through their integration into a capitalist market and their wide availability to a public stratified into multiple classes (Benjamin “The Work” 1168-73). Pioneering contributions to Spanish Cultural Studies question sharp distinctions between mass culture and its popular and elite counterparts, pre-industrial folk culture and high art insistent upon retaining a quasi-sacred aura (Graham and Labanyi 6-9; Labanyi 2-6;
Technological innovation promotes “hybridized forms” between cultural categories, even as some critics struggle to preserve a “great divide” between them (Labanyi 12; Huyssen). One example of hybridity in literature studied here involves narratives by Retana or Hoyos that juxtapose aesthetic conventions of Decadence, the epitome of art for art’s sake, and costumbrismo, the representation of popular social types. This type of amalgam was typical of texts sold in kiosks to a mass readership in the early twentieth century.

Such heterogeneity signals that commercial literature of the time was varied in terms of its content, format, and audience. Of my primary texts, short novels by El Caballero Audaz, Burgos, and Retana formed part of literary collections with large weekly print runs. Their low prices, illustrations, and brief chapters made them accessible even to newly literate consumers. Long, unillustrated novels by Zamacois and Hernández-Catá appealed to a more educated middle-class readership, though the authors became familiar to a wider public through their participation in short novel series. Despite its relatively high price, Josep Maria de Sagarra’s two-volume novel Vida privada [Private Life] (1932) also reached an ample audience in Barcelona due to marketing designed to heighten anticipation of its inquiry into the intimacy of the city’s socialites. Lastly, De muy buena familia [Of Very Good Stock] (1931) was one of the realist dramas through which Benavente once delighted and antagonized his bourgeois public. Aside from their portrayals of male (homo)sexualities in a modern context, what unites these works is that they had a widespread reception in the early 1900s, notwithstanding their obscurity in contemporary Hispanism.
The majority of existing studies of mass culture in Spain between 1900 and 1936 take the form of catalogues of authors and titles; descriptions of material characteristics, themes, and aesthetic trends; and biographies of particular figures. Given the dispersal of commercial material in used bookstores, these contributions lay a necessary groundwork for further scholarship. They have been used to great avail by Christine Rivalan Guégo in her books Lecturas gratas o ¿fábrica de lectores? [Pleasant Readings, or, Factory of Readers?] (2007) and Fruición-Ficción: Novelas y novelas cortas en España (1894-1936) [Delightful Fiction: Novels and Short Novels in Spain (1894-1936)] (2008). The first examines the readership and marketing techniques of commercial novels, while the second evaluates their formal and thematic dimensions, including erotic content. Other works treating gender and sexuality in mass culture of the period turn to the cuplé [torch song] and erotica. The website accompanying Maite Zubiaurre’s forthcoming book Cultures of the Erotic in Spain, 1898-1936 provides a generous archive of postcards, magazines, and novels replete with male and female (homo)eroticism (Zubiaurre Virtual). One reason why I foreground the term commercial literature over mass culture in my own work is to indicate that much of the visual material covered by Zubiaurre falls outside its purview. In spite of my attention to visual components of my primary texts, I reserve prolonged analysis of male (homo)sexualities in film, music, and other cultural forms for future research. Another reason for the term is that I want to underline my commitment to providing detailed, literary readings of selected works.

To that end, this study examines how faustian characters emerge at the juncture of other figures deployed by commercial literature; namely, linguistic and conceptual resources intimately linked to questions of form and genre. Though structured around
concrete human types, the ensuing chapters eschew narrow character analysis to see how protagonists relate to wider concerns in the texts, both thematic and formal. In Chapter 2, I highlight generic specificities of bourgeois realist drama, Naturalist novels, and short, erotic narratives to explain divergent portrayals of hustlers and extortionists in *De muy buena familia*, *Vida privada*, and *Bestezuela de placer* [*Little Beast of Pleasure*] (1922), a short novel by El Caballero Audaz. Along the way, I note that allegory and *mise en abyme* heighten tensions between visibility and concealment, curiosity and disgust, and moral distance and complicity in the textual representations of male prostitution and homosexual blackmail. Chapter 3 looks at ambivalent attitudes towards literary Decadence and queer sexualities in Hoyos’s stories *Aromas de nardo indiano que mata y de ovonia que enloquece* [*Aromas of Fatal Indian Spikenard and Maddening Hovenia*] (1927), and the short novels *El veneno del arte* [*The Venom of Art*] (1910) and *El veneno de la aventura* [*The Venom of Adventure/the Affair*] (1924), by Burgos and Retana, respectively. The works construct Decadence as a *pharmakon*, a drug that both kills and cures with its celebration of queer desire. After distinguishing Retana’s particularities vis-à-vis his contemporaries, I show how his short novels *Mi novia y mi novio* [*My Girlfriend and My Boyfriend*] (1923), *Flor del mal* [*Flower of Evil*] (1924), and *A Sodoma en tren botijo* [*To Sodom by Slow Train*] (1933) use self-reflexivity to lay bare the program of seduction and instruction whereby they hope to guide readers to join queer subcultures in modern Madrid and Barcelona. Structural analysis prevails in Chapter 4 in response to the strong generic affiliations of the novels *La antorcha apagada* [*The Extinguished Torch*] (1935) by Zamacois and *El ángel de Sodoma* [*The Angel of Sodom*] (1928) by Hernández-Catá. Whereas the former draws upon techniques
of the *roman à thèse* to make the life story of a chaste invert an argument for the triumph of scientific modernity over religious tradition, the latter alludes to Aristotelian notions of tragedy to confront its protagonist with an impossible choice between Paris and the province, change and tradition.

Clearly, these readings depend on an eclectic theoretical apparatus open to the insights of narratology, structuralism, and poststructuralism. This procedural diversity correlates to that of commercial literature and male (homo)sexualities. Their plurality renders a uniform, linear methodology unserviceable. Rather than reading the texts chronologically in search of thematic and aesthetic development, I weave them into a historicized web to draw out their continuities and ruptures; whence the recurrence of texts and motifs in every chapter: bodies and money, medicine and the law, trains and cities, self-reflexivity. In my conclusion, I broaden my scope by observing the persistence of faustian figures as a point of intersection in polemics regarding (post)modernity in literature from post-Franco Spain. I also argue that reflections on male (homo)sexualities in commercial literature of the early twentieth century can be useful for socially engaged critics to restore a sense of fear and longing to narratives of progress in contemporary Spain that would prefer to reduce modernity to a complacent acceptance of capitalist spectacle.

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Chapter One Notes

1 Andy Merrifield characterizes Marshall Berman as an urban theorist who promotes “a Marxism that is melodic and ironic, yet somehow loud, rough, and sexual, too” (157). I return to the last adjective later in the introduction.

2 For historical and critical studies of modernization in Spain in the early twentieth century, see Carlos Serrano and Serge Salaün, as well as companion volumes by Ángeles Barrio Alonso, and Ana Aguado and Mª Dolores Ramos. Susan Larson (Constructing 9-67) writes on Madrid, and Joan Ramon Resina and Alejandro Sánchez on Barcelona.

3 Carlos Barriuso analyzes discourses on modernity concerning nation-building, empire, and aesthetics in works by the canonical intellectuals Miguel de Unamuno, Ángel Ganivet, and Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. Spaces of intellectual debate in Madrid such as the Junta para Ampliación de Estudios [Committee on the Expansion of Studies] and the Residencia de Estudiantes [Student Residence] are at the core of Álvaro Ribagorda’s investigation of Spain’s “caminos de la modernidad” [roads to modernity]. On Spain’s political development in the early 1900s, see Barrio Alonso.

4 Studies that initially drew my attention to the nexus of modernity, gender and sexuality, and literature include books by Joseph Allen Boone, Dianne Chisholm, Rita Felski, Deborah L. Parsons, Michael Trask, and Michael Tratner. Cited elsewhere in this project, they do not examine the Spanish context.

5 Readings of Faust by Germanists coincide with Berman’s allegory while placing Goethe’s play and its sources in a thicker historical context. See Virgil Nemoianu and Jeffrey Barnouw.

6 I translate loca as fairy throughout this project in light of George Chauncey’s analysis of the latter word as it was used in New York City between 1890 and 1940. During that time, fairy designated “men who dressed or behaved” in what could be considered “a flamboyantly effeminate manner” (Chauncey 16). Effeminacy is also central to the gender performances of Spanish locas, as discussed in Chapter 3.

7 Since “the closet” is a relatively recent construct in Spain, there is a need for studies like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet (1990) on Spanish idioms. Alfredo Martínez Expósito offers an epistemology of “la acera de enfrente” [the other side of the street], a phrase used to identify people who “entienden” [understand] or are open to same-sex encounters (Escrituras torcidas 64-72; Bergmann and Smith). For another major statement of queer theory from Spain, see Ricardo Llamas.

8 A brief history by Albert Ferrarons condenses Alberto Mira’s 615-page volume (Ferrarons refers to Mira’s text as the “Bible” at the base of his own project [18]). Despite reservations expressed in my conclusion, the popularizing work is a good introduction to the history of male (homo)sexualities in Spain for readers unfamiliar with the topic.

9 For studies on Federico García Lorca foregrounding questions of homosexuality, see Enrique Álvarez (33-90), Ian Gibson, Ángel Sahuquillo, and John K. Walsh. John Binding’s monograph Lorca: The Gay Imagination (1985) has not been well received by Hispanists. On Luis Cernuda, see Álvarez (81-126), Philip Martin-Clark, and Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez.

10 Cleminson and Vázquez García (‘Los Invisibles’ 204-07), David William Foster (33-37), Mira (De Sodoma 122-28), Sylvia Molloy, and Alfredo Villanueva-Collado reflect on Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto in relationship to homosexuality.

11 I cite relevant studies of mass culture throughout my text. For key descriptions and catalogues of Spanish theater between 1918 and 1931, see Dru Dougherty and María Francisca Vilches de Frutos.
Alberto Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa provides a similar source for short novel collections. Individual catalogues exist for *El Cuento Semanal* (Magnien et. al.), *El Libro Popular* (Correa Ramón), *La Novela Corta* (Mogín-Martín), *La Novela Semanal* (Fernández Gutiérrez), *La Novela de Hoy* (Precioso and Martínez-Arnaldos; Labrador Ben et. al.), and *La Novela Mundial* (Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa and Santamaría Barceló). For major biographies and critical studies of the authors included in this study, see Mariano de Paco and Francisco Javier Díez de Revenga, Lluís Permanyer (*Sagarra vist pels seus íntims*), Antonio López Hidalgo, María del Carmen Alfonso García, Concepción Núñez Rey (*Carmen de Burgos*), Luis Antonio de Villena (*El ángel*), Luis S. Granjel (*Eduardo Zamacois*), and Uva de Aragón.

12 On the *couplé*, see Pepa Anastasio and Serge Salaün. Lily Litvak and Maite Zubiaurre (“Serrallos” and “Velocipedismo”) discuss women’s place in erotic culture.

13 M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham write that “[f]igurative language is a conspicuous departure from what competent users of a language apprehend as the standard meanings of words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Figures are sometimes described as primarily poetic, but they are integral to the functioning of language and indispensable to all modes of discourse.” They include figures of thought, where “words or phrases are used in a way that effects a conspicuous change in what we take to be their standard meaning,” and figures of speech, in which “the departure from standard usage is not primarily in the meaning of the words, but in the order or syntactical pattern of the words” (118-19).
Chapter Two

Little Fausts: Modernity, Hustling, and Homosexual Blackmail in Commercial Drama and Narrative

—Es posible que me lleve el demonio; ¡pero me lleva en automóvil!

[‘It’s possible that I’m going with the devil, but he’s taking me by car!’]

—El Caballero Audaz, Bestezuela de placer (58)

Benjamín Leira’s reflections as he allows himself to be chauffeured through Madrid by a dandified admirer in El Caballero Audaz’s short novel Bestezuela de placer [Little Beast of Pleasure] (1922) condense the attitudes adopted by male prostitutes and blackmailers in commercial novels and plays from early twentieth-century Spain. Like other young male characters who take payment for either sex or silence about sex, Benjamín acknowledges the danger of peddling his physical charms to a Decadent aristocrat whose mellifluous cooing and eager fondling may signal a lurking evil. At the same time, the enticement of cars, clothing, money, and a home off the streets provides sufficient motive for Benjamín to pact with the dandy in exchange for access to the fruits of capitalist modernization.

In the works by Jacinto Benavente (1866-1954), Josep Maria de Sagarra (1894-1961), and El Caballero Audaz (José María Carretero, 1888-1951) to be studied in this chapter, entrance into an expanding consumer economy with guarantees of socioeconomic prosperity in an otherwise unstable class hierarchy constitutes a central goal for male characters who engage in prostitution and extortion. Whether from the provinces, Madrid, or Barcelona, from the working class, the bourgeoisie, or a crumbling aristocracy, all the characters to be considered here exploit their bodies with wealthy men
and women in order to achieve the material comfort and social prestige made possible by modern technological and economic advances.

The nexus of hustlers, blackmailers, and modernity in commercial Spanish texts from the 1920s and 30s harks back to a fascination with prostitution in the literature of nineteenth-century Europe. As Hispanist Akiko Tsuchiya notes, rapid industrialization and urbanization in capital cities such as Paris led to the appearance of texts featuring mercenary sex in the 1830s and 40s. As the century wore on, there was a shift between the treatment of prostitution in Romantic works by the likes of Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue, and Naturalist novels by Émile Zola. While the former tend to idealize prostitutes and to “redeem” them through suffering and self-abnegation, the latter construct them as a social ill in desperate need of a cure (Tsuchiya 162). In either case, prostitutes in canonical works are generally women.

This gender imbalance also affects theoretical reflections on prostitution and modernity wherein an archetypal female prostitute serves as the foremost emblem for the commodification of sexuality under consumer capitalism. Feminist literary critic Dianne Chisholm writes that Walter Benjamin’s observations in *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940) and his musings on Charles Baudelaire canonize the French poet’s female streetwalker as “the supreme allegory of commodity society, where everything and everyone is other than what they appear to be, disguised in the dress of desirability and on display for market speculation” (41). Additional symbolic uses of the female prostitute in nineteenth-century texts connect her to the commercialization of art, the anonymous crowd, changing class hierarchies, and disease and contamination, all in the modern city (Felski 19, Parsons 24-25).
Given these weighty associations, it is understandable that most scholarly work on prostitution in nineteenth and early twentieth-century literature and culture across Europe focuses on women. In the Spanish case, studies by Pura Fernández and Tsuchiya on female prostitution in the novels of non-canonical authors including Eduardo López Bago (1855-1931) and Matilde Cherner (1833-1880) represent a major contribution to feminist and literary histories. At the same time, they leave aside representations of male prostitutes and blackmailers in literary and social texts like those analyzed in this chapter, and they do not acknowledge that hustlers and extortionists often attain an emblematic status similar to that of their female counterparts in debates about modernity.

Nevertheless, prostitution, whether male or female, emerges at the heart of an important theoretical statement on modern life: Marshall Berman’s allegorical reading of Goethe’s play Faust in All That is Sold Melts into Air (1982). From Berman’s Marxist perspective, Faust’s pact with Mephistopheles corresponds to the interactions of leftist intellectuals with capital. The character enters his relationship with the devil with admirable intentions. At one point in the play, he tells Mephistopheles that he wishes to experience every human emotion so that he can better understand and serve his fellow beings (Goethe l. 1770-75). When he tames the sea and constructs an ideal human habitat, he insists on the selfless motivation for his actions (l. 10188). Yet Faust cannot deny that the means to his end have sinister implications. Berman’s observations on the seamy side of the character’s collusion with Mephistopheles often make Faust sound like a prostitute to the devil. He explains that Faust acts in an economy where “[b]ody and soul are to be exploited for a maximum return,” and that he is “the archetype of a modern intellectual forced to ‘sell himself’ in order to make a difference in the world” (49, 118).
Both Faust and contemporary thinkers must “scheme and hustle” to accomplish their altruistic goals (117).

Clearly, Berman does not mean to suggest that either Goethe’s protagonist or later intellectuals prostitute themselves in the sense of taking payment for sex. What concerns him is that Marxist intellectuals in capitalist societies must sell out to the market if they hope to effectively disseminate their ideas and contest the injustices created by capitalism. Berman’s attention to this metaphorical variety of hustling and to relatively privileged intellectuals prevents him from examining sexual prostitution and the modern experiences of characters like Benjamín who sell themselves and extort money from others in order to achieve socioeconomic stability.

In this chapter, I want to fill this gap by foregrounding the sexual connotations of the idea that modern people must “scheme and hustle” to flourish under capitalism. This will allow me to trace the relationships between modernity, male prostitution, and homosexual blackmail in Benavente’s bourgeois realist drama *De muy buena familia* [Of Very Good Stock] (1931), Josep Maria de Sagarra’s novel in Catalan *Vida privada* [Private Life] (1932), and El Caballero Audaz’s short novel *Bestezuela de placer*. If modern Faustian characters are those who pact with capital in order to better human life on a massive scale, then it is clear that the protagonists in question here cannot be classified under that heading. If, on the other hand, they are those figures who negotiate risky contracts to ensure their survival in a capitalist market, then the characters discussed below can be compared to Faust. When he steps into the car with the dandy, Benjamín takes control of the same “money, speed, sex and power” identified by Berman as the advantages procured by Faust from his pact with Mephistopheles (50). Willing to sell
their bodies in exchange for clothing, shelter, and money, Benjamín and the creations of Sagarra and Benavente are what I call *little Fausts.*

This term brings together characters whose sexual and economic pursuits also exhibit important differences. In the following pages, the words *male prostitute* and *hustler* appear interchangeably in conjunction with figures in *Vida privada* and *Bestezuela de placer* who take money and commodities for providing sexual services to rich clients. *Blackmailer* and *extortionist* refer to characters in *Vida privada* and *De muy buena familia* who use their bodies to attract the attention of male admirers in order to demand remuneration from their victims in exchange for hushing their knowledge of the latter’s homosexual desire. While prostitutes accept payment for sex, blackmailers receive money for silencing their sexual exploits.

The two activities involve widely varying power relations in the works under consideration. Whereas male prostitutes often feel helpless at the hands of exploitative clients, blackmailers manipulate the fear of their victims about the revelation of their homosexual inclinations in order to drive them to despair. Still, the distinction between hustler and extortionist can collapse as a given relationship evolves. *Vida privada* illustrates the ease with which a man who grows tired of prostituting himself with a married couple takes revenge on the husband by threatening to disclose his clandestine homosexual contacts. Hyphenated constructions such as *prostitute-blackmailer* or *hustler-extortionist* appear below to capture the continuity between taking money for sex and extracting payment from unsuspecting victims.

These terms seek to clarify the varied language of this chapter’s primary texts. In *Bestezuela de placer,* El Caballero Audaz uses the literary image of the title to label
Benjamín a prostitute. In *De muy buena familia* and *Vida privada*, Benavente and Sagarra call their protagonists *señorito* and *xicot* or *jove de casa bona* to emphasize that they are the pampered sons of middle-class or aristocratic families. This tendency to elide the words *prostitute* or *hustler* under more general class designations also appears in early twentieth-century sociological texts from Spain. In the criminological study *La mala vida en Madrid* [*Low Life in Madrid*] (1901), Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós and José María Llanas Aguilaniedo use terms like *golfo*, *chulo*, *pilluelo*, and *señorito* to name the men most likely to hustle in Madrid (10-42, 232, 266, 274). Whereas the first three words refer to impoverished males driven to prostitution by financial hardship, the last one denotes their self-important bourgeois clients, who could also peddle their bodies to maintain their social standing, as in *De muy buena familia*.

More exact Spanish equivalents for the English terms defined above appear in ostensibly scientific taxonomies of sexual “deviants” in *La mala vida en Madrid* and Max Bembo’s similar treatise *La mala vida en Barcelona* [*Low Life in Barcelona*] (1912). Labels such as *invertidos natos prostituidos* [prostituted congenital inverts] and *invertidos por lucro* [inverts for profit] in the former work reflect the medical notion that a biological male who desires members of his own sex must have an “inverted” or female psychology and feminine anatomical traits (265-66). Bembo emphasizes that *uranistas prostituidos* [prostituted uranists] and *prostitutos* [male prostitutes] are effeminate men who adopt female nicknames to identify themselves as inverts (42, 233, 249-51). While these specialized terms are absent from the literary works studied below, hints of inversion are present in passing references to Benjamín’s “ojos de mujer” (44) [womanly eyes] in *Bestezuela de placer* or the hustler-extortionist’s “inflexión aterciopelada y
femenina” (68) [satin, feminine inflexion] in Vida privada. Details of this nature come to
the foreground in novels by Eduardo Zamacois and Alfonso Hernández-Catá examined in
Chapter 4, where I examine inversion at greater length.

For now, it is enough to note that the concept of inversion refers to a constellation
of sexual and gender identities at odds with heteronormative standards aimed at
upholding a compulsory, binary distinction between male bodies, masculine gender
identities, and desire for women, on the one hand, and female bodies, femininity, and
attraction to men, on the other. In this sense, inversion evokes the term queer as it has
been used in Anglo-American queer theory since the early 1990s. I define and use this
term extensively in Chapter 3 to discuss characters in novels by Álvaro Retana who
consciously contest middle-class norms of gender and sexuality. These figures differ
significantly from the hustlers examined here. While the former flout their disdain for
the bourgeoisie, the latter use their sexuality to consolidate their position in a
comfortable, urban middle class. Hence, I hesitate to call prostitutes and blackmailers
queer. Where that word appears in this chapter, it refers to sexual arrangements and
identifications for which the normative categories hetero- and homosexual fall short as
adequate descriptors.

By subsuming a range of English and Spanish words for male prostitutes and
blackmailers under the umbrella term little Fausts, I certainly do not mean to pass moral
judgment on characters created by Benavente, Sagarra, or El Caballero Audaz. The
adjective little seeks only to indicate the gulf between the vast projects of Goethe’s Faust
and the more limited ambitions of figures like Benjamín. It does not suggest that the
implications of male prostitution and homosexual blackmail in commercial literature are
insignificant, or that the particular works at stake here warrant the oblivion into which they have fallen in contemporary literary criticism.

On the contrary, this chapter’s central argument is that *De muy buena familia*, *Vida privada*, and *Bestezuela de placer* are important statements on modernity in Madrid and Barcelona in the 1920s and 30s precisely because they construct hustlers and extortionists as subjects upon whom desires and fears about modern urban life converge. As characters who eagerly embrace a consumer society, who negotiate changing class structures, and who are intertwined in the marketing of literature as a mass commodity, they are used by writers to evaluate the possibilities generated by capitalism’s expansion in Spain’s largest cities. While generally condemning changes brought about by economic development, the authors under consideration oscillate between apprehension and enthusiasm for modern innovation.

This dialectic between dread and longing for the effects of material progress, crucial to Berman’s understanding of modern experience, is an axis around which this chapter is organized. Others include tensions between revelation and concealment, curiosity and disgust, and critical distance and intimate involvement, all with respect to the ways in which the primary texts construct male prostitution and homosexual blackmail as issues of interest to mass audiences. *De muy buena familia* exposes and covers up the existence of blackmail between middle-class men in Madrid for bourgeois spectators who are invited to simultaneously acknowledge and overlook one character’s status as an extortionist. This ambivalent game of disclosure and censorship forms part of Benavente’s wider comparison of two models of modernity embodied by a pair of brothers who adopt different attitudes towards blackmail and homosexuality. *Vida
*privada* traces the decline of an aristocratic household in Barcelona in a scathing critique of the modernization of the city’s social classes during industrialization. Sagarra has trouble dissembling his fascination with the family’s degeneration, and with one member’s participation in male prostitution and extortion. Finally, *Bestezuela de placer* allows for an allegorical interpretation in which the prostitute Benjamín represents a type of mass-produced literature both cultivated and critiqued by El Caballero Audaz in the 1920s.

My examination of hustlers and blackmailers in these works focuses on their constitution as fictional entities whose characterization emerges at the juncture of the generic conventions, language, and structuring devices mobilized by their creators. This type of analysis calls for attention to the generic particularities of bourgeois drama, lengthy Naturalist novels, and short novels from commercial literary collections. For example, opaque dialogues in *De muy buena familia* make greater sense in light of theatrical censorship laws and viewing practices in the early 1900s. Likewise, the self-conscious dimension of *Bestezuela de placer* comes into sharp relief against the literary conventions and marketing techniques used by short novel collections such as *La Novela de Hoy* [*Today’s Novel*], where the text was published.

Without overlooking generic specificities of this sort, the following readings also highlight recurrent formal components of the texts at hand. The works coincide in their use of two mechanisms associated with self-reflexive or narcissistic narrative: allegory and *mise en abyme*, “two devices which are often hard to distinguish from one another” (Hutcheon 54). The word *allegory* means “other meaning” and derives from the Greek words *allos* [other] and *agoreuo* [to speak in a place of assembly] (Tambling 6). As the
etymology would suggest, an allegory is a narrative in which the characters and events on a first, literal plane of meaning have equivalents on a second level of signification (Abrams and Harpham 7; Tambling 6). Stories of this type appear several times in this chapter. In *Vida privada*, a character interprets a Biblical scene on a tapestry as an allegory of his own relationship with his brother. I perform a similar operation when I read the protagonist of *Bestezuela de placer* as an analogue for the book itself, or for other short, erotic novels.

Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon considers the *mise en abyme* a sort of brief allegory in which part of a work, often a text within the text, can be read as a commentary on the larger work to which it belongs (53-56). Other critics agree that the term designates an intradiegetic sequence of a work liable to be viewed by interpreters as a small-scale replica of a facet of the work considered relevant to its entirety (Dällenbach 8; Ron 436-37). Drawing on the vocabulary of Roman Jakobson, narratologist Lucien Dällenbach distinguishes between different classes of *mise en abyme* according to the particular element of a work reflected in the embedded text: its utterance (*what* is narrated in the work, its story or *message*), enunciation (*how* it is narrated between an *addresser* and an *addressee*), or code (its language, style, and undergirding aesthetic theory) (Dällenbach 55-106; Bal 46-51; Jakobson 66). This typology omits the work’s *contact*, the “physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication” (Jakobson 66). In a novel, where the contact is the book’s materiality and its mode of circulation between author and readers, a *mise en abyme of the contact* would presumably take the shape of references to physical artifacts handled like the novel itself.
The four types of *mise en abyme* appear below as intradiegetic texts in this chapter’s primary works. In *De muy buena familia*, a father reads, hides, and destroys documents that associate his son with an obscure crime involving homosexual blackmail. In *Vida privada*, a hustler-extortionist announces his plan to write a novel about his own sexual experiences. And in *Bestezuela de placer*, the prostitute Benjamín can be viewed as a novel circulating among voracious readers. These texts are significant because they generate self-reflexive commentaries on the literary and social agendas of Benavente, Sagarra, and El Caballero Audaz. Relationships of characters to intradiegetic documents and novels show how the writers may have envisioned their own relationships to their works dealing with hustling and extortion, and the potential responses of their audiences. The *mises en abyme* analyzed here heighten the tensions between visibility and invisibility, curiosity and disgust, and critical distance and involvement surrounding representations of prostitution and blackmail. In the process, they open their embedding works to multiple readings caught up in the dialectic of fear and longing for change constitutive of modern experience.

In this chapter’s epigraph from *Bestezuela de placer*, Benjamín recognizes that the dandy could take him to Hell. Without delving too deeply into “the headier philosophical and poetic implications of the abysmal metaphor” built into the term *mise en abyme*, it might be fitting to note the felicitous coincidence that the “fall into the abyss” and the allegory should be key formal strategies in the commercial works dealing with the little Fausts studied below (Ron 417).
I. Homosexual Blackmail in De muy buena familia

Four years after Jacinto Benavente’s death in 1954, Catalan writer Josep Maria de Sagarra published a biographical sketch in the newspaper Destino [Destiny]. Fondly recalling his contacts with Benavente over thirty years earlier, Sagarra affirms that, within the literary circle at the Madrilenian café Gato Negro [Black Cat], the dramatist was

[e]l único ser viviente que en realidad tenía relieve, y que no parecía abocetado, sino bien definido con toda la línea y el color; determinado y detallado como una buena miniatura. Al fin y al cabo de una miniatura se trataba. De un hombrecillo brevisimo y sin carnes, con una cara en la que el pelo no mitigaba la constante agudeza de una expresión burlona, y en cuya boca un puro habano descomunal parecía más descomunal todavía, en relación con una dentadura que lo atormentaba y con la mano de niño que lo sostenía. (Retratos 204-05)

[the only living being that really had any relief, and that did not seem sketched, but well defined with every line and color, with the fixity and detail of a good miniature. After all, he was a miniature. An extremely dainty and skinny man whose facial hair did not dull the constant sharpness of a mocking expression, and in whose mouth a colossal Cuban cigar seemed bigger still in relation to the teeth that tortured it and the boyish hand that held it.]

Replete with imagery drawn from the visual arts, this passage can be read as an ekphrasis of caricatures of Benavente published by newspapers in Madrid in the early decades of the twentieth century. Such caricatures often portray the playwright with a large cigar and a sly smile magnified by a prominent handlebar mustache (figures 2.1-2).

El Caballero Audaz’s characterization of Benavente as “un menudo Mefistófeles urbano, culto y travieso” [a little urban Mephistopheles, cultured and mischievous] in a 1916 interview comes into focus in light of these images (cited in López Hidalgo 383). Comparisons of Benavente to the devil, a veritable topos in writing on the dramatist, highlight his ability to make Madrid’s middle and upper classes both victim and
enthusiastic consumer of his social satire in many of his 172 plays written between the 1890s and 1950s. As a prodigious Mephistophelean figure, it is appropriate that Spain’s 1922 Nobel Prize winner should be the first creator of a little Faust discussed at length in this chapter.

![Caricature of Jacinto Benavente](image1.png)

**Figure 2.1.** Caricature of Jacinto Benavente (Paco and Díez de Revenga 418).

**Figure 2.2** Caricatures of Jacinto Benavente (Paco and Díez de Revenga 419).

I.A. **Benavente and Homosexuality, Between Visibility and Erasure**

In spite of his fame in Spain before the Civil War, recent critical studies register Benavente’s diminished reputation among contemporary audiences and scholars (González del Valle; Matamoro 11-14). Several essays from the only academic book on the dramatist to appear in the last decade lament that only a few of his works are performed today, principally *Los intereses creados* [The Bonds of Interest] (1907) (Huerta Calvo “Un dramaturgo” 189; Oliva 192-95; Rubio Jiménez 340). As César Oliva notes, most literary histories repeat received wisdom about Benavente’s attention to dialogue, irony, and light social criticism, but do not analyze individual texts. In present-day scholarship, the playwright is both an obligatory reference in discussions of Spanish theater, and an ellusive figure for all but the most specialized experts (191-95).
The tension between knowledge and ignorance, visibility and void, surrounding Benavente as an object of study emerges again in scholarly work on writings by and about the dramatist. My reading of *De muy buena familia* (1931) seeks to reinforce a recent trend in which critics have foregrounded issues of revelation and concealment pertaining to homosexuality in the author’s life and works. Alberto Mira cites memoirs and biographies by Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, Ángel Lázaro, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna to show how Benavente’s contemporaries engaged in verbal acrobatics in order to speculate about his probable same-sex relationships without overtly referencing homosexuality or its synonyms (*De Sodoma* 64-65, 69-71). Similarly, Ricardo Fernández explains that the dramatist’s unfinished autobiography, *Recuerdos y olvidos* [*Things Remembered and Forgotten*] (1937-1938), entails a play of masks through which he exposes and hides his body, private life, and homosexual desire. In a recuperation of Benavente’s earliest *modernista* plays, Javier Huerta Calvo and Emilio Peral Vega note the presence of homoeroticism in works usually excluded from literary histories (59-74). Finally, Dru Dougherty’s article on male friendship in the realist play *El rival de su mujer* [*His Wife’s Rival*] (1933) reveals that an ambiguous script and performance left reviewers wondering whether the work dealt with a homosexual relationship.

These studies do not acknowledge *De muy buena familia* as another salient example of the simultaneous disclosure and suppression of homosexuality and, in this case, homosexual blackmail in Benavente’s oeuvre. The play is no more than a specter in many critical studies. While Dougherty mentions in passing that the drama touches upon a sex scandal (57), Fernández reports that it deals tangentially with same-sex desire (57). Huerta Calvo and Peral Vega relegate the work to a footnote, perhaps because they
consider its juxtaposition of homosexuality and criminality *escabroso* [distasteful] (74). Other discussions fail to mention that the play involves homosexuality at all (Huerta Calvo “Jacinto Benavente” 26; Sánchez Estevan 210-12; Sheehan 120-21).

*De muy buena familia* deserves greater attention in contemporary criticism for at least three reasons. First, the play did not go unnoticed during its first run in Madrid starting on March 11, 1931. On the contrary, the respected director Cipriano de Rivas Cherif led Margarita Xirgu’s famous company in 140 performances in the Teatro Muñoz Seca between March and May of 1931. Thirteen other performances by the same company took place in the more prestigious Teatro Español between 1931 and 1935. The play later formed part of Xirgu’s repertoire during tours in Barcelona (1931), Havana (1936), and Mexico City (1936). Finally, other companies performed it in the Madrilenian theaters Maravillas (1933), Chueca (1934), and Español (1934). For the purpose of comparison, one might note that another of Xirgu’s triumphs in the early 1930s was Federico García Lorca’s *Yerma*, which had a run of 138 performances in the Teatro Español in 1934 (Gil Fombellida 324).

Although a work’s popularity may not be enough to justify its scholarly recuperation, the gulf between *De muy buena familia*’s initial success and its current absence from academic studies raises questions. Why was this play so popular? Why has it since fallen out of critical favor? Besides its implication in the general depreciation of Benavente’s works over time, my study identifies formal aspects of this particular drama, including *mises en abyme*, that presage its impending dismissal.

*De muy buena familia* also requires renewed scholarly interest because critical references limited to signaling its relation to crime and scandal do not adequately capture
the complexity of its engagement with homosexual blackmail. The issue is caught up in a
game of hide-and-go-seek reminiscent of the ambiguous visibility of homosexuality in
better studied works like *El rival de su mujer*. Blackmail also relates to wider thematic
concerns about modernity that, from my point of view, constitute the play’s main point of
interest. A third motive for a new interpretation would be to connect isolated allusions to
the work’s sexual content in existing criticism to crucial questions about modern
experience.

The thesis of my reading is that the play enacts a struggle between a pair of
middle-class brothers who subscribe to two models of modernity similar to the “true” and
“false” modernities defined by Spanish physician and intellectual Gregorio Marañón
(1887-1960) in his contemporaneous essay “Juventud, modernidad, eternidad” [“Youth,
modernity, eternity”] (1929). The characters’ contrasting attitudes towards homosexual
blackmail delineate two possible organizations of male same-sex desire in modern
Madrid. The eventual demise of the brother who secretly exploits his person to extort
money from male admirers indicates that the play advocates for increased openness
regarding homosexuality in the city.

Paradoxically, in order to evade both official censorship and a scandal among his
bourgeois fans, Benavente had to transmit this call for visibility in a play whose sexual
content occupies a gray zone between revelation and erasure. The playwright reflects on
this conundrum through *mises en abyme* wherein the treatment of documents on stage
mirrors the play’s skirting of homosexual blackmail while signaling the disastrous
consequences of bourgeois hypocrisy vis-à-vis that activity. The tendency of Madrid’s
middle class to tacitly accept and willfully disavow the existence of extortionists in its ranks is central to the drama’s social critique.

Such duplicity was magnified by a 1928 law that criminalized homosexual acts in Spain in response to moral outrage with the increased public visibility of same-sex desire during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). The statute differed from previous legislation against *abusos deshonestos* [dishonest abuses] and *escándalo público* [public scandal] between people of any sex by sharply distinguishing between hetero- and homosexual manifestations of those offenses. Under articles 601 and 616 of the 1928 legal code, people of the same sex charged with abuse could spend two to twelve years in prison, while public scandal could lead to a fine of 1,000 to 10,000 pesetas and removal from public office from six to twelve years. Predictably, the exact definition of the crimes was subject to the opinions of judges often predisposed against all sorts of sexual contact between men (Aresti *Masculinidades* 223-28; Mira *De Sodoma* 183-84).

As historian Angus McLaren notes in *Sexual Blackmail: A Modern History* (2002), comparable statutes elsewhere in Europe led to increased incidences of blackmail since they provided delinquents with a means of extorting money from other men in exchange for silence about the latter’s compromising sexual desires. Of course, men who used their bodies to entrap other males also exposed themselves to blackmail from a third party (10-29). Spain’s 1928 law had similar consequences until its repeal in 1932. Bembo’s study *La mala vida en Barcelona* provides insight into how exactly blackmail took place during the early 1900s. The work discusses groups of young men

con el nombre de la *ronda ful* o, simplemente, *la ful*. Valiéndose de un joven bien parecido, que sirve de gancho, procluran seducir en un sitio
público, generalmente es en un urinario, a un homosexual que ellos conoce por su posición. Cuando la conquista está hecha, y ha habido algún acto inmoral, se presentan dos timadores fingiendo ser agentes de la policía secreta o parientes del joven. No hay que decir que su indignación se calma instantáneamente si les ofrecen dinero. (italics in original, 59)

[known as the ronda ful or, simply, the ful. Using a good looking young man who serves as bait, they try to seduce a homosexual whom they know for his social standing in a public place; generally, in a urinal. When the deed is done, and there has been some immoral act, two swindlers pretending to be police agents or family members of the young man make their appearance. Of course, their indignation is immediately quelled by monetary offers.]

In a review from 1931, theater critic Enrique Díez-Canedo states that De muy buena familia should remind viewers of a recent, sensational crime (150). Benavente’s calculated evasions in the play make it difficult to determine the exact nature of the event to which Díez-Canedo refers. Nevertheless, evidence from the text strongly suggests that one character exploits his body for money by serving as the “bait” in la ful as described by Bembo. The extortionist’s eventual suicide owes more to his involvement in blackmail than to whatever physical contact he might have with his victim. Consequently, homosexual blackmail and the law that made it possible are nearer to the heart of Benavente’s criticism than homosexuality per se. This circumstance reinforces the idea that the drama denounces bourgeois hypocrisy and promotes a more frank acceptance of same-sex desire in Madrid. For Benavente, legislation relegating homosexuality to the shadows could never be truly modern.

I.B. Marañón on “True” and “False” Modernities

One contributor to debates about the “truth” of modernity in Spain in the late 1920s was Gregorio Marañón. Remembered today for his writings on a range of sexual themes before the Civil War, the physician’s ideas are important for later readings of
novels by Retana, Zamacois, and Hernández-Catá (3.II.D., 4.I.B.-C.). According to literary critic Dagmar Vandebosch, recent studies on Marañón oscillate between identifying his sexual politics as progressive or conservative (106-10). On the one hand, many of his ideas about sex were liberal compared to the mainstream Catholic morality of his time. For example, his attempt to shift social hegemony over homosexuality from the Church and State to the medical establishment led him to contest the criminalization of homosexual acts in the 1928 Penal Code. On the other hand, the doctor promoted a brand of sexual and gender differentiation aligned with long-standing patriarchal stereotypes. With respect to sexual behavior, his tolerance for homosexuals extended only to those who remained chaste, tried to conceal their desire in public, and sought a “cure” for their “condition.”

Subsequent parts of this project provide detailed analyses of the ambivalent political valence of Marañón’s thought on sexuality, emphasizing its homophobic potential. The ambiguity of his ideas extends into the essay “Juventud, modernidad, eternidad” from the book Amor y eugenesia [Love and Eugenics] (three editions between 1929 and 1931). The text constructs a distinction between two types of modernity, one of which is falsa, aparente, and presunta [false, apparent, and alleged], and the other verdadera, profunda, and auténtica [true, deep, and authentic] (477, 482, 491). Marañón explains that the evolution of material reality through wars, revolutions, and technological advances generates new concerns for human existence. In Spain, for instance, neutrality during World War I led to an economic boom and an inundation of the cultural market with entertainers exiled from Paris. Consequences included increased spending capacity and leisure time for the country’s middle class; a craze for sports; an
obsession with automobiles, airplanes, telephones, and record players; and the introduction of new models of femininity by French singers and dancers (Litvak 11-44). Some of these innovations appear in the essay as a “preocupación deportista y mecanicista” [concern for sports and machines] and a “despreocupación por las normas sexuales clásicas” (469) [lack of concern for classic sexual norms].

Marañón’s thesis is that these phenomena are only truly modern if they are at the service of achieving an “eternal” good: “la igualdad de todos los seres humanos ante un mínimo de bienestar material, de instrucción, de seguridad y de justicia” (487) [the equality of all human beings with a minimum of material wellbeing, education, safety, and justice]. Yet most young Spaniards embrace new technologies and sexual norms only to achieve “ephemeral” self-satisfaction. From the physician’s perspective, these “false moderns” cling to “actitudes fundamentalmente reaccionarias” (476) [fundamentally reactionary attitudes].

Undoubtedly, Marañón hoped to present his vision of true modernity as a progressive historical force. He states at one point that he wants Spain to develop “una modernidad profunda y perdurable, basada en una aspiración enérgica hacia el futuro, con un contrapeso necesario, pero no excesivo, de tradición” (482) [a deep and enduring modernity, based upon an energetic aspiration towards the future, with a necessary counterbalance of tradition, not too excessive]. The problem is that the essayist’s connection between authentic modernity and equality for all people is deceptively inclusive. “Juventud, modernidad, eternidad” appears in the same volume as the essay “Amor, conveniencia, eugenesia” [“Love, Convenience, Eugenics”]. As previous scholars have pointed out, the latter text formulates a eugenic program designed to
promote heterosexuality and preserve patriarchal power relations in Spain. While Marañón does not advocate the sterilization or murder of queer individuals of any sort, he does recommend possible “remedies” for their “ailment” (Sosa-Velasco 103-12; Vandebosch 191-209). In other words, the doctor excludes “deviants” from his call for equality unless they conform to his standards of gender and sexuality. The implication is that those who fail to do so are “false moderns.”

Whether Jacinto Benavente shared this opinion is doubtful on the basis of De muy buena familia. El rival de su mujer provides textual evidence for the playwright’s familiarity with some of Marañón’s theories on sexuality. One character mentions the doctor by name in a reference to his attack on the Spanish icon Don Juan Tenorio, to be studied below in section 3.II.D. (33). Similar proof that Benavente had Marañón in mind when he wrote De muy buena familia has not been forthcoming. If I read the play in relation to “Juventud, modernidad, eternidad” it is because the essay’s distinction between genuine and spurious modernities helps characterize two models of modernity discussed by the characters. At the same time, one figure’s argument that a modern approach to homosexuality would entail making it visible in Madrid has the potential to distance the play’s concept of authentic modernity from Marañón’s narrow tolerance for chaste homosexuals in the private sphere.

I.C. Conflicting Modernities, Bickering Brothers

De muy buena familia is set in the living room of a modest apartment in Madrid inhabited by the middle-class couple Isidoro and Pilar, together with their children Enrique, Manolo, and Anita. Stage directions are scarce throughout the script, and there is no overt indication of when the play takes place. Vague allusions to political
disturbances prior to the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic probably situate the action in early 1931. As is often the case in plays by Benavente, few events occur on stage; instead, the characters comment on actions executed elsewhere, sometimes during the intervals between the three acts. 

Accordingly, conversations between Enrique and other characters in Act I reveal that Manolo has been exploiting *su figura* [his figure] with another man in exchange for money to be shared with his friends Pepe and Rafael (12). In the final scene of Act I, Manolo and his friends plan to blackmail their victim into redeeming a bill of exchange. Aside from this conspiracy, Enrique is aware of his brother’s activities because he once rejected Manolo’s invitation to take part in *la ful*. When the curtain rises, Enrique cannot understand his parents’ naïveté regarding Manolo’s sudden economic prosperity. Despite his fear of an impending scandal, he fails to muster the courage to inform Isidoro and Pilar about his brother’s personal life. He reveals the truth to the family outcast, his hump-backed Uncle Moisés.

Dialogue at the beginning of Act II indicates that several days have passed since Enrique’s confession. In the meantime, Rafael and Manolo have met the latter’s admirer in a disreputable hotel and have killed him for refusing to pay off the bill of exchange. Never shown on stage, these actions are made known to characters and spectators alike in Acts II and III when Isidoro and Moisés discuss a newspaper article about the murder, when Isidoro receives an anonymous letter demanding money in exchange for silence regarding Manolo’s role in the crime, when Moisés reports that the police have interrogated him about a professional connection to Manolo’s victim, and when Pepe announces that Rafael is in jail. Manolo shoots himself just before policemen arrive for
his arrest, thereby instigating Isidoro’s claim that God’s justice has punished his ignorance of his son’s undertakings.

Throughout the play, the characters discuss what it means to be modern. Two divergent understandings of modernity similar to those of Marañón emerge in comments made by Isidoro and Moisés. Countering the latter’s admonition that he must tighten the reins on his household, Isidoro argues that life has changed since he and Moisés were young men:

hoy, por fortuna, las costumbres han cambiado; ya no asusta un poco de libertad, ni hay tanta hipocresía; las muchachas alternan con los muchachos; yo creo que así se conocen mejor y van con más seguridad al matrimonio. En cuanto a los muchachos, la vida de hoy les ofrece posibilidades desconocidas cuando nosotros éramos jóvenes: entonces ya se sabía: para un muchacho de la clase media no había otro porvenir que la carrera facultativa o el empleíllo en una oficina del Estado. Hoy la industria, el comercio, la aviación, hasta el cinematógrafo, hasta los deportes, les abren horizontes insospechados para nosotros. (22)

[fortunately, customs have changed today; a little bit of liberty is not frightening any longer, and there is not as much hypocrisy; young women mix with young men; I think that they get to know each other better that way and that they go into marriage with more security. With respect to young men, life today offers them possibilities unheard of when we were young: back then it was known that for a middle class boy there was no other future beyond a university degree or some little job in a State office. Today industry, commerce, aviation, even cinema and sports, open up unforeseen horizons for us.]

For Isidoro, modernity coincides with the same changes in sexual norms, sports, and technology identified by Marañón as novelties in Spanish society following World War I. Detached from any desire for justice and equality, such transformations are more reactionary than modern.

Such is the view of Moisés, who implicitly refutes Isidoro’s idea of modernity in a conversation with Manolo and Anita in Act II. Chiding his nephew and niece for their
boredom with cars, planes, and dances, the hunchback exclaims: “os creéis muy modernos y estáis muy atrasados; ese figurín de la frivolidad y de los falsos atrevimientos, ya data, como se dice ahora. Lo moderno es trabajar en algo útil, sea como sea, sin distinción de sexos ni de clases” [you consider yourselves very modern and you are behind the times; that model of frivolity and false audacity is already dated, as it’s fashionable to say. The modern thing to do for all the sexes and classes is to work on something useful, whatever it may be] (31). Like Marañón, Moisés locates true modernity in hard work distributed equally across society.

The superficial and profound models of modernity outlined by Isidoro and Moisés correspond well to Manolo and Enrique’s opposing lifestyles. Props and stage directions clarify that Manolo has integrated himself into a consumer society organized around leisure activities involving new technologies and social opportunities. At the start of the play, Enrique cringes as a maid carries new clothes of unknown origin into Manolo’s bedroom. Mysteriously, Manolo can also afford expensive sweets and perfumes for his sister Anita, as well as an automobile shared with Rafael. Towards the end of Act I, Anita peers out from a balcony to report that the car is magnificent.

In the opening scene of the following act, Moisés and Isidoro listen as Manolo dances with Anita and her friends to the tune of a blaring radio. When they join the older men on stage, the young people complain that they are no longer entertained by dances, automobiles, or airplanes. Anita instead prefers the cinema, where she enjoys watching actresses once stigmatized for performing in *variétés*. From Moisés’s perspective, Anita puts her own reputation at risk during a telephone conversation in which she flirts with an acquaintance from the luxurious Hotel Palace. Manolo remains impassive to his uncle’s
scolding, demonstrating his characteristic *despreocupación* [lack of concern] with respect to changing social norms (30, 38). Living solely for fine clothing, sophisticated entertainment, and fancy cars, the youth is an example of a false modern as defined in “Juventud, modernidad, eternidad.” He is a point of constellation for fears about modern consumerism and the lengths to which some people go to sustain their spending habits.

In contrast, dialogues construct Enrique as a representative of a deeper brand of modernity based on work and social responsibility. Seduced by Manolo’s leisurely existence, Pilar and Anita frequently contrast Enrique and his brother, chastising the former for being too serious. As Anita tells Enrique, “[r]etrasas dos siglos” [you are two centuries behind] (17). Ironically, the same proof adduced in support of the youth’s backwardness also identifies him as the most authentically modern member of his family within Marañón’s understanding of modernity. In particular, Enrique has no time for leisure, since he devotes his energy to working for a modest salary. He plans to marry a woman who does the same.

Manolo snidely dismisses his brother’s upcoming union with a “joven moderna que se gana la vida detrás de un mostrador” [modern young woman who makes a living behind a shop counter] (10). Flying in the face of his own supposed modernity, Manolo imbues the word *moderna* with a negative charge. If the young man’s lack of concern for patriarchal sexual norms allows him to look benevolently upon Anita’s coquetry, it does not imply that he will accept more profound changes to the status of middle-class Spanish women. Manolo’s jab at the working woman suggests that his gender politics are more traditional than those of Enrique, whose intention to marry a shopkeeper marks him as an
incarnation of modern desires for hard work and increased equality for women in the public sphere.  

I.D. Modernity, Blackmail, and Homosexuality

Homosexual blackmail plays significantly different roles in the two types of modernity embodied by Manolo and Enrique. The first brother views sexual extortion as a source of income required to sustain his conspicuous consumerism. Although Manolo never states his opinion of his victim, the conversation between Rafael and Pepe at the end of Act I reveals that they consider him a sub-human being good only for his money. In Rafael’s words, “su obligación es apoquinar, y muy contento. Manolo le tiene muy dominado” [his obligation is to cough up money, and with that he is happy. Manolo has him under his control] (25). If it were not for the demands of his expensive lifestyle, valued by Enrique at twenty-five or thirty thousand pesetas per year, perhaps Manolo would not use his physique to ensnare unwary admirers.

Certainly, Manolo does not want anyone to know about his ties to homosexuality. Unaware of her brother’s personal life, Anita’s naïve comments reveal that the youth has managed to hide his pursuits beneath the façade of a business in auto retail. When the psychological trauma of the murder begins to affect Manolo in Act II, Anita assumes that her brother’s bad mood is due to debts left unpaid by an unsuccessful business buying and selling automobiles. Manolo’s lies become increasingly untenable as facts about the assassination are revealed by the newspaper, the anonymous letter, and the bill of exchange. In the face of an imminent scandal, the character opts to commit suicide before being outed as a sexual extortionist. Once again, Manolo’s supposedly modern disregard for traditional sexual norms proves tenuous. If his bodily comportment
transgresses heteronormative sexual standards, his secrecy with respect to his activities is
complicit with hypocritical bourgeois norms according to which homosexual blackmail is
an acceptable source of income so long as it remains outside the public view. Manolo’s
sexual behavior in la ful is another aspect of his false modernity.

As mentioned above, Enrique once refused Manolo’s invitation to collude with
Rafael and Pepe in their ruse. Although his decision signals an attempt to distance
himself from his brother’s reprehensible conspiracies, his understanding of modernity is
not without relation to sexual activity between men. On the contrary, the character’s
ethical concerns lead him to echo Marañón’s ideas on homosexuality following the 1928
legislation against same-sex contacts. Whereas Pepe and Rafael dehumanize Manolo’s
admirer, Enrique considers him a victim of Nature and middle-class extortionists. He
speaks of

la explotación despiadada de un pobre degenerado que no hallará
compasión ni al haber sido asesinado cobardemente por alguno de sus
explotadores; porque el criminal habrá sido uno de ellos, el más
desalmado; pero el crimen ha sido de todos los que explotabais una
depravación con otra depravación más vergonzosa, porque al fin él no era
más culpable que pudiera serlo nuestro pobre tío Moisés por haber nacido
jorobado. (37)

[the merciless exploitation of a poor degenerate who will not elicit
compassion even after having been assassinated with cowardice by one of
his exploiters; because the criminal was presumably the most heartless of
the lot, but the crime belongs to all of you who exploited one depravity
with another more shameful depravity; for, in the end, he was no more
guilty than our poor Uncle Moisés for having been born a hunchback.]

The last clause resembles the doctor’s claim in a 1930 study that “[e]l invertido es, pues,

...tan responsable de su anormalidad como pudiera serlo el diabético de su glucosuria” (La
evolución 608) [the invert is, then, as responsible for his abnormality as a diabetic for his
blood sugar]. This statement is typical of Marañón’s politically ambivalent approach to
homosexuality mentioned earlier. By treating homosexuality as a pathology rather than a crime, the physician both combatted the 1928 Penal Code, and stigmatized same-sex desire from a medical standpoint. Within its historical context, Enrique’s similar argument for the victim’s innocence is progressive in comparison to Rafael and Pepe’s utter disregard for the man’s humanity.

Enrique’s comments on homosexual blackmail occasionally seem to depart from Marañón’s views on homosexuality. In the most powerful passage in De muy buena familia, the young man rails against clandestine actions of all kinds. Addressing himself first to Manolo, and then to Manolo and Anita, Enrique questions:

El día que, por un tropiezo tuyo o una mala intención de los demás, surgiera el escándalo en tu vida, ¿qué sería de ti? ¿Serías capaz de afrontar las consecuencias lógicas de tu conducta?... Entonces, ¿por qué hablás de atrasos ni de adelantos? Si vivís al amparo de lo más viejo, de una moralidad hipócrita sin tener el valor de proclamar: ‘Somos así porque creemos que debemos ser así, porque la opinión de las gentes nos tiene sin cuidado, porque no nos importa exponernos a la reprobación y al escándalo.’ Eso sí sería modernidad; porque, creedme a mí, lo más anticuado, lo más viejo, es esa moral de una sociedad que se desmorona, apuntalada por el miedo de verla hundirse sin saber lo que vendrá a sustituirla... ¡Ya lo ves! ¡Ya estáis asustados los dos! ¡Yo adelanto más que vosotros! A mí no me asusta nada, y lo que me parece mal en vosotros no es que seáis atrevidos en vuestra conducta, es que seáis cobardes para no llegar al fin lógico de ella y afirmarla en toda vuestra vida. (18-19)

[The day when, due to a slip of your own or the bad will of others, scandal comes into your life, what will become of you? Would you be capable of facing up to the logical consequences of your conduct?... Then, why do you all speak of steps backward and forward? For you live under the protection of the oldest guard, a hypocritical morality, without having the courage to proclaim: ‘We are this way because we believe we should be this way, because public opinion doesn’t worry us, because we don’t mind exposing ourselves to reprobation and scandal.’ That would indeed be modernity; because, believe me, the most antiquated, the oldest thing, is the morality of a crumbling society held up by the fear of seeing itself come to naught without knowing what will come in its stead... You see! Now you two are scared! I am more advanced than you! Nothing
frightens me, and what seems bad to me is not that you are daring in your conduct, but that you are too cowardly to take it to its logical extreme and to affirm it in your whole life.]

It is here that Benavente’s play most vehemently denounces a duplicitous, false modernity whose embrace of apparently progressive behaviors clashes with an underlying allegiance to outmoded moral beliefs. In its immediate context in Act I, Enrique’s speech does not allude exclusively to bourgeois hypocrisy surrounding homosexual blackmail; instead, Enrique condemns all situations where a person’s conduct belies his or her morals. Taking into account the entire play, however, the outstanding example of such a contradiction is the disconnect between Manolo’s willingness to exploit his body for economic purposes and his intense fear that his ties to homosexuality will be made known in public.

Therefore, when Enrique says that he is scared less by risqué behavior than by attempts at keeping it confidential, he is claiming that Manolo’s need to conceal his bodily relations with other men for criminal motives is his main problem, and not the relations themselves. Enrique implies that to be fully modern, Manolo would need to openly acknowledge his participation in sexual behavior with other males. Doing so would undermine the 1928 law that condemned homosexual acts to secrecy. Far from promoting equality, the statute subjected men who manifested same-sex desire to gratuitous violence by making blackmail an effective threat. *De muy buena familia* illustrates the legislation’s unfortunate consequences in order to foster a frank recognition of the existence of both homosexuality and unscrupulous sexual extortionists in middle-class Madrid. In the process, it presents a vision of authentic modernity with greater radical potential than Marañón’s conditional acceptance of chaste, invisible homosexuals.
I.E. Benavente’s Baluceos

Admittedly, much of the play’s progressive social critique gets lost in its oblique aesthetic. Benavente’s assault on bourgeois duplicity is paradoxical in a drama whose veiled treatment of sexual themes could raise charges of hypocrisy against the playwright himself. For the sake of clarity, it has been convenient for me to write about Manolo as though it were evident from the play’s outset that he takes advantage of his person to extort money from other men in la ful. Although there are enough clues to prove that this is the case, the drama is hardly explicit on this point. Structural and stylistic factors construct homosexual blackmail as an “absent presence” in De muy buena familia (Bech 38).

In his book When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity (1997), sociologist Henning Bech argues that “homosexuality’s most common mode of being in modern societies” involves its entanglement in a dialectic of “presence and absence, knowing and ignoring, desire and denial” (38). Theater scholars John M. Clum and Alberto Mira confirm that these tensions governed the creation of English-language dramas dealing with same-sex relationships between the 1930s and 60s. For Clum, British playwrights like Mordaunt Shairp and Noël Coward were masters at “the invocation of homosexuality without naming it—or the problematizing of homosexuality without acknowledging its existence” (89). Such dramatists made use of an enunciación paranoica [paranoid enunciation] or an estética del balbuceo [muttering aesthetic] in which silences, insinuations, and double meanings weave homosexuality into a web of subtle allusions (Mira ¿Alguién se atreve? 15, 217). De muy buena familia mobilizes similar strategies.
by locating homosexual blackmail in the glass closet, an opaque space famously analyzed by queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁸

Structurally speaking, the play manages to elude direct references to Manolo’s activities by framing the action in a bourgeois living room, apparently at a far remove from neighborhoods of vice. The choice of setting means that spectators never witness the actions and events most important to the drama’s development: Manolo’s dealings with his admirer; the dispute between Manolo, Rafael, and their victim over the bill of exchange; the probable threat of blackmail against the victim; the subsequent murder. Viewers must reconstruct these events by piecing together clues dispersed in the dialogues. This is a difficult task, since characters like Anita and Pilar believe Manolo’s lie about his car sales and do not suspect the real source of his income. Those characters who do know the truth have incomplete information, remain silent about their knowledge, or skirt the issue through rhetorical indirection. Consequently, only perspicacious viewers are likely to recognize that Manolo uses his body to lure male admirers to their ruin.

An examination of scenes from Act I shall suffice to illustrate how Benavente’s estética del balbuceo constructs a translucent closet around Manolo’s involvement in la ful. In the act’s opening scene, Enrique becomes annoyed when he sees the maid carrying clothes into Manolo’s bedroom. For viewers, the reaction suggests a strain between the two brothers reinforced by the following scene, where Enrique rejects Pilar’s advice that he act more like Manolo. The source of the conflict remains an enigma. Since it is still unclear whether Enrique or Pilar is the more reliable character, spectators
could agree with the mother that her son envious his brother’s social and economic success, or they could believe Enrique that Manolo does not deserve emulation.

The fourth scene favors the second interpretation. Enrique asks his sibling: “¿es que a mí también quieres engañarme?... ¿A mí, de quien hubieras querido hacer tú y tus amigos lo que sois vosotros, lo más bajo, lo más vergonzoso? Pero ¿crees tú que yo no sé quien paga los trajes, y la vida que llevas, y todo, y por qué lo paga?” (9) [do you also want to deceive me?... Me, whom you and your friends would have liked to make what you are, the lowest, the most shameful thing that one can be? But, do you think I don’t know who pays for your suits, and the life you’re living, and everything, and why they pay for it?]. The expressions the lowest and the most shameful are typical of Enrique’s elliptical approach to talking about Manolo’s money-making endeavor. It is not until later in the drama that some spectators could reasonably be expected to understand that these circumlocutions stand in for homosexual blackmail. Enrique’s rhetorical questions also veil the details of his knowledge of Manolo’s personal life. The youth does not reveal who pays for Manolo’s new clothes, or why. He simply insinuates that he knows this information. Viewers are left to ponder what Enrique means by his subtle accusations.

They receive some aid in Scene V, when Moisés interrogates Enrique about Manolo’s lifestyle. Again, the youth’s response is evasive: “¡Es peor que todo eso!... ¡Es algo tan vergonzoso, tan indigno!...” (12) [It’s worse than all that!... It’s something so shameful, so degrading!...]. Such exclamations generate suspense for spectators who are encouraged to listen for more information about Manolo’s enterprises. The key detail
comes with Moisés’s realization: “¡Vamos, sí!... ¡Explota su figura!...” (12) [So that’s it!... He exploits his figure!...]. Enrique confirms:

Así sucede; nadie se atreve a entender, nadie se atreve a querer ver lo que ve todo el mundo, y así sucede hasta ese antro del vicio en que de un lado están las víctimas, pobres degenerados, para los que no hay más que incomprensión, y de otro lado, los explotadores, para los que todo es tolerancia y complicidad, nunca llega la verdad por cobardía de todos. (13)

[So it is; nobody dares to understand, nobody dares to want to see what everyone is seeing, and so it is that, due to everyone’s cowardice, the truth never penetrates that den of vice where on one side are the victims, poor degenerates for whom there is nothing more than miscomprehension, and on the other side are the exploiters, for whom all is tolerance and complicity.]

Together with a few other passages later in the play, this dialogue represents the work’s least ambiguous statement of Manolo’s participation in la ful. It still requires decoding on the part of viewers. Moisés’s euphemism he exploits his figure offers little detail about how Manolo uses his person, and it never becomes clear if the blackmailer actually performs sexual acts with other individuals, or if he simply baits admirers into making advances. Enrique’s mention of degenerados is also indirect, although it does imply that Manolo’s ruse involves men.

In the 1930s, the word degenerate should have been enough to make savvy spectators aware of Manolo’s ties to homosexual males. As Mira notes, degeneration was one of the principal tropes for homosexuality in Spain at the time (De Sodoma 51-57). Rafael’s allusion to the mote [nickname] of Manolo’s admirer in the final scene of Act I further clarifies the victim’s connection to same-sex desire (24). It evokes the adoption of feminine nicknames by members of Madrid’s queer subculture, a practice widely publicized in the 1920s and 30s by the commercial novels of Álvaro Retana to be
studied in Chapter 3. Passing in nature, these references could have gone unnoticed by inattentive or under-informed viewers in 1931. Other spectators could easily have chosen to overlook their full implications. In the final analysis, Benavente’s balbuceos urge audiences to contemplate the existence of homosexual blackmail in middle-class Madrid, and give them the chance to remain blissfully ignorant.

I.F. Revelation, Concealment, and Mise en Abyme

In this sense, *De muy buena familia* functions much like intradiegetic documents that reveal and conceal Manolo’s role in his victim’s assassination. In Acts II and III, details of the murder come to light when Isidoro reads a newspaper report about the crime, when he receives an anonymous letter from a witness who asks for money in exchange for silence, and when he recuperates the bill of exchange. Although the documents appear as props on stage, viewers do not have first-hand knowledge of their content. Their familiarity with the texts depends on the characters’ terse oral summaries. When Moisés asks Isidoro about the murder reported by the newspaper, the latter vaguely replies that it is “repugnante por todo: por la víctima, por las causas aparentes y por el presunto o presuntos asesinos, he empezado a leer y no he querido seguir; me ha asqueado todo ello” (28) [repugnant on every count: because of the victim, the apparent causes, the alleged assassin or assassins; I began reading and I didn’t want to continue; it’s all disgusting to me]. Spectators learn nothing else about the article’s content before Isidoro hides the journal from his family.

Isidoro does something similar with the anonymous letter and the bill of exchange. After examining the letter, he asks Manolo: “Pero, ¿es verdad, es verdad? Tú conocías a ese hombre?... ¿Tú ibas a esa casa y eras amigo de los que la fecuentaban, y
hasta puedes parecer complicado en tan repugnante crimen?” (42) [But, is it true, is it true? You knew that man? You went to that house and were a friend of those who frequented it, and you even might seem involved in such a repugnant crime?]. The questions leave viewers wondering exactly what Isidoro must have read in the missive. The father later does away with the document by paying the money demanded by the blackmailer. After redeeming the bill of exchange, he also orders Enrique: “Rompe, quema ese papel que de no haberlo recogido a tiempo hubiera sido una tremenda prueba contra tu hermano” (51) [Rip up and burn that paper, which would have been a tremendous piece of evidence against your brother had it not been salvaged in time].

On the one hand, the newspaper, the letter, and the bill of exchange force Isidoro to acknowledge that Manolo owes his economic prosperity to homosexual blackmail. On the other hand, the father tries to manipulate the documents in order to restore the crime to a realm of oblivion. As an interpreter of texts that both divulge and censor information about sexual extortion, Isidoro is an intradiegetic double for the viewers of De muy buena familia. His relationship to the documents is a mise en abyme of the play’s enunciation that anticipates on a diegetic level spectators’ reception of the drama itself. Just as Isidoro learns about and covers up homosexual blackmail through his contact with the texts, extradiegetic viewers are likely to recognize and overlook the crime’s importance in the play. The character’s treatment of the documents en abyme thus serves as a model for the reception of Benavente’s drama. Moreover, his destruction of the texts prefigures critical dismissals of the play’s relation to sexual extortion, and perhaps of the drama itself.
A newspaper review by Enrique Díez-Canedo from 1931 confirms that at least one early spectator imitated Isidoro in his viewing of *De muy buena familia*. The critic’s handling of the play recalls the father’s attitude *vis-à-vis* the intradiegetic newspaper. In the same way that Isidoro withholds details of the article in his conversation with Moisés, Díez-Canedo fails to report that the drama deals with homosexual blackmail. He refers to the crime euphemistically, writing that “[e]l fondo turbio en que nace el drama en primer término […] queda tan esfumado que no puede escandalizar a nadie” (148) [the shady background from which the main drama emerges...ends up being so opaque that it cannot scandalize anyone]. Later on, the critic comes closer to confessing that sexual extortion forms part of the play, only to deny that it has any real significance: “En *De muy buena familia*, el crimen que cuesta la vida a un personaje cuyo nombre ni siquiera se pronuncia […] pudo perfectamente sustituirse por otro asunto en que la perversión sexual [sic] nada tuviese que ver” (148-49) [In *Of Very Good Stock*, the crime that costs the life of a character whose name isn’t even mentioned...could have easily been substituted for some other matter in which sexual perversion had no role]. Like the intradiegetic newspaper and its embedding drama, Díez-Canedo’s article weaves a web of silences and disclosures around blackmail between middle-class men in Madrid.

If Benavente’s aesthetic of indirection seems to call out for critical responses like those of Díez-Canedo, a careful interpretation of his play reveals that such readings expose themselves to a grave danger. Isidoro’s attempt to expunge all evidence of his son’s ties to homosexual blackmail does not prevent Manolo from committing suicide. In the drama’s concluding moral, the father admits that he and Pilar have failed as parents: “¿Qué sabemos de nuestros hijos? ¿Qué sabíamos del que hemos perdido para siempre?
¿Qué sabemos de los que nos quedan? […] no hemos sabido ser padres” (55-56) [What do we know about our children? What did we know about the one we’ve lost forever? What do we know about the ones that remain? …we have not known how to be parents].

Rather than destroying the proof of Manolo’s involvement with la ful, Isidoro should have directly confronted his son’s activities from the outset in an effort to put an end to his delinquency. Returning to the analogy between Isidoro and Benavente’s spectators, the moral indicates that the audience also needs to boldly face up to the existence of homosexual blackmail in Madrid. In the midst of its ambiguous aesthetic, the play calls for an honest appraisal of the injustices generated by extortion and the 1928 law that increased its efficacy.

I.G. Censorship and Scandal

There are several reasons why Benavente could not write a drama more overtly criticizing his middle-class public’s willful ignorance of homosexual blackmail. In Spain and abroad, increasingly stringent regulatory practices in the 1920s sought to curtail a wave of sexuality on stage by banning plays that could be construed by censors to endorse vice or crime. More or less explicit references to sexual “perversion” or “degeneracy” were a prime target for expurgation. Although De muy buena familia does not promote homosexual blackmail, it could be read as a defense of the victims of that wrongdoing. A more obvious apology of this type would have outraged Spanish censors, especially in light of the legal injunctions against same-sex relations still on the books at the time of the play’s premier.

Even if a less oblique version of the drama had evaded censorship in 1931, it would probably have sparked a scandal among Benavente’s middle-class audience. In an
investigation of theater criticism in the Madrilenian newspapers *La Voz* [*The Voice*] and *La Libertad* [*Liberty*] between 1926 and 1936, María Teresa García Abad-García notes that works dealing with taboo sexual themes routinely wrought havoc in Madrid’s fashionable playhouses. The theatrical adaption of *A.M.D.G.*, Ramón Pérez de Ayala’s novel about the sexual abuse of schoolboys by their Jesuit teachers, had a scandalous premier in 1931 at the Teatro Beatriz (180-81). The year before, Simon Gantillon’s melodramatic treatment of heterosexual prostitution in *Maya* (1924) had caused an uproar at the Zarzuela (233). Benavente would have risked infuriating his bourgeois spectators had he completely lifted the veil on homosexual blackmail in *De muy buena familia*.

As it is, the play oscillates between revealing and concealing sexual crime in Madrid, attacking and perpetuating middle-class hypocrisy, and, ultimately, plunging into “deep” modernity and reinstating bourgeois attitudes towards homosexuality and extortion. After forcefully exposing his ideas about modernity and the need for Manolo to be more open about his bodily comportment with men, Enrique confesses: “También yo soy cobarde en mi vida” (19) [I’m also a coward in my life]. Since the play’s most progressive character fails to live up to his own idea of modernity, it is hardly surprising that the work itself has not entered Spain’s canon of modern drama. Just as Isidoro hides the newspaper, contemporary critics have consigned the play to brief comments and footnotes. This is the price that Benavente has paid for his incursion into commercial theater. Without neglecting the play’s aesthetic concessions to conservative moral sensibilities, my reading calls for renewed attention to the way Benavente was able to oppose legislation against homosexuality within the limits imposed by his fame as bourgeois playwright.
II. Hustler-Blackmailer-Author Relations in *Vida privada*

One viewer who detected a socially radical message in *De muy buena familia* was the Catalan writer Josep Maria de Sagarra. In the same biographical sketch cited above (2.I.), Sagarra claims that Benavente,

[c]uando quiere pasar la maroma de las dificultades, y decide meterse de cabeza en el fuego, con el propósito de salir sin ninguna quemadura, es el único que lo logra, y es él el único a quien el público respeta. En estos momentos de audacia y de conciencia teatral, don Jacinto no ha tenido nadie que pudiera comparársele. Nadie se hubiera atrevido a escribir *De muy buena familia*, en el momento en que se estrenó, y sólo ante la emoción humana de aquella comedia, una primera y gran actriz [Margarita Xirgu] se hubiese resignado a salir en la escena final encarnando una alma despreciable. En esta obra la maestría de don Jacinto fue rotunda, hasta la parte de discurso, propia de muchas de sus comedias, allí se fundió con los tejidos de la verdad. (*Retratos* 211)

[when he wants to give himself a challenge, and he decides to go head-first into the flames with the aim of emerging without any burns, he is the only one who is able to do so, and the only one respected by the public. In these moments of audacity and theatrical awareness, Don Jacinto has not had anyone who could equal him. Nobody would have dared write *Of Very Good Stock* at the time of its premier, and a first-rate, great actress [Margarita Xirgu] would have agreed to appear in the last scene playing a despicable soul only as a result of the human emotion of that play. Don Jacinto’s skill was resounding in that work; even the spoken parts, characteristic of many of his plays, intertwined there with the fabric of truth.]

Written in 1958, this passage indicates that Benavente’s play made a lasting impression on Sagarra, who likely attended a performance before 1936. In fact, there is reason to suspect that Sagarra drew on the drama for details of his plot when he composed the novel *Vida privada* in the summer of 1932, a few months after the play’s premier in Barcelona in November, 1931.

*De muy buena familia* and *Vida privada* both center on a contrast between two brothers, one of whom is said to have come “de molt bona família” [from a very good
family] in the latter text (153). In the two works, one sibling’s financially-motivated sexual practices distance him from the other brother. And in both texts, threats of outing lead to the death of a man who falls victim to his desire for an exploitative youth.

Whether these resemblances can be interpreted as evidence of a direct connection between the works of Benavente and Sagarra is of little consequence for my reading. The convergences are of interest here to the extent that they signal how texts with noticeable similarities at the level of story can, through discursive variation, generate diverse messages about modernity, male prostitution, and homosexual blackmail. Whereas Benavente’s distinction between Enrique and Manolo corresponds to a gulf between deep and superficial models of modernity, the first of which appears in a positive light, Sagarra’s contrast between two aristocratic brothers foregrounds differences between attachment to patrician tradition and integration into a modern bourgeois order, neither of which is portrayed sympathetically. Moreover, while Benavente’s oblique aesthetic both reveals and conceals Manolo’s activities, Sagarra’s less circumspect approach brings everything to light: there can be no doubt that one of his protagonists prostitutes himself with men and women, and blackmails a male client.

What is at stake in Vida privada is not whether hustling and extortion will remain under cover or come into public view; as a roman à clef, the novel’s piquant revelations about well-known citizens of Barcelona inevitably sparked a scandal resulting in the expulsion of Sagarra and his wife from their social circles (McDonogh 137; Ordóñez 20). Of greater importance are the textual features that mark Sagarra’s attitude towards his all-too-explicit subject matter. These details trace the writer’s vacillations between critical distance and fascinated involvement in relation to male prostitution and blackmail. I
argue below that *Vida privada* constructs the hustler-extortionist as an embodiment of what Sagarra presents as the corruption of both aristocratic tradition and socioeconomic modernization in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Barcelona. At the same time, a curious *mise en abyme* draws parallels between the author and his ostensible object of critique. Despite the former’s efforts to distance himself from the prostitute, an uncanny resemblance between the two emerges at the novel’s very core.

**II.A. Sagarra and Modern Barcelona**

Josep Maria de Sagarra i Castellarnau was born in 1894 to a family of aristocratic extraction. As shall become important later on, his father’s ancestors gained noble titles in the late seventeenth century and moved from rural Catalonia to Barcelona a century later. Sagarra’s parents retained some of their forebears’ rural properties, and the author often spent summers in the country. Although he studied law and diplomacy in Barcelona and Madrid, his socioeconomic privilege allowed him to focus on writing, mostly in Catalan. Biographer Lluís Permanyer describes Sagarra as an *home total* [total man] because of the range of his social and literary activities (*Millors escrits* 9-16). He navigated Barcelona with ease, interacting with everyone from intellectuals in the Ateneu to thrill-seeking tourists in the red light district. From a literary standpoint, he garnered commercial success between 1914 and 1961 through his journalism, plays, poetry, memoirs, and novels.

Both socially and literarily, Sagarra experienced the vertiginous changes that accompanied modernization in Barcelona and that provide the backdrop for the action of *Vida privada* in 1927 and 1932. During its transformation, the city received monikers that appear in historian Alejandro Sánchez’s title “Manchester español, Rosa de Fuego,”
París del sur…” [“Spanish Manchester, Rose of Fire, Paris of the South…”]. The first alludes to Barcelona’s position as Spain’s industrial capital in the early 1900s, a status achieved over the course of the previous century following the construction of the city’s first cotton factory in 1832 (Conversi 11-12; McDonogh 20-23; Sudrià). Industrial expansion prompted the introduction of other technologies, such as the railroad (1848), trams (1872), electricity (1875), and automobile plants like Hispano Suiza (1904) (Resina 11-20, 23; Sudrià).

New modes of transportation were important as the city tore down its medieval walls (1854-1865) and expanded outward in Ildefons Cerdà’s gridiron Eixample. Initially approved in 1859, the Cerdà Plan imposed a standardized orthogonal block to add a total of 1,200 blocks to the existing city (Resina 64; Roca 162). Construction continued in 1903, when a competition was held to design connections between the new neighborhoods and outlying towns once separate from Barcelona (Guardia and García Espuche 38; Resina 65-67). Concurrent modifications to the urban landscape included the razing of the Ciudadela in preparation for the International Exposition of 1888 and the beautification of Montjuïc and the Plaça de Espanya prior to the analogous event in 1929 (Guardia and García Espuche). As Sánchez puts it, the two Expositions aimed to prove that Spain’s Manchester had “apost[ado] de forma decidida por la modernidad, o lo que era lo mismo, por la integración plena en la Europa avanzada del momento” [decisively committed itself to modernity or, in other words, to full integration into the cutting-edge Europe of the time] (15).

Of course, the push for modernization in Barcelona had a downside, sometimes clashing with the celebratory tone of the Expositions. The city’s growth both encouraged
and responded to a demographic boom in which the population grew from 133,545 in 1834 to 1,005,565 in 1930 (McDonogh 21). By 1930, nearly twenty percent of residents were migrants from other parts of Spain, many of whom had come to the city from the south in search of work in factories (Sudrià 54). Violent class warfare punctuated Barcelona’s modern history through the Civil War, making the city a so-called “rose of fire” (McDonogh 26-27; Sánchez 17).

If labor unrest ignited the period’s most visible conflicts, there was also dissonance in the upper classes to which most of the characters of Vida privada belong. In his study Good Families of Barcelona: A Social History of Power in the Industrial Era (1986), anthropologist Gary Wray McDonogh observes that industrialization restructured Barcelona’s elite as newly enriched bourgeois industrialists sought access to the symbolic capital held by a landed aristocracy in possession of noble titles as early as the ninth century.26 From the 1830s onward, Barcelona’s so-called Good Families, a group of one to two hundred patrilineages, emerged as a synthesis of these two classes, often brought about by marriage (3-4, 107, 141-64). This merger allowed for the rapid social climbing of previously humble entrepreneurs, while also sealing the decline of long-standing patrician families who “proved unable to keep pace with the expansion and redefinition of power” (139). The tale of two brothers in Vida privada marks the distance between aristocrats who failed and succeeded in joining the Good Families.

Shifting political trends in the first decades of the twentieth century also overlapped with class mobility. According to sociologist Daniele Conversi, political Catalanism gained momentum in the mid-1800s in response to Catalan cultural revival, traditionalist Carlism, Republican federalism, and industrial protectionism (13). The last
of these factors took center stage in the Lliga Regionalista [Regionalist League], the hegemonic Catalanist party between 1901 and 1931 (26). Dominated by industrialists, the Lliga eventually capitulated to the anti-Catalanist Miguel Primo de Rivera, eschewing its regionalist aims in exchange for safeguards against class warfare (39). The party’s collaboration with the dictatorship between 1923 and 1930 led to its demise under the Second Republic, when the more radical Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya [Republican Left of Catalonia] came to power. The triumph of working-class and lower bourgeois interests in 1931 dealt a blow to industrialists and aristocrats alike (Davidson 187; McDonogh 28). Set in 1927 and 1932, the two parts of *Vida privada* identify the transition from the Primo de Rivera regime to the Republic as a funereal time for Barcelona’s old aristocracy.

For cultural critic Robert A. Davidson, the same period also signaled the passing of the city’s Jazz Age. Spain’s neutrality in World War I heralded an era of economic prosperity for Barcelona’s industrialists, who produced equipment for the war effort elsewhere in Europe (Sudrià 49-52). Excess capital in the city attracted artists and entertainers from Paris looking for work beyond the lines of battle. The result was an interest in jazz, sports, and other leisure activities not seen in the rest of Europe until after the war (Davidson 15-18). Until the economic crisis of 1929, Barcelona was truly a Paris of the South. Composed in the wake of the financial crash, *Vida privada* belongs to what Davidson calls the *hang-over period* (182). For this critic, Sagarra uses the novel to level a harsh denunciation against the preceding Jazz Age, and especially against the elite’s pandering to Primo de Rivera at the expense of Catalanism’s claims to regional autonomy (10, 211, 213-14).
Davidson’s effort to situate Sagarra’s attitude towards Barcelona’s historical panorama coincides with a trend in other texts on the author, most of which are written in Catalan and provide overviews of his life and works. Biographers frequently discuss the degree to which Sagarra either clung nostalgically to his aristocratic roots, or enthusiastically welcomed the modern innovations in Barcelona described above. In an essay from 1995 on Sagarra’s aristocratic lineage, the author’s grandson Josep Maria de Sagarra Àngel suggests that his grandfather would not like contemporary Barcelona (178). The implication is that Sagarra’s attachment to his noble origins predisposed him against urban evolution. In the same vein, Sagarra’s contemporary Néstor Luján claims that the writer “deplora les brutalitats imperdonables contra la pedra antiga a finals del XIX i a principis del XX” (88) [deplores the unforgiveable brutalities against the old stone in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries]. The idea sits oddly alongside Luján’s later remark that “[s]i, com hem dit, Sagarra fou un gran nostàlgic de la Barcelona antiga […], també aprecià enormement totes les transformacions de la ciutat que estimava” (92) [if, as we have said, Sagarra was nostalgic for old Barcelona..., he also enormously appreciated all the transformations of his beloved city]. The juxtaposition of the two comments supports Enric Gallén’s conclusion that Sagarra’s outlook swayed between longing for a noble, pre-industrial past and attraction to Barcelona’s modernizing cityscape (Introduction 12). Debate around Sagarra’s allegiance to tradition and/or modernity reaches a high point in criticism on Vida privada.

II.B. Vida privada in History and Criticism

Sagarra wrote the two-volume work in the summer of 1932. Philologist Xavier Pla’s detailed description of the novel’s genesis reveals that journalists and booksellers
marketed it as an exposé of “els aspectes més apassionats i més íntims d’una societat existent” (391) [the most thrilling and intimate aspects of a real society]. Such advertisements inclined readers to greet the work with scandal and generated enough enthusiasm for it to win the 1932 Premi Creixells, a prestigious award for novels in Catalan (Ordóñez 19-20; Pla 396-97). According to Pla, the moral involvement or distance of the author with respect to the plot interested readers from the outset (396).

Inquiries into the author’s elusive stance towards his novel’s content also dominate later discussions of the work. Writers generally agree that Sagarra both loved and condemned the aristocracy from which he drew his characters. Exactly which literary mechanisms inscribe these contradictory attitudes is a matter left unexplored by most critics, whose statements appear in brief prologues and commentaries.29

Scholarly investigations based on close textual analysis are different from shorter reviews to the extent that they place greater emphasis on Sagarra’s negative perspective on modern socioeconomic change in Barcelona. While Davidson argues that the writer constructs his critique through his portrayal of urban spaces in the Jazz Age (182-211), Maria Escala finds that ironic language satirizes the novel’s characters, from whom Sagarra hopes to distance himself and readers (22). Both critics treat the brother who does not prostitute himself as the novel’s protagonist (Davidson 191; Escala 26). In doing so, they perpetuate prior criticism’s trend of overlooking hustling’s role in the text and relegating the second brother to fleeting allusions and endnotes (Davidson 208, 229).

The disproportionate treatment of the two siblings in critical essays contrasts sharply with the novel’s structure, which leaves equal space for the brothers’ stories. More importantly, ignoring the prostitute-blackmailer deprives critics of an opportunity
to gauge Sagarra’s relation to his subject matter. Without disputing claims that *Vida privada* attacks aspects of modernization in Barcelona, my attention to the hustler in the following pages destabilizes the notion that the novel is a one-dimensional social critique. The text’s treatment of the prostitute, including his role in a *mise en abyme*, reveals that Sagarra has trouble maintaining space between himself and the target of his moral disdain. My interpretation provides textual evidence in support of the widespread intuition that Sagarra’s novel oscillates between disgust and intimate involvement with the trajectory of Barcelona’s aristocracy in the industrial era and Jazz Age.

II.C. The Tapestry in the Text

*Vida privada* contains two parts set at the height of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1927) and the beginning of the Second Republic (1932). Using the type of omniscient third-person narration associated with nineteenth-century Realist and Naturalist novels, unnumbered sections in each part alternately advance the action, introduce characters, and situate them against a broad sociohistorical backdrop. Critics have identified digressive tableaux and extended descriptions of secondary characters as obstacles to the novel’s structural unity (Ordóñez 15-21). Nevertheless, richly allusive motifs help the novel to cohere around the Naturalist *topos* of a family’s decline over several generations. *Vida privada* traces the decadence of Barcelona’s aristocratic Lloberola family across three generations during the period of rapid modernization starting in the mid-1800s. As a cohort positioned at the crossroads between tradition and change, the second generation occupies center stage. Its representatives are the brothers Frederic and Guillem de Lloberola, youths who select markedly different paths in the struggle for socioeconomic stability.
Given the cotton industry’s prominent role in Barcelona’s modern expansion, it is fitting that the warp of Sagarra’s text should be tightened by references to a textile. A sixteenth-century tapestry considered an heirloom by the Lloberola family appears repeatedly in the novel. Though unrelated to a second mise en abyme discussed below, the tapestry motif also becomes a textual mirror to the extent that two aspects of the artwork—its circulation between characters and its design—duplicate elements of Sagarra’s story and reinforce its overarching emphases on familial deterioration and fraternal competition.

The tapestry’s movement between different owners throughout the text reflects the varying fortune of the Lloberola clan as it negotiates the merger of landed nobility and industrial bourgeoisie that produced Barcelona’s Good Families. Prior to 1912, the tapestry presided over a room in the Lloberolas’ ancestral mansion in the Gothic Quarter as a sign of the lineage’s distinction. People once identified the family as “aquells senyors que tenen aquell tapís tan bo” (51) [those respectable people with such a fine tapestry]. But by the time of the action in 1927, the bourgeois widow Hortènsia Portell has taken advantage of the Lloberolas’ economically-driven move to more modest housing in the newly-urbanized Eixample in order to procure the tapestry for her own living room.

Hortènsia’s purchase confirms Joan Ramon Resina’s claim that a “collecting craze that seized the nouvelle richesse at the turn of the century fed […] on the bourgeois dream of full enfranchisement from the past” (53). Barcelona’s newly enriched industrialists sought to disavow their humble origins and co-opt the social prestige associated with longstanding aristocrats by acquiring and displaying antiques (Resina 46-
Hortènsia does so with great delight: “en la compra del tapís dels Lloberola, es pot dir que Hortènsia hi va posar més amor propi i més esperit de venjança que entusiasme artístic” (52) [one could say that Hortensia put more egoism and vengeance than artistic enthusiasm into the purchase of the Lloberolas’ tapestry.]

This self-satisfaction is short-lived, for Hortènsia’s own economic downfall follows quickly upon that of the Lloberola household. In spite of her opportunistic support for the Second Republic, her previous affiliations with Primo de Rivera do not put her in a position to benefit from the political change under Catalonia’s leftist Republican government. Like the Lloberola family, Hortènsia chooses to part with the tapestry in 1932. Ironically, she sells it to Conxa Pujol, the consort and future wife of Guillem de Lloberola. As clarified below, Sagarra acidly presents Guillem’s success in restoring his patrimony as the result of his activities as hustler and blackmailer.

Guillem ends up with the tapestry at the expense of his older brother Frederic, who, under Catalan civil law, would have normally inherited over three-fourths of his family’s estate (McDonogh 43). Not coincidentally, the artwork’s design also depicts a struggle between two brothers over an inheritance. An ekphrastic passage explains that the tapestry “[f]igurava una escena bíblica. Jacob, amb guants de pell de be, s’agenollava als peus d’un Isaac carregat de camàndules; Isaac tenia el nas notarial i la cabellera com construïda amb spaghetti. Rebeca somreia a tots dos, agafant per les potes una mena d’ocell que semblava un pollastre” (170) [depicted a Biblical scene. With his fine gloves, Jacob kneeled at the feet of an Isaac loaded down with frills; Isaac had a notarial nose and his hair seemed made out of spaghetti. Rebecca smiled at both of them, taking by its feet some sort of bird reminiscent of a chicken].
The mocking description reveals that the second-rate weaving portrays the events in Genesis 27 in which Jacob deceives Isaac in order to usurp a blessing from his older brother Esau. Previously, Jacob had also taken Esau’s birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew, just as Guillem manages to win much of his father’s wealth from Frederic. The implied allegorical equivalence between Guillem and Jacob, the founder of the nation Israel, is damning for Barcelona’s future, for it positions the morally suspect prostitute as initiator of the city’s modern elite as represented by the Good Families.

By placing the story of Frederic and Guillem en abyme in the tale of Esau and Jacob, the tapestry highlights the contrast between the Lloberola brothers as a major concern in Vida privada. The Biblical myth hinges on a series of oppositions between Isaac’s two sons. While the firstborn Esau is a hairy hunter, the younger Jacob is a smooth-skinned cook and homebody. These differences correspond to other disparities between Frederic and Guillem in Sagarra’s novel. Besides interweaving motifs like that of the tapestry, another way the text achieves structural unity is by insistently foregrounding the varying ways in which the two brothers confront their family’s precarious social status.30

II.D. Between Tradition and Change: Two Sex Lives

Both parts of the novel feature sections whose order seeks to maximize the distinction between the relations of Frederic and Guillem to symbolic and economic capital.31 These sequences reveal that the elder brother values the social prestige of nobility over financial stability. His stubborn clinging to aristocratic behavioral norms determines his economic ruin. On the other hand, Guillem is willing to temporarily
sacrifice patrician privilege in an effort to solidify his economic standing by mingling with the industrial bourgeoisie.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the differing socioeconomic strategies of the siblings closely correlate to their contrasting sexual relations. Literary critic Michael Trask observes that literature and social thought in the United States between 1900 and 1930 often viewed “innovative and unsettling social arrangements as an extension of irregular or perverse desires that sexology deliberated” (1). Literary texts in particular tended to treat “sexual irregularity, class antagonism, and the collapse of stable movement as different facets of the same plot” (9). *Vida privada* is an outstanding source of evidence for a similar nexus of volatile social mobility and nonheteronormative sexual relations in a Catalan context.

In the first four sections of Part I, Frederic sleeps with a woman of aristocratic pretensions with whom he had an affair prior to marrying and losing much of his fortune. His new fling with Rosa Trènor is a desperate attempt to remember his noble past and to evade financial concerns in the face of his inability to pay off a bill of exchange. For Frederic, possessing Rosa means recovering his aristocratic roots even to the detriment of his economic well-being. The novel begins *in medias res* as Frederic awakens from his first night back with Rosa only to contemplate how he will deal with his bankruptcy.

From a chronological standpoint, section six of Part I coincides with the novel’s initial situation: “A la mateixa hora que Frederic sentia en la cuina de Rosa Trènor aquell sorollet feble i ritmat de la tassa de cafè víctima del cops de llengua d’una gata fosforescent, a la casa de modes de Dorotea Palau passaven unes escenes bastant curioses” (57) [At the time that Frederic was listening to the weak and rhythmic sound of...
the coffee cup fallen victim to the licking of a phantasmatic cat in Rosa Trenor’s kitchen, some very curious scenes were taking place in Dorotea Palau’s boutique. Temporal simultaneity helps juxtapose Frederic’s relations with Rosa and the subsequent narration of his younger brother’s activities in the boutique of his family’s former seamstress. Rather than using sex to confirm his noble standing, Guillem sacrifices his class privilege by allowing his one-time maid to hire him out as a prostitute to a bourgeois couple that enjoys orgies with working-class youths. In order to satisfy the sexual desires of Conxa Pujol and her husband Antoni Mates, Guillem changes into rags and uses make-up to simulate a dirty face. With the money thereby earned, he escapes the need to seek other work.

Conxa and Antoni’s desire to pay poor men in exchange for sexual favors marks their longing to distance themselves from their own families’ lowly backgrounds. Their actions imitate aristocratic norms according to which patrician men can seek sexual release with working-class partners without damaging their self-dignity (47-48). In Part II, Frederic persists in his effort to preserve his noble standing by complying with such guidelines. After breaking up with Rosa Trènor, he takes refuge in Can Lloberola, his family’s only remaining rural possession. There, he becomes ill while having an affair with a wine seller’s wife, a woman whose main virtue is that she venerates him as “tot un senyor de Lloberola” (280) [a genuine Lloberola gentleman]. Once again, Frederic turns to sex to confirm his aristocratic identity at a time when his health and pocketbook threaten to betray him.

Frederic’s downfall at Can Lloberola contrasts sharply with Guillem’s triumph in the preceding section of Part II. Having secretly driven Antoni Mates to suicide by
threatening to publicize his orgies, Guillem manages to initiate a relationship with Conxa, who does not recognize him as the hustler whom she hired with her husband. Guillem and Conxa find that they are most happy together when she gives him money to perform violent sexual favors. They plan to marry in order to legitimate a relationship that continues to center on a sort of sadomasochistic prostitution on Guillem’s part. With payment in hand, the younger brother achieves socioeconomic success: “arribà a ésser un dels xicots de moda. El seu esdevenidor econòmic estava assegurat” (267) [he managed to become one of the fashionable boys. His financial future was secure].

The opposition between Frederic and Guillem reaches its culminating point towards the end of the novel when the latter contemplates his family’s tapestry in his new home with Conxa. Guillem deciphers the tapestry’s allegorical meaning:

Deprés de dinar, fumava uns havans magnífics, encarat amb l’històric tapís dels Lloberola, i mirava Conxa, agraint-li la delicadesa d’aquell rescat. Es veia ell mateix en la figura del Jacob bèl·lic, ensarronant Isaac i ensarronant tothom, amb el seu perfil de criatura; mentre que aquell Essau, hirsut i vermellenc, li duia al pensament la imatge de l’imbècil del seu germà Frederic, cosit de misèria i de confusió, jugant al tuti entre unes herbes àcides i destenyides, i donant pa a la tuberculosi en el llit d’una comercianta de vins. (345)

[After dining, he smoked magnificent Cuban cigars while contemplating the historic tapestry of the Lloberola family, and he gazed at Conxa, thanking her for the kindness of the recuperation. He saw himself in the war-ready Jacob, swindling Isaac and all the rest, with his childish profile; while that Esau, hairy and vermillion, brought to mind the image of his imbecilic brother Frederic, all misery and confusion, playing cards in acid, faded weeds, and cultivating his tuberculosis in the bed of a wine seller’s wife.]

The passage condenses in a single paragraph the contrast between Frederic and Guillem played out elsewhere in entire sections. The tapestry’s _mise en abyme_ summarizes
Guillem’s ability to usurp his brother’s inheritance by rejecting Frederic’s aristocratic airs and exploiting his own sexuality as prostitute and blackmailer.

II.E. Constructing Critical Distance

Although Guillem’s sexual strategies guarantee him a comfortable existence, narrative techniques along with Naturalist imagery and diction generate a powerful critique of both Frederic’s tenacious adherence to patrician tradition and Guillem’s successful attempt to join Barcelona’s Good Families. From a narrative standpoint, one of *Vida privada*’s most unusual sections begins *in medias res* with a lengthy monologue in which someone addresses a speech to an unknown interlocutor about the past grandeur of the Lloberola family’s rural properties. Textual clues quickly reveal that the orator is Frederic. What remains unclear for over three pages is that his addressee is a cow (267-70). The animal greets the speech with an impertinent “muuu…” that mocks Frederic’s final question: “No sóc un Lloberola autèntic, jo?…” (270) [Aren’t I an authentic Lloberola?]. The cow’s unexpected intervention discredits Frederic’s extravagant ideas about his household’s past and urges readers to distance themselves from the character’s nostalgia.

The close proximity of Frederic and the cow recalls grotesque comparisons between human beings and animals throughout the novel. In one passage, a secondary character playing cards “ensenyava les dents amb un excés de secreció de saliva, produït per l’estat de nervis, d’una manera molt semblant a la que gasten les hienes quan entre elles s’ha convingut una visita al cementiri” (30) [bared her teeth with an excess of saliva produced by the state of her nerves, much like hyenas when they have planned a visit to the cemetery]. Guillem falls victim to equally dehumanizing analogies. When he first
accepts money from Conxa after submitting her to a beating, he keeps the money, “exactament igual que se’ls hauria quedat un llop” (266) [exactly as a wolf would have kept it]. After learning of Antoni’s suicide, Guillem smiles “amb una alegria d’animal salvatge” (211) [with the happiness of a savage animal]. These words conclude Part I, leaving readers without any doubt as to the character’s bestiality and the novel’s ties to Naturalist depictions of human beings as organisms on par with animal life.

*Vida privada* also displays its Naturalist filiations in frequent allusions to medical theories of degeneration. As noted in the discussion of *De muy buena familia*, degeneration was an important trope for homosexuality in early twentieth-century Spain. In fact, dominant groups across Europe used the term to stigmatize a range of minorities that were considered to be over- or under-evolved, usually with respect to white, middle-class, heterosexual men. Historian Lawrence Birken explains that “developmental evolution postulated inferior hierarchical positions for proletarians, perverts, women, children, criminals, primitives, and the mentally ill,” all of whom were sometimes considered degenerate (75).

Comparisons to most of these groups reinforce Guillem’s characterization as a product of the Lloberola clan’s decline (89). According to the moralizing narrator, Guillem is an abnormal, machine- or childlike individual who suffers from atavism and who could be best understood by a low-class female prostitute (59, 209, 258-59, 265). By explicitly judging him in this way in the text, the narrator seeks to evade the ambiguity about the character’s moral status that would emerge from a more neutral recounting of his activities as hustler-extortionist.
The overall effect of the Naturalist language used to discuss Guillem constructs the male prostitute as an incarnation of the corruption of both aristocratic tradition and socioeconomic innovation in Barcelona in the early 1900s. As final product of an increasingly degenerate noble lineage and first in a line of unsavory individuals to embrace a modern class structure through a merger with the bourgeoisie, Guillem occupies a pivotal position in his family’s history. He is the blighted fruit of Barcelona’s patrician regime that will continue to contaminate its modern evolution, represented in the novel’s third generation by the equally corrupt and self-consciously modern Maria Lluïsa. Undoubtedly, the hustler-blackmailer achieves symbolic weight as a prime target of Sagarra’s social critique in Vida privada.

II.F. Too Close for Comfort: Uncanny Resemblances en Abyme

Without denying the novel’s denunciatory force, it is also important to acknowledge that the critical distance between Sagarra and Guillem narrows in a mise en abyme at the end of Part I, exactly mid-way through the text. In a dialogue that does not otherwise advance the plot or provide further information about the characters, Guillem tells his friend Agustí Casals that he wants to write a novel (202-07). Although readers of Vida privada never receive access to Guillem’s projected text, the hustler’s comments evoke a hypothetical novel that serves as a mise en abyme of the code, the utterance, and the enunciation of Sagarra’s embedding work.

Guillem and Agustí’s conversation about the former’s literary project could easily function as a manifesto for the aesthetic aims of Vida privada. Agustí tells his friend that “[l’]argument és el de menys; la qüestió és saber-les escriure, les coses: saber-les fer interessants i vives” (203) [the plot is the least important component; the main thing is to
know how to write things, how to make them interesting and lively]. In response, Guillem implies that he will author a novel in which one event follows upon another, so that “els esdeveniments semblen cada vegada més extraordinaris, i els personatges agafen un clar-obscur sense terme mig, massa de melodrama” (203) [the events seem increasingly extraordinary, and the characters add a claroscuro with no middle ground, replete with melodrama]. While readers might contest the verisimilitude of such a text, Guillem insists that his work will be based on actual events in Barcelona. He will publish it only at the risk of being exiled from high society “com una mala bèstia indesitjable” (203) [like a foul, undesirable beast].

The description of Guillem’s hypothetical narrative fits Sagarra’s novel extremely well. As literary critic Marcos Ordóñez notes, Vida privada often subordinates action to verbal portraiture and static scenes (17-18). With its strand of queer and otherwise taboo behaviors culled from contemporary life in Barcelona—adultery, male prostitution, orgies, homosexual blackmail, suicide, premarital sex, abortion, sadomasochism, and incest—the novel matches the type of book described by Guillem. Additionally, the hustler’s prediction about his novel’s negative reception prefigures the historical reception of Sagarra’s text. As mentioned earlier, some sectors of Barcelona’s aristocracy greeted the work with outrage and shunned the writer and his wife (McDonogh 137; Ordóñez 20).

The projected novel also mirrors parts of Vida privada’s utterance or story. Guillem’s text will deal with an episode with which he is intimately familiar in order to prove that “ha cada senyor i cada senyora que ningú no en sospitaria mai res, que apparentament porten la vida més gris i més correcta, que […] si els pguessis guitar per
dins, si els pguessis seguir els passos inconfessables, tindries arguments que no se t’acabarien mai” (203) [there are gentlemen and ladies about whom nobody would ever suspect anything, who apparently lead the most dull and proper lives, who would give you never-ending plots if you could see them from within, if you could follow their unconfessable steps]. All the evidence indicates that the character plans to write about his experiences as prostitute and blackmailer with Conxa and Antoni, one of the principal subplots in the first part of Vida privada. Since Guillem reveals that he is in love with the protagonist of his novel, the work also foreshadows his marriage to Conxa in Part II (205).

From the point of view of both style and content, Guillem plans to write a novel with some striking similarities to the text in which he is a character. Consequently, the conversation under discussion constructs a mise en abyme of the enunciation in which there is an analogy between Sagarra as creator of Vida privada and Guillem as author of a hypothetical intradiegetic novel sharing characteristics of its embedding work. Whereas the mise en abyme in De muy buena familia reflects on the play’s reception by positioning Isidoro as a sort of intradiegetic spectator, the one in Vida privada illuminates the novel’s production by drawing a parallel between Guillem and Sagarra as writers.

A host of details in Vida privada reinforce a resemblance between Sagarra and the prostitute that can best be described as uncanny [German, unheimlich]. In his 1919 essay on that adjective, Sigmund Freud affirms that “everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (934). Considering the prominence of narrative strategies and language used to distance Sagarra from his novel’s
characters, the link between the author and Guillem implied by an apparently gratuitous dialogue seems to be a fleetingly exposed secret repressed by the rest of the text.

But the discussion’s appearance at the novel’s figurative heart raises the question of whether it establishes a connection with reverberations elsewhere in the work. Freud’s assertion that “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads us back to what is known of old and long familiar” helps detect such resonances throughout Vida privada, for it ties the unheimlich directly to Sagarra’s theme of familial decline. As the psychoanalyst’s etymological investigation of the German word heimlich indicates, familiar in the preceding definition can be taken literally as “belonging to the house or family” (931). Glossing Freud, the uncanny is that which frightens because it recalls something terrifyingly close to home.

In addition to their shared status as writers, the strongest bond between Sagarra and Guillem is in fact their family history. The Lloberola household once formed part of a rural aristocracy ennobled by Castilian monarchs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the nineteenth century, it had settled in Barcelona’s Gothic Quarter and was involved in the Carlist wars. Facing economic ruin, Guillem’s father sold the family’s mansion and relocated to the Eixample. In spite of his need for money, young Guillem refused to pursue a conventional career. He undertook legal studies simply “per estudiar alguna cosa” (68) [for the sake of studying something]. At the time of the action of Part I in 1927, Guillem prefers literature over law, and he mingles with a group of poets accused of writing indecentades (67) [indecencies]. Since the character is approximately thirty years old at the time, his birth would have been close to that of Sagarra in 1894.
This coincidence strengthens a point-for-point correlation between Guillem and Sagarra’s familial and personal histories, as described above and in Sagarra’s autobiographical Memories (1954). Aside from a divergence between the Lloberola household’s disdain for Catalanism and the Sagarra clan’s loyalty to the Lliga Regionalista, Guillem could easily belong to Sagarra’s family or serve as the writer’s degraded double. As Freud notes, the ego finds doubles uncannily familiar, since it creates them by projecting its unpleasant fantasies onto foreign entities (941).

Given the void around sexual desire in Memories, it would be futile to speculate about why Sagarra voluntarily or unconsciously creates an alter ego in the form of a male prostitute and blackmailer. For my purposes, it is enough to highlight the suitability of the Sagarra-Guillem parallel revealed by overlapping biographies and the mise en abyme. Just as Guillem-cum-hustler plans to use his privileged access to Conxa and Antoni’s clandestine sexual lives to write a novel, Sagarra exploits his aristocratic social connections to air his class’s dirty laundry in Vida privada. And if Guillem-cum-extortionist threatens to publicize Antoni’s same-sex desire in order to make money, Sagarra really does disclose secrets in his lucrative literary enterprise.34

The multi-layered connection between Sagarra and Guillem indicates that the former’s attitude towards socioeconomic change, male prostitution, and blackmail in Vida privada embraces both critical distance and fascinated complicity. I do not mean to suggest that Sagarra had sex for money or extorted payment from homosexual men during his lifetime. Whether he did so is of little interest, as the novel sometimes positions him astonishingly close to the fictional hustler-extortionist from whom he otherwise tries to separate himself as much as possible. Sagarra’s oscillations to and
from Guillem capture his desire and fear vis-à-vis the socioeconomic modernization represented by the hustler’s unscrupulous assimilation into Barcelona’s Good Families. For Marshall Berman, the clash of longing and dread in the face of change is a defining trait of modern experience. Teetering between these two poles, Vida privada is a compelling testament to Barcelona’s turbulent tryst with modernity.

III. Pimping the Text: Novel and Prostitute in Bestezuela de placer

The link between author and hustler in my reading of Sagarra’s novel comes into sharper focus in light of contemporaneous discourses about commercially successful literature in Spain. By 1932, well-known Spanish writers had explored manifold connections between male and female prostitution, authorship, and the sort of short novels that began to flood kiosks on a weekly basis in 1907 with the publication of the collection El Cuento Semanal [The Weekly Story]. Such series modernized editorial and reading practices in Spain by marketing certain types of books as mass-manufactured commodities in an expanding capitalist economy.

Chapter 3 examines how Álvaro Retana’s short novels took advantage of the publishing industry’s modernization to consolidate queer subcultures in Madrid and Barcelona. In this section, I introduce the collections that published Retana’s novels by reading El Caballero Audaz’s Bestezuela de placer (La Novela de Hoy, 1922) in conjunction with texts by some of the short novel’s most important proponents. My juxtaposition of works by El Caballero Audaz (José María Carretero, 1888-1951), Eduardo Zamacois (1876-1972), Carlos Fortuny (Álvaro Retana, 1890-1970), and Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964) shows that Bestezuela de placer can be interpreted as an
allegory about the production and consumption of short novels that used eroticism to attract a wide readership.

The vehicle for this allegory is the biography of Benjamín Leira, a prostitute whose treatment by a series of lovers replicates the way readers are likely to handle Bestezuela de placer or comparable works. Benjamín offers sexual services to a rapid succession of male and female lovers in exchange for access to a luxurious lifestyle. In the process, he repeats a script that situates him in a seemingly interminable cycle of financial boom and bust. This monotonous circulation of bodies, sexual gratification, and socioeconomic capital corresponds to the equally repetitive flow of texts, reading pleasure, money, and prestige in the literary and commercial endeavors comprised by Spain’s short novel collections.

My reading of the hustler in Bestezuela de placer as a trope for the type of mass-produced literature of which the work itself is an example places El Caballero Audaz in a delicate situation. The novel’s implicit condemnation of the literary vacuity and financial aims of short novels jars with the fact that the author attained considerable fame and fortune from his own contributions to commercial novel collections. In the same way that Sagarra vacillates between critical distance and involvement with respect to Guillem’s insertion into Barcelona’s modern class hierarchy, El Caballero Audaz alternately attacks and engages in practices that modernized Spain’s publishing industry by marketing short novels as pleasurable commodities.35

III.A. The Novel as Commodity: Short Novel Collections in Spain, 1907-1936

Major collections of short novels revolutionized Spain’s literary field between 1907 and 1936 by drawing on modern technological and socioeconomic innovations in
order to produce literature in new formats and on a scale previously unimaginable
(Martínez Martín “La edición” 170-71). Literary historian Louis Urrutia describes the
conditions of the shift when he writes that at the turn of the century,

[1]e développement urbain, la croissance industrielle, l’alphabétisation
croissante, l’entrée de la femme dans la vie sociale, la naissance de
théories nouvelles dans le domaine philosophique, politique et social, vont
elever considérablement le chiffre de lecteurs potentiels, avec des
disparités régionales et locales [...]. Ces faits nouveaux rendent propice,
exigent même une littérature dite populaire, adaptée à un niveau culturel
moyen ou médiocre, de gens las du feuilleton classique (ou de la novela
por entregas exsangue), de gens qui souhaitent trouver autre chose que le
conte et le feuilleton du journal, souvent traduits de l’étranger. (159)

[urban development, industrial growth, increasing literacy, the entrance of
the woman into social life, the birth of new theories in the philosophical,
political, and social arenas, considerably elevated the number of potential
readers, with regional and local disparities...These developments paved the
way for, even necessitated, a so-called popular literature, adapted to a
middle-brow or mediocre cultural level, that of the readers of the classic
feuilleton (or the dying novel in installments), of the readers who wanted
to find something other than the story or the newspaper feuilleton,
generally translated from foreign tongues].

The first person to capitalize upon the demand for a new class of commercial
literature was the writer Eduardo Zamacois, whose novel La antorcha apagada [The
Extinguished Torch] (1935) is an object of analysis in Chapter 4. He discovered the
formula for attracting readers to the novel with El Cuento Semanal, the first short novel
collection of its type published in Spain. Based in Madrid like the other series discussed
here, Zamacois’s collection issued a total of 263 new novels every Friday between
January 4, 1907 and January 12, 1912. Each work cost a modest thirty cents and was
printed on high-quality couché paper with color illustrations and twenty-four large pages
of double-columned text (Magnien et al. 26-27; Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa 85).
Materially, the collection was not entirely innovative, since several nineteenth-century literary magazines shared a similar format and price. *El Cuento Semanal*’s novelty resided in its fictional fare. While earlier magazines had produced installments of lengthy, canonical novels by European masters of the 1800s, each number of Zamacois’s collection offered a complete, original novel written by a Spaniard. Contributors included both veteran authors like Benito Pérez Galdós and Emilia Pardo Bazán, and a host of younger writers who would become assiduous participants in later short novel collections (Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa 33-34).

The new novels offered by Zamacois sealed his collection’s success with readers. By 1908, several of its numbers had enjoyed four printings and the series had its own kiosk on the Calle de Alcalá in Madrid. Numbers 33, 91, 116, and 199 assure that *El Cuento Semanal* was also sold in Barcelona, Paris, Havana, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires (Magnien et. al. 28-29). The publication of collections with the same layout such as *Los Contemporáneos [The Contemporaries]* (896 numbers, 1909-1926) and *El Libro Popular [The Popular Book]* (104 numbers, 1912-1914) also signaled Zamacois’s triumph.

Experiments with more convenient formats ensued as competing collections entered the market featuring identical authors and comparable novels. The most successful innovation was that of *La Novela Corta [The Short Novel]* (499 numbers, 1916-1925), which popularized pocket-sized books with thirty-four single-columned pages. Printed on low quality paper and lacking illustrations, each number sold for only five cents. The collection’s first novels reached print runs of 200,000 copies, quadrupling the already impressive runs of 50,000 copies more typical of other major series (Sánchez
Álvarez-Insúa 35, 103). Like El Cuento Semanal before it, La Novela Corta inspired a host of pocket-sized imitators. Initially directed by El Caballero Audaz, La Novela Semanal [The Weekly Novel] (233 numbers, 1921-1925), sought to outdo its competitor by offering a sixty-four page novel on high quality paper with drawings (Sáinz de Robles 71; Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa 37, 114).

Both La Novela Semanal and La Novela Corta were dealt a fatal blow by La Novela de Hoy [Today’s Novel] (525 numbers, 1922-1932), whose sixty-two page, pocket-sized novels featured glossy covers with drawings and photographs. Director Artemio Precioso crushed most of his opponents by offering exclusive contracts to his collection’s regular authors. Writers like El Caballero Audaz received 1,000 pesetas for each novel published in La Novela de Hoy, as opposed to only 250 or 500 pesetas in analogous collections of the time (Precioso and Martínez Arnaldos 53-54). Few other publishers could compete with Precioso’s enterprise, and the only important collection founded after La Novela de Hoy was José García Mercadal’s similarly formatted La Novela Mundial [The World Novel] (130 numbers, 1926-1928). More ephemeral series like El Caballero Audaz’s Los Trece [The Thirteen] (13 numbers, 1933) continued to appear during the Second Republic and, less successfully, following the Civil War.37

One of the reasons for the failure of short novel collections after 1939 was their association with ideologies and sexual content considered morally suspect under the Franco regime. The fórmula Zamacois [Zamacois formula] popularized by the collections cited above was extended by some publishers to series devoted to leftist propaganda or erotic and pornographic texts (Sastre 12). While Gonzalo Santonja has studied politically-motivated collections such as La Novela Roja [The Red Novel] (49

The risqué titles and cover images of the latter collections distinguish them from more mainstream series, which often published statements in defense of their lofty cultural aspirations.38 For instance, the second number of La Novela Corta contains director José de Urquía’s promise that his collection will be “un apostolado que viene a cumplir una alta misión en estos tiempos de sicalipsis y exaltación taurina” (cited in Sáinz de Robles 65) [a ministry that takes up a high mission in these times of eroticism and obsessive bull fighting].39 As literary historian Federico Carlos Sáinz de Robles notes, La Novela Corta failed to uphold Urquía’s standards, for it ended up publishing salacious novels by authors who also contributed to more exclusively erotic collections (68). In fact, an examination of the output of authors classified by scholars as erotic novelists reveals that such writers published regularly in a range of series. Racy titles by Retana and Antonio de Hoyos y Vinient appear indiscriminately in El Cuento Semanal and La Novela de Hoy, as well as in La Novela Picaresca and La Novela Pasional (Alfonso García 293-96; Barreiro 120-22).

Certainly, eroticism is not a central component of all the short novels published in the most important collections. By 1925, novelist and literary critic Rafael Cansinos-Assén's had classified contributors using labels such as intellectuals, Orientalists,
provincial apologists, or erotic novelists (Sáinz de Robles 40-43). Such terms evoke the diversity of content characteristic of short novels in the early 1900s. They also misleadingly imply that only a select group of authors produced works aimed at sexual titillation.

Later critics have taken issue with this aspect of Cansinos’s taxonomy. José María Fernández Gutiérrez observes that sexuality is not important in novels published in La Novela Semanal by the so-called eróticos. On the other hand, writers placed by Cansinos in other categories did produce erotic works for the collection (19-21). As literary scholar Christine Rivalan Guégo concludes, eroticism was a selling point for collections like La Novela Corta, La Novela Semanal, or La Novela de Hoy, regardless of whether the thematic complexity of particular writers and novels allows them to be profitably labeled erotic (Fruición 217).

Of the authors whose novels treat sex in conjunction with other motifs, El Caballero Audaz was especially prominent. Originally from Montilla, Córdoba, the writer achieved fame in Madrid as director of La Novela Semanal and Los Trece and contributor to Los Contemporáneos, La Novela Corta, and La Novela de Hoy (Cruz Casado “José María Carretero” 78-79; López Hidalgo 136-74). Besides producing a series of aggressively conservative political treatises between 1923 and 1951, he wrote novels whose titles appear to fortify Francisco Umbral’s claim that he was a literary pornographer (Fernández Gutiérrez 20). Titles like La virgen desnuda [The Nude Virgin] (1910), El pozo de las pasiones [The Well of Passions] (1916), La bien pagada [The Well-Paid Woman] (1920), and Bestezuela de placer (1922) reduce his work to its sexual content (Cruz Casado “José María Carretero” 75-80).
This tactic is deceptive, since Naturalist motifs including poverty, illness, and class disparities are as important as sexuality in books like *De pecado en pecado* [*From Sin to Sin*] (1921) and *Bestezuela de placer*. The priority of El Caballero Audaz’s titles is not to encapsulate his varied thematic concerns, but to promote massive sales. Like other people involved in the making of Spain’s short novel collections, the writer knew that eroticism would appeal to consumers out for reading and sexual pleasure.

**III.B. The Novel as Female Prostitute: Gendered Tropes for the Short Novel**

The preponderance of prostitution as a trope in discussions of short novels confirms that the collections’ directors and contributors were aware that many readers purchased their works for mental and physical stimulation. Figurative language in texts by Zamacois, Fortuny, and Cansinos-Asséns draws varied comparisons between novels, authors, and readers, on the one hand, and female and male prostitutes, pimps, and clients, on the other. In preparation for an allegorical reading of the hustler Benjamín as a short novel in *Bestezuela de placer*, this and the following section explore metaphoric and material relationships between female and male prostitution and novel collections in Spain in the early 1900s. I argue that aggressively sexist comparisons between short novels and female prostitutes in texts by male writers aim to deflect attention from the authors’ nervous recognition of their own connections to hustlers. While male writers from the pre-Civil War era often imagined the material support upon which they inscribed meaning as a prostituted female body, most were more hesitant to acknowledge that writing for commercial collections was akin to prostituting their literary talent and that the sale of short novels and male bodies overlapped in prominent public spaces in Madrid.
Works by male authors frequently present short novels or novel collections as female bodies engaged in relationships with readers, male writers, and male directors as daughters, lovers, and prostitutes. The director/father and novel/daughter analogy figures in a statement from Zamacois’s memoir *Un hombre que se va... [A Man Departing...]* (1964) in which the founder of El Cuento Semanal explains that he modeled his collection *Los Contemporáneos* on the earlier publication so that his *nueva hija* [new daughter] would be identical to the existing one (253). Zamacois’s gendered metaphor echoes another passage of his memoir where he imagines the publication of *El Cuento Semanal* in disturbingly sexualized terms. The collection’s first number “apareció el viernes día primero de 1907, llevando en sus entrañas de papel la novela *Desencanto*, original del académico Jacinto Octavio Picón. Yo quise que desflorase la publicación un académico” (233) [appeared on Friday, January 1, 1907, carrying in its paper entrails the novel *Disillusionment*, an original work by the academician Jacinto Octavio Picón. I wanted an academician to deflower the publication]. Here, the book as material object is a virginal female body that attains meaning through the agency of the male author’s potent pen(is).

Together, the quotations from *Un hombre que se va...* outline a masculinist narrative according to which Zamacois as director-father engenders *El Cuento Semanal* in order to hand his daughter over to other writer-lovers. If pushed to its logical extreme, the story undergoes some troubling metaphorical slippage. The collection alternately occupies the position of virginal daughter and lover to the 136 writers who published novels in *El Cuento Semanal*, including Zamacois himself (Magnien et. al. 244-52).
Similar ambiguities result from the deployment of gendered tropes in Fortuny’s study *La ola verde: Crítica frívola* [*The Green Wave: Frivolous Criticism*] (1930), a critique of sexually explicit works by well-known contributors to short novel collections. After two brief imprisonments on charges of writing pornographic texts, Álvaro Retana published the book under a pseudonym to prove that his contemporaries had also written lubricious novels (Barreiro 97-100). The work turns to the language of paternity to describe authors’ relationships to their feminine literary offspring. Fortuny says that the novelist Ramón Pérez de Ayala was ashamed of his early novel *Tnieblas en las cumbres* [*Darkness on the Peaks*] (1907), and that he put his *equivoca hija literaria* [equivocal literary daughter] into *circulación* [circulation] under the pseudonym Plontino Cuevas (53). Pérez de Ayala both fathers his novel-daughter, and puts her into circulation. Fortuny’s meaning becomes clearer when he explains that “Ramón Pérez de Ayala es un mago del lenguaje, y con sus obras sucede lo que con cierta clase de mujeres: no son atrayentes, pero las toleramos en sociedad porque se presentan bien vestidas. Pérez de Ayala engalana a las hijas de su imaginación con tales ropajes literarios, que vale la pena de sofaldarlas” (54-55) [Ramón Pérez de Ayala is a magician of the language, and his works follow the same course as a certain class of women: they are not attractive, but we tolerate them in society because they are well-dressed. Pérez de Ayala adorns his imagination’s daughters with such literary vestments, that it is worthwhile lifting their skirts]. Just as Zamacois fathers *El Cuento Semanal* to make it available to other writer-lovers, Pérez de Ayala adorns his novels with the aim of prostituting them to readers eager to lift their skirts.
Fortuny establishes the trope of the novel as female prostitute as the presiding metaphor of his study in the volume’s introduction, where he attacks authors who disavow their connections to pornography: “Lo que no puede admitirse es que un autor reclame para sus producciones pornográficas las mismas consideraciones de la crítica y el público que si se tratara de obras honorables. Porque una cortesana podrá ser admitida por su belleza; pero de eso a exigir ser estimada como una mujer honesta, hay un abismo” (13) [What cannot be allowed is for an author to claim for his pornographic productions the same respect on the part of the critics and the public as for honorable works. Because a courtesan can be admired for her beauty, but there is a gulf between that and asking that she be esteemed as an honest woman]. A perusal of the Guía de cortesanas en Madrid [Guide for Courtesans in Madrid] (1921), a parodic pedagogical manual for novice female prostitutes written by Pedro González Blanco under the penname Ana Díaz, confirms that the word cortesana was applicable to a range of more or less refined female prostitutes in the early 1900s. Consequently, Fortuny’s comparison between sexually arousing novels and women involved in mercenary sex is clear.

This trope is particularly vivid in a statement of purpose published in the first number of La Novela Semanal (1921), a compendium of the sexist metaphors mobilized by Fortuny and Zamacois. As director of the collection at the time, El Caballero Audaz is the best candidate for the authorship of the unsigned statement “Al público” [“To the Public”] (Granjel Eduardo Zamacois 90; Sáinz de Robles 71). There, La Novela Semanal addresses its readers in the form of a woman. It announces that it is not a book, newspaper, or magazine, but “una nueva hija espiritual de la unánime y tenaz voluntad de
Los mismos hombres que crearon Prensa Gráfica” (3) [a new spiritual daughter of the unanimous and tenacious will of the same men who created the Graphic Press].

*La Novela Semanal*’s initial spirituality conflicts with its later recognition that it is a passive body waiting to be animated by its contributors. The female voice warns readers that future disappointments ought to be attributed to uninspired writers and artists: “Como yo sólo he de poner en la empresa mi cuerpo material, y el alma—que es lo mejor—la aportarán novelistas y dibujantes, dicho está que si fracaso, culpa de los que mal me utilicen será” (4) [Since I only have to dedicate my material body to the endeavor, and novelists and illustrators will contribute the soul—the best part—it is obvious that if I fail, those who use me poorly will be to blame]. From spiritual daughter, *La Novela Semanal* becomes a material body to be disposed of with more or less skill by its predominately male creators.43

The collection seems keen to offer itself to male artists and readers, for it highlights its generosity, beauty, and freedom from obligations to any proprietor. With respect to its contributors, *La Novela Semanal* is “acogedora y libre de toda tutela” (4) [welcoming and free from any guardianship]. The speaker elaborates: “queda sentado que mis páginas están abiertas a todas las orientaciones y que carezco de dómine que me rija y de director que me sujete a su censura. […] Yo brindo los brazos blancos de mis páginas […] a todos los escritores y dibujantes españoles. He elegido mis huéspedes entre los mejores y los más reputados” (4) [it has been established that my pages are open to every orientation and that I lack a master to rule over me and a director to subject me to his censorship. I open the white arms of my pages to all Spanish writers and illustrators. I have selected my guests from among the best and most reputable]. In the
context of patriarchal gender norms, the description of contributors as guests that can take refuge in the collection’s arms without angering other men identifies *La Novela Semanal* as a prostitute. As such, she is also prepared to satisfy readers, constructed by the text as male. She advertises herself as “[p]equeña, no fea y con buen alma” [small, not ugly, and with a good soul] and promises to be an “agradable pasatiempo en manos del varón culto” (5) [a pleasant pastime in the hands of the cultured man].

Without a doubt, “Al público” is a tour-de-force of masculinist fantasies reducing women’s bodies and *La Novela Semanal* to objects designed to satisfy male sexual appetites. Together with works by Zamacois and Fortuny, the piece belongs to a concerted effort on the part of male authors to appropriate the female body as a trope for mass-manufactured short novels in early twentieth-century Spain.

In the wake of feminist criticism by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Stephanie Sieburth, Andreas Huyssen, and Akiko Tsuchiya, none of the figurative language studied above is especially surprising, although it continues to be disturbing. Gilbert and Gubar cite canonical male writers from Great Britain and the United States in support of their claim that traditional conceptions of writing in Western culture imagine a text’s author as its “father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power just like his penis” (6). Within this framework, “women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and sensual objects” (8). The trope of the author-father and female text seeks to exclude women from the act of writing.

This was also the case in Spain from the mid-1800s onwards. As Sieburth explains, Spanish women started to publish poetry, novels, and newspaper articles in the
1840s and became important players in women’s journals in subsequent decades. Some of these women also contributed to publications for mixed gender audiences (7). In spite of their underrepresentation in short novel collections, Carmen de Burgos, Concha Espina, Sara Insúa, Pilar Millán Astray, Magda Donato, and Margarita Nelken did find space for publication in La Novela de Hoy and comparable series (Labrador Ben et. al. 22). Their success seems to have been daunting for male contributors to the collections, who responded by imagining the book as a female body forged by masculine authorial agency.

This comparison also allowed the writers to claim that they formed part of a “high” culture in control of “low” cultural projects, coded as feminine. In the aptly titled essay “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” Huyssen turns among others to Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, Nietzsche, and Barthes to trace a long-standing tendency to identify commercial literature and femininity as twin threats to “manly” modernism (44-62). Tsuchiya demonstrates the force of this connection in late nineteenth-century Spain, where magazines published images of women deriving “dangerous” erotic pleasure from reading serial novels (76-111). The gendered connotations of mass culture were still strong a few decades later, since directors of short novel collections found it necessary to defend their creations from charges of effeminacy. As mentioned above, José Urquía once asserted that La Novela Corta was on a grandiose mission to restore the Spanish novel in the face of a wave of feminine sicalipsis, a turn-of-the-century word rumored to have come from the Greek roots sykon [vulva] and aleiptikós [arousing] (Litvak 53). 44
Without denying that the trope of the short novel as female body or prostitute condenses male fears about the growing presence of woman writers and commercial literature in Spain in the early 1900s, I argue below that another of its functions is to obfuscate connections between short novels and male prostitution that were equally troubling to writers of the time. The female prostitute’s prominence as a cipher for the material book in texts by male writers eclipses but does not erase either the metaphoric hustler as an analogue for the authors themselves or actual male prostitutes as sellers of sex and short novels in urban Spain.

III.C. Short Novels and Male Prostitution

Textual evidence from memoirs, critical studies, sociological treatises, and short novel collections posits two significant links between the series and male prostitution. First, the processes through which short novels were produced and marketed prompted certain writers to identify male novelists as hustlers who sold their literary talent to powerful publishers. Additionally, identical agents and spaces often intervened in the sale of commercial novels and male bodies in Madrid.

If some of the texts cited in the preceding section describe novelists as pimps with respect to their literary daughters, other works position publishers as pimps and male novelists as prostitutes. In his memoir *La novela de un literato* [*The Novel of a Man of Letters*] (published 1982-1995), Cansinos-Asséns pithily calls the publisher “la Celestina del autor” (I: 177) [the author’s madame]. From his vantage point as a frequent contributor to novel collections and newspapers, Cansinos recognized that increasingly professional publishers controlled the resources required to market novelists to a large reading public during the modernization of Spain’s publishing industry. Sexualized
language in *La ola verde* reinforces his suggestion that this type of marketing involved the prostitution of literary talent. Fortuny affirms that the publishers of pornography got rich “prostituyendo la pluma de escritores inteligentes” (300) [by prostituting the pen of intelligent writers].

There is ample evidence to support the claim that publishers exploited the abilities of commercially successful writers during the period of the short novel collections. The contributors to such series had to subordinate their artistic aims to the restrictions imposed by directors who wished to preserve a uniform layout on a weekly basis and to sell large print runs. Editorial needs leveled constraints on authors ranging from the length of their novels to possible themes and characters (Martínez Arnaldos 239-40). The novel’s integration into a modern capitalist economy ultimately meant that authors had to make difficult compromises to survive on a competitive market (Rivalan Guégo *Fruición* 40).

In spite of these hardships, conforming to the standards of the collections could win writers enormous commercial success. Comparisons between authors and prostitutes come not only from writers wary of their publishers, but also from publishers tired of the attitudes of famous novelists. In an otherwise unpublished memoir included in a study of Artemio Precioso’s work as director of *La Novela de Hoy*, Precioso complains that famous novelists are “más vanidosos que una prostituta de campanillas o una entretenida de postín” (Precioso and Martínez Arnaldos 60) [more vain than a classy female prostitute or kept woman].

Ironically, Precioso helped establish the conditions under which contributors to *La Novela de Hoy* could act like celebrities. His collection differed from others by
including gossip about the personal life of its contributors in prologues printed in each number (Labrador Ben et. al. 22). This marketing ploy perpetuated a strategy common to all the series whereby directors sought to create a star-system of novelists (Mainer 14-16; Rivalan Guégo Fruición 37-38).

One writer who used the prefatory matter of La Novela de Hoy to augment his own fame was Álvaro Retana, the main subject of Chapter 3. As explained below, prologues to his novels published in the collection in the 1920s take the form of conversations between himself and Precioso (3.I.B.). For the purposes of this section, the most interesting parts of these dialogues are the numerous passages where Retana claims that he accepts money for sex with his adoring fans. In the prologue to El encanto de la cama redonda [The Charm of the Round Bed] (December 1, 1922), the author complains that frequent requests for erotic favors from his readers have forced him to establish fees for his services. What follows seems like a newspaper ad for a prostitute:

Por un beso corriente, cinco duros; por un beso de película, cincuenta pesetas; por una hora de amor, cien duros; toda la noche, mil pesetas. Servicios extraordinarios y fantasías de mi invención, patentadas, precios convencionales. No admito señoras casadas, y en las tobilleras hago un 50 por 100 de rebaja. En caso de aglomeración de pedidos, serán primeramente servidas las gordas. No concedo exclusivas; pero sí abonos. Pagos anticipados. Seriedad y reserva. (Precioso “El novelista más guapo” 10)

For a regular kiss, five duros; for a cinematographic kiss, fifty pesetas; for an hour of love, one hundred duros; for a whole night, one thousand pesetas. Special services and patented fantasies of my own invention, market price. I don’t accept married women, and I give a fifty percent discount to adolescent girls. In the event of a back-log, fat women receive preference. I don’t concede exclusive rights, put I do give out credit. Payment in advance. Serious and prudent.

Prologues to subsequent novels follow up on Retana’s advertisement. In one, he explains that he would like to pay two or three young men to help him meet his clients’ exhausting
demands (Precioso “Se desean” 5-7). Elsewhere, he announces a sale to celebrate his decision to offer his services to Satan: “¡Gran rebaja de precios, antes de emprender definitivamente la marcha a los Infiernos!” (Precioso “Al Infierno” 6) [Blow-out sale before finally embarking for Hell!]. In every case, Retana insinuates a strong connection between prostituting his body and selling short novels.36

An important thesis of the following chapter is that the prologues to Retana’s novels establish a play of fact and fiction that makes it difficult to determine which statements correspond to the author’s historical “truth” (3.I.B.). Yet there is no need to know whether Retana actually prostituted himself with his readers to see that he mockingly acknowledged an analogy between commercial male writers and hustlers. A literary portrayal of a second author to be discussed in Chapter 3 highlights another aspect of this parallel.

Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent contributed at least 84 short novels to no less than twenty collections between 1909 and 1931 (Alfonso García 293-96; see section 3.II.C.). While Retana’s prologues present him as a successful prostitute, one text shows Hoyos picking up a young man in Madrid, presumably for paid sex. In La novela de un literato, Cansinos describes a scene of cruising in which the deaf-mute writer seduces an adolescent with the help of his friend Luisito Pomés. Part of the novelist’s appearance merits citation for the light it sheds upon the consumption of texts and bodies in Madrid’s famous Puerta del Sol:

Esta noche, la gente que pasa los mira [a Hoyos y Pomés] un momento con curiosidad, murmurando frases despectivas e hirientes.
—¡Esos maricones! —y pasa de largo.
Los golfillos y vendedoras de periódicos siguen de reojo sus manejos.
Antonio, aburrido de no hacerse entender, se ha recostado indolente en el muro, mientras Luisito prosigue su labor diplomática. Finalmente, el éxito corona su gestión de catequesis. Hácele unas señas al amigo, éste sale de su apatía y ambos, llevando en medio a un muchachito imberbe, de aire toeril, montan en un coche y se alejan. Una esquinera sonríe maliciosa: —Esos tíos nos hacen la competencia. Así está el oficio... Una vieja se admira: —Hay que ver..., cómo está el mundo. Y sigue voceando sus periódicos, con una voz cansada, como una queja a la vida... (I: 212)

Tonight, the passersby look at them [Hoyos and Pomés] curiously for a moment while murmuring derogatory, hurtful comments. ‘Those fags.’ And they go by without stopping. The street urchins and newspaper sellers watch their operation out of the corner of their eye. Antonio, tired of not being understood, leans leisurely against the wall, while Luisito proceeds with his diplomatic labor. Finally, his well-learned maneuvers meet with success. He makes some signs to his friend, the latter abandons his apathy, and both of them get into a car and go away, taking with them a beardless boy with the look of a bull fighter. A female prostitute on the corner smiles: ‘These guys compete with us. That’s what this job has come to...’ An old woman marvels: ‘Would you look at that... So this is what’s happening in the world.’ And she continues hawking her newspapers, with a tired voice, like a complaint in the night...]

The fragment is notable for how it frames the scene of homosexual seduction with references to a newspaper seller. Cansinos forges a link between the sale of texts and Hoyos’s acquisition of a male conquest by locating both sorts of exchange in the Puerta del Sol.

La mala vida en Madrid (1901) confirms that the intimate contact of male prostitution and the hawking of texts in old Madrid was a pressing concern for officials concerned with public hygiene. Writing in the capacity of self-proclaimed scientific observers, Bernaldo de Quirós and Llanas Aguinaliedo identify the Puerta del Sol and the Plaza Mayor as sites for homosexual cruising and the sale of salacious literature at the
turn of the century (274, 134). In either space, the individuals most likely to prostitute themselves and peddle texts were poor boys and men like Benjamín in *Bestezuela de placer* (35, 43, 177, 266). Some of the same males who sold newspapers and inexpensive books in the center of Madrid occasionally worked as hustlers in the same area. This circumstance reinforces the relationship between the impoverished male body and mass-produced novels that I find in El Caballero Audaz’s novel.47

**III.D. Financial Boom and Bust in *Bestezuela de placer***

*Bestezuela de placer* belongs to a special number of *La Novela de Hoy* published on December 29, 1922. As the almanac edition for the following year, the issue has 128 pages, twice the usual length. In addition to the novel, the book also contains twelve short pieces by different authors about “the Woman” in each month of the year: “La mujer en enero” [“The Woman in January”], “La mujer en febrero” [“The Woman in February”], and so on. *Bestezuela de placer* provides an interlude between the entries for May and June. The number’s cover also emphasizes idealized femininity as a thematic concern in *La Novela de Hoy* (figure 2.3). It features a characteristically Decadent drawing by Rafael Penagos of a voluptuous, semi-nude woman reclining on a plush bed beside a provocative ephebe, an accurate illustration of the only sex scene in El Caballero Audaz’s novel.

The prominent place occupied by the woman in the drawing deceptively implies that she may be the *bestezuela de placer* mentioned in the title printed below. In the text, however, the title refers to the male protagonist, whose female lover is a secondary character. As in discussions of short novel collections on a larger scale, the centrality of the eroticized female body on the cover of *La Novela de Hoy*’s almanac, as well as in the
pieces on the months, obscures the significance of the male body in *Bestezuela de placer* itself.

The novel focuses on the biography of the prostitute Benjamín Leira. Like Sagarra in *Vida privada*, El Caballero Audaz draws on the conventions of nineteenth-century Realism and Naturalism to examine how the character’s social milieu informs his actions. Benjamín is a young man of humble origins who migrates from Cádiz to Madrid in search of fame and fortune. Explicit temporal markers in each of the seven chapters indicate that the text covers three years of his life. During that time, Benjamín’s financially-motivated involvement with a series of wealthy male and female lovers situates him in a cycle of economic boom and bust. The thematic and formal importance of this pattern meshes well with *Bestezuela de placer*’s publication in a book designed to foreground the passage from one calendric cycle to the next.

As revealed by the third-person omniscient narrator’s frequent recourse to free indirect speech, Benjamín generally attributes his socioeconomic instability to Destiny or
Fate. An inveterate gambler, when he reads a sign in a shop window advertising a position as clerk, he wonders: “¿no serían caminos preparados por la Casualidad, artimañas del Destino que, al hacerle leer el anuncio, le preparaba un bien? Sí; seguramente el Azar le había conducido allí” (47-48) [couldn’t roads prepared by Coincidence and the tricks of Destiny have prepared some good fortune for him by making him read the announcement? Yes, Chance had surely led him there].

In spite of Benjamín’s superstitions, El Caballero Audaz seems intent on proving that paranormal forces do not account for his protagonist’s victories and failures. The young man’s oscillations between rags and riches are a systemic feature of his engagement with prostitution. As Michael Tratner observes in *Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Literature* (2001), modern consumer capitalism depends upon the constant circulation of money and products, so that “[o]bjects of desire become […] most stimulating when borrowed, not fully possessed.” In this context, the market “becomes a place of abundant partial satisfactions, carelessly acquired and carelessly tossed aside” (88). Because Benjamin enters this logic of expenditure and waste, alternating phases of upward and downward class mobility punctuate his life story. The cycle affects *Bestezuela de placer* both structurally and stylistically.

From a structural standpoint, Chapter 1 begins *in medias res* during one of Benjamín’s periods of financial ruin. Having been expelled from a hostel the night before, the character wanders aimlessly through Madrid on a rainy day in November. A series of exclamations suspend the action when Benjamín pauses to read a clock on a building: “¡Otra noche como la anterior, sin techo bajo el cual cobijarse, ni cama en la
que reposar voluptuosamente sus miembros cansados y ateridos! ¡Oh!” (40) [Another night like the one before, without a roof under which to take refuge, nor a bed upon which to voluptuously rest his tired and frozen limbs. Oh!].

These indirectly reported laments allow the narrator to enter the protagonist’s thoughts and recount his life story. Benjamín recalls his impoverished childhood in Cádiz, his modest success as a shipping agent’s scribe, and a subsequent downfall precipitated by his profligate spending on fine clothing. The latter episode encouraged him to travel by train to “el Madrid de los grandes artistas y las cortesanas célebres y las aventuras magníficas” (42) [the Madrid of the great artists and famous courtesans and magnificent adventures/affairs]. Benjamín’s extravagant expectations for Madrid bode poorly for his own sojourn in the city, just as his memories of his life in Cádiz establish the paradigm of earning and spending that later dominates the novel.

A clap of thunder conveniently interrupts Benjamín’s reminiscing and prompts him to take refuge from the rain in the doorway to a men’s clothing boutique, where he sees his reflection in the shop window: “A pesar del trajecillo de estambre, descolorido y con ese desaliño de la ropa muy usada, su cuerpo fino, esbelto y bien proporcionado, tenía un aire gentil, señorial, de mozo gallardo” (44) [Despite his wool coat, discolored and in the disarray typical of well-worn clothing, his slender, lithe, and well-proportioned body had a noble look like that of a dashing lad]. Looking past his reflection, Benjamín also notes that the shop window features male clothing: “dentro se desbordaban puñados de corbatas en una orgía multicolor; […] al fondo, en su maniquí, lucía un espléndido gabán de paño marrón, con el amplio cuello guarnecido de piel” (46) [inside loads of ties
burst into a multicolor orgy;...in the back, a mannequin wore a splendid brown woolen overcoat, with a wide neck lined with leather].

The quotes presage Benjamín’s transformation into a sexual commodity by juxtaposing his attractive image in the window with the eroticized garments on display. The character admires his body as though it were a second mannequin amidst the “orgy” of colorful ties. Later, a male client in the shop acquires Benjamín in lieu of clothing. Having entered the boutique to offer his services as a clerk, the young man leaves with a dandified fashion designer who had visited the store to buy new attire. Upon seeing Benjamín, the modista “[l]o inspeccionó de hito en hito con afectada indiferencia; de arriba abajo, como midiéndolo” (51) [inspected him with affected indifference, staring from head to toe as though he were measuring him]. The aristocrat measures the protagonist like a piece of cloth and decides to make a “purchase.” The clerks’ knowing looks as Benjamín exits the shop with the dandy indicate that the scene is a familiar one; the boutique has peddled men’s clothing and male bodies on more than one occasion.

A temporal leap between Chapters 1 and 2 creates a vivid contrast between Benjamín’s poverty at the start of the novel and his financial success as the designer’s lover. Towards the beginning of the second chapter, Benjamín examines himself in a mirror in the aristocrat’s apartment: “pulcro, perfumado, poniéndose un alfiler de brillantes en el nudo de la corbata […] no recordaba en nada al muchacho insomne y hambriento que pululaba por Madrid bajo la lluvia una tarde de hacía cinco meses” (59) [immaculate, perfumed, putting a diamond pin in the knot of his tie...he did not look at all like the sleep-deprived, hungry boy who had milled around Madrid in the rain one
afternoon five months ago]. If the shop window once separated Benjamín from the ties within, a new mirror helps him adjust his tie and accessories.

Chapters 3 through 6 trace Benjamín’s efforts to stabilize his new socioeconomic status by replacing the dandy with wealthy female lovers. Two aspects of this part of the novel strengthen the notion that the protagonist repeats a script in each of his conquests. Benjamín meets both his second and third benefactors when they offer him money to continue gambling. Moreover, the second lover is a courtesan who receives payment for accompanying a rich marquis. *La Goletera* has accumulated enough capital to maintain a lover of her own. The narrator’s description of her as a “mujer del arroyo” (66) [woman from the gutter] from Andalusia recalls Benjamín’s memories of his own “infancia de niño pobre del arroyo” [childhood as a poor boy from the gutter] in Cádiz (41). The parallel signals that the young man is caught in a cycle of prostitution and social climbing that goes beyond his personal situation to embrace other poor migrants in Madrid.

Benjamín’s cycle takes another downward turn when *La Goletera* tires of his reckless spending. By the novel’s final chapter, the protagonist finds himself on the streets once more. The return also operates at a stylistic level, as long stretches of Chapter 7 reproduce passages from Chapter 1. The two chapters open with identical descriptions of the weather:

Llovía desde el amanecer y eran ya las cinco de la tarde…
Llovía de un modo lento, tenaz, desesperante: unas veces a turbiones que el viento arremolinaba e inundaban las calles, formando en ellas grandes charcos; otras caía una lluvia despaciosa, fina y fría, que empapaba cruelmente.
Benjamín Leira se encontró por cuarta vez durante el día en la calle del Príncipe. […]
Y eran las cinco de la tarde ya. (39, 88)
It had been raining since dawn and it was already five in the afternoon...

It was raining slowly, tenaciously, exasperatingly: sometimes in a downpour that the wind whipped about and that flooded the streets, forming large puddles; other times there fell a slow, fine, cold, cruelly soaking rain.

Benjamín Leira found himself for the fourth time that day in Príncipe Street...
And it was five in the afternoon already.]

Not only does the passage appear twice in the novel, but the language itself emphasizes repetition as a motif. Just as the iteration of the verb to rain at the start of consecutive paragraphs evokes the monotony of a dreary day, multiple references to the hour set time at a standstill. Lost in the city, Benjamín returns incessantly to the same street.

Other details in Chapter 7 remind readers that everything takes place “como antaño” [as in days gone by], “al mismo lugar que tres años antes” [in the same place as three years ago], and “como aquel día” [like that day] at the beginning of the narrative (89-90, 92). Unsurprisingly, the novel ends when Benjamín looks for work as a clerk in the same boutique where he met the dandy. The implication is that events could recur in an endless cycle. The duplication of entire paragraphs from Chapter 1 in Chapter 7 means that both Benjamín and the text itself form part of this pattern. The resultant parallel between character and text is key to my allegorical interpretation.

III.E. The Body as Book en Abyme

El Caballero Audaz fortifies the relationship between Benjamín and Bestezuela de placer by causing his protagonist to recognize that he is no more than an expendable object for his lovers, a dehumanized bestezuela de placer. In one episode, Benjamín scrutinizes himself in a shop window and acknowledges that his face and body “eran sus armas. BESTEZUELA DE PLACER, el mundo era suyo” (88) [were his weapons.
LITTLE BEAST OF PLEASURE, the world belonged to him]. Following his return to the streets in Chapter 7, he asks: “¿Qué había sido él entonces? BESTEZUELA DE PLACER, carne de juventud, quiso como un cobarde burlar la suerte vendiéndose” (91) [What had he been, then? LITTLE BEAST OF PLEASURE, youthful flesh, he had wanted to outwit fate by selling himself, like a coward].

The appearance of the work’s title within the text itself follows a convention that has precedents in numerous other novels. It is particularly significant in Bestezuela de placer to the extent that the linguistic identity between the book and its protagonist makes it possible to interpret Benjamín as a mise en abyme of the work’s contact, its material support and mode of circulation. What the character reproduces are neither the processes by which the novel’s meaning is constructed by its writer or readers, nor the story itself, of which he is already a central player. In opposition to the mises en abyme in De muy buena familia and Vida privada, Benjamín is neither an alter ego for Bestezuela de placer’s producer or receivers, nor the creator of an embedded work analogous to the novel at the level of story or discourse. Instead, his body is an object whose trajectory parallels the treatment of Bestezuela de placer or similar short novels as a channel of communication between authors and their readers.

In the same way that Benjamín as bestezuela de placer cycles between voracious lovers in a series of ephemeral relationships, copies of Bestezuela de placer and comparable works circulated among readers for about a week when they were the newest publication in their collections. Just as the protagonist stimulates his lovers in exchange for money and social standing, many short novels were a source of reading pleasure and erotic titillation for paying readers. Finally, Benjamín’s existence is just as monotonous
as either Chapters 1 and 7 of Bestezuela de placer or other short novels and the collections to which they belong.

Scholars who have examined entire collections agree that they are formulaic in several ways. Authors often recycled plots, character types, and descriptions of settings and actors (Magnien et. al. 59, 161; Rivalan Guégo Fruición 50-73). The interchangeability of characters in different texts allowed some writers to reproduce entire passages in multiple works (Rivalan Guégo Fruición 73). More drastically, the phenomenon of the refrito [rehash] permitted authors to reissue entire novels in different collections under modified titles (15, 27). The result was that reading any one short novel was likely to evoke something read previously in an analogous work (55). By literally forcing readers to reread large parts of Bestezuela de placer within the text itself, El Caballero Audaz pushes the repetition characteristic of the collections as a whole to a hyperbolic level and draws attention to the questionable literary value of many individual novels.

Another formulaic aspect of short novel series was their predictable life cycle. Of the 165 mainstream series cataloged by literary historian Alberto Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa, a few scored an initial success, underwent changes in format to preserve their appeal, and met their demise in a struggle with competitors.49 The majority disappeared after issuing fewer than twenty numbers (101-17). El Caballero Audaz was acutely attuned to the evolving popularity of each series due to his intense activity as writer and editor. A savvy business man, he published Bestezuela de placer in La Novela de Hoy at a time when the series threatened to do away with a collection once under his own directorship, La Novela Semanal.50 The former publication’s uniquely glossy covers and piquant
prologues offered readers incentive to choose it over competing collections. Additionally, Precioso’s high payments and exclusive contracts drew famous novelists to *La Novela de Hoy* to the detriment of other series to which they had formerly been faithful (Sáinz de Robles 73-74). El Caballero Audaz’s emphasis on Benjamín’s varying economic situation in *Bestezuela de placer* reflects a concern about financial success and failure that also guided his professional decisions about which collections would allow him to further his career as a commercial writer.

In conclusion, Benjamín is a vehicle through which El Caballero Audaz reflects, wittingly or otherwise, on the socioeconomically unstable situation of male prostitutes and mass-produced literature in a modern consumer society in which bodies and books are rapidly circulating commodities available in an exchange of money for pleasure. *Bestezuela de placer*’s calculated stylistic tedium and pessimistic denouement suggest that the author could sometimes be critical of what can be read allegorically as the literary inanity and financial gamble involved in the production of short novels and novel collections. In the meantime, El Caballero Audaz liked to brag that his books sold better than those of any other Spanish author (Cruz Casado “José María Carretero” 77). The writer’s apparent ambivalence regarding the revolution of Spain’s publishing industry in the short novel collections rounds out this chapter’s focus on authors whose complex responses to modernization converge upon male prostitutes and blackmailers.

**Conclusion: From Faust to Mephistopheles**

The foregoing examination of hustlers and extortionists in works by Benavente, Sagarra, and El Caballero Audaz exceeds the constraints of descriptive character analysis by relating the protagonists to unresolved tensions that resonate throughout the texts. Just
as *De muy buena familia* unveils and conceals homosexual blackmail as a problem in middle-class Madrid, *Vida privada* and *Bestezuela de placer* exude fear and desire for modern innovations including Barcelona’s Good Families and mass-manufactured novels. Texts *en abyme* accentuate these contradictions by intradiegetically replicating aspects of the works themselves. Isidoro’s interaction with documents linked to extortion in Benavente’s play mirrors the way viewers are likely to recognize and dismiss the crime’s role in the drama. Guillem’s plans to write a novel similar to *Vida privada* bring him close to Sagarra, who otherwise condemns the character’s use of prostitution and extortion to climb in Barcelona’s class hierarchy. Finally, Benjamín’s circulation between lovers reproduces *Bestezuela de placer*’s involvement in the rapid production and consumption of short novel series.

As men who seek stability in modern socioeconomic conditions, the prostitutes and blackmailers studied above merit the name *little Fausts*. Their varying sexual arrangements eroticize and trivialize Faust’s pact with the devil in Goethe’s play. If the canonical character collaborates with Mephistopheles to radically improve human existence, little Fausts contract with wealthy men and women with the more limited aim of guaranteeing their personal well-being. Both pursuits imply a courtship with capital as incarnated by either the devil or rich clients, lovers, or victims. Having looked at Faust and his imitators in commercial literature, the spotlight now shifts to Álvaro Retana as a Mephistophelean seducer who marketed a queer brand of modernity in Spain over the three decades prior to the Civil War.

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Chapter Two Notes

1 All quotations from *Bestezuela de placer* and *De muy buena familia* in this chapter are from the original texts from 1922 and 1931, respectively. I list more widely available modern editions in the bibliography. Lily Litvak’s 1993 edition of *Bestezuela de placer* lacks the illustrations and other paratextual materials included in the original. Quotations from *Vida privada* are from the 2007 Catalan edition listed in the bibliography. For Castilian translations, see the entries for José Agustín Goytisolo and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán.

2 The fine silk attire, high heels, rouge, high-pitched voice, and eloquence of Benjamín’s male admirer in *Bestezuela de placer* identify him as a dandy (49-50). Nineteenth-century writers such as Barbey d’Aurevilly, Charles Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde defined the dandy as a man who sought to model himself as a work of art, often by imitating the elegant attire of aristocratic women of the time. Dandies considered themselves superior to middle-class people due to their triumph over nature, their cult of superficiality and appearances, and their indifference towards bourgeois social norms, especially those regarding procreative sexuality (Krauel 142-47). Luis Antonio de Villena is the most ardent defender of dandyism in Spain today. While he focuses on the dandy’s transgressive potential vis-à-vis middle-class morality (*Corsarios* 13-49), feminist critic Rita Felski emphasizes misogynistic aspects of the figure centering on his disdain for “natural” women (91-114). Jessica R. Feldman and Rhonda K. Garelick provide extensive analyses of the gendered elements of dandyism.

3 For my use of the term *Decadent*, see 3.II.A.

4 For a selection of Walter Benjamin’s texts on Charles Baudelaire, see *The Writer of Modern Life*. Benjamin’s readings of *Les Fleurs du mal* often settle on the female streetwalker as an allegory for the modern poet. In “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” for instance, Benjamin writes that a poem about a prostitute by Baudelaire signals his recognition of “the true situation of the man of letters: he goes to the marketplace as a flâneur—ostensibly to look around, but in truth to find a buyer” (Benjamin *The Writer* 66).

5 Studies focusing on female prostitutes in French or British literature and culture of the nineteenth century include the works of Shannon Bell, Charles Bernheimer, Alain Corbin, Jann Matlock, and Judith R. Walkowitz.

6 One scholar who does recognize a parallel between the symbolic implications of male and female prostitutes is Dianne Chisholm. She writes on urban novels from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century in the United States, Canada, France, and Great Britain.

7 My term *little Fausts* echoes geographer Don Mitchell’s use of the phrase *little Arnolds* to describe politicians who reiterate Matthew Arnold’s calls for order and civility in public space without having achieved his canonical status in liberal humanist discourse (15).

8 Historians Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García have produced a sociological study of male prostitutes and extortionists in early twentieth-century Spain drawing on *La mala vida en Madrid* by Bernaldo de Quirós and Llanas Aguilaniedo and *La mala vida en Barcelona* by Bembo. See ‘Los Invisibles’ for information on the historical conditions of prostitution and blackmail during this period (220-29).

9 Literary critic Jesús Rubio Jiménez echoes El Caballero Audaz’s satanic description of Benavente in a 2005 essay that calls the playwright a *personaje mefistofélico* (375) [Mephistophelean character]. Ramón Gómez de la Serna also calls Benavente a *diabilllo* [little devil] or *diablo cojuelo* [crafty devil] in his *Nuevos retratos contemporáneos* [*New Contemporary Portraits*] (1945) (95, 98, 105). Benavente himself encouraged these descriptions by writing plays such as the comedy *Mefistófela* [Ms.
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Mephistopheles] (1918) or the rural bourgeois drama El demonio fue antes ángel [Before, the Devil was an Angel] (1928).

10 Gómez de la Serna writes that at the premier of Una señora [A Lady], the public invented the epigram: “El ilustre Benavente / ha estrenado Una señora, / y a coro dice la gente: / ¡Ya era hora!” [The illustrious Benavente / has premiered A Lady, / and the people say in chorus: / It was about time!] (102). For similarly oblique outings, see Rafael Cansino-Asséns (I: 116, 124, 339-40, 373, 376, 442) and Ángel Lázaro (21, 38-39).

11 Javier Huerta Calvo insists on the homoeroticism of Benavente’s early modernista texts in “Un dramaturgo posmoderno” (185-89) and “Jacinto Benavente” (24-28).

12 Other discussions of clandestine homosexuality in plays by Benavente, especially the 1913 drama La malquerida [The Woman without Love], appear in essays by Ernest Rehder and Robert Richmond Ellis.

13 For information on performances of De muy buena familia, see María Carmen Gil Fombellida (99, 178-84, 319-24), Michael D. McGaha (13, 16, 42, 51, 55), María Francisca Vilches de Frutos and Dru Dougherty (85, 438), and Juan Aguilera Sastre (35-38).

14 Nerea Aresti offers an extensive analysis of archival evidence related to a trial that raised questions of male homosexuality in Spain in the late 1920s and early 30s (Masculinidades 179-252). On May 2, 1929, the beheaded corpse of Pablo Casado de las Navas, an industrialist in Barcelona, was found in a box in a train station in Madrid. The discovery sparked a multi-year trial which found Casado’s servant Ricardo guilty of his master’s assassination, possibly motivated by jealousy. The press of the period speculated on the potential amorous relations between Casado and his servant using a rhetoric of indirection similar to that of De muy buena familia (228-39). Whether Benavente and his audiences would have thought about the crime in relation to the play is a matter of speculation, but Aresti provides evidence of the repercussions of the case on a range of periodical publications in Madrid and Barcelona as late as 1935.

15 For recent scholarship on Gregorio Marañón vital to my understanding of his ideas on sexuality, see Aresti (Médicos 115-61; Masculinidades 179-252), Cleminson and Vázquez García (‘Los Invisibles’ 95-135; Hermaphroditism 122-78), Alberto Mira (De Sodoma 190-93), Alfredo Sosa-Velasco (99-144), and Dagmar Vandebosch (79-209).

16 Ramón Pérez de Ayala famously criticized Benavente in Las máscaras [The Masks] (1924) for creating an excessively oral theater devoid of dramatic action (González del Valle 60). This supposed defect turns out to be an effective strategy for establishing a void around homosexual blackmail in De muy buena familia.

17 Marañón’s own opinion of the relation of women to modernity in “Juventud, modernidad, eternidad” has strong misogynistic overtones not reproduced by Enrique in De muy buena familia. The physician argues for the entrance of “the woman” into the public sphere, but only to the extent that it will free men from the supposed tyranny of their wives and mothers at home (495-97). For more on Marañón’s writings on women and feminism, see Aresti (Médicos 163-208, 135-148).

18 For her well-known theorization of the closet, see the first chapter of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet (67-90). The term glass closet appears on page 80.

19 Theater historian Emeterio Díez describes the theatrical censorship laws in force in Spain between 1913 and 1936. The regulations coincide with increased censorship in the United States, where sex scandals such as comedian Fatty Arbuckle’s alleged rape and murder of film actress Virginia Rappe led to concerns about sexual morality in film and theater after 1921 (Houchin 77-78). Plays involving lesbians and male transvestites like Edouard Bourdet’s The Captive (1926) and Mae West’s The Drag (1927) and
The Pleasure Man (1928) prompted the passage of New York’s Wales Padlock Law, which made it a misdemeanor to stage plays alluding to “sex perversion” or “sex degeneracy” (93-111).

20 Sagarra’s reference to the despicable soul played by Margarita Xirgu in the last act of De muy buena familia alludes to the reaction of Enrique and Manolo’s mother to the latter’s suicide. Unaware of Manolo’s activities as a blackmailer, Pilar furiously accuses Enrique of having killed her favorite son.

21 To the best of my knowledge, the last performance of De muy buena familia in Spain took place on February 12, 1935 in Madrid’s Teatro Español (Gil Fombellida 324).

22 On Sagarra’s rapid composition of Vida privada, see the prologue by Marcos Ordóñez, one of the few sources of information on the novel in Castilian (15). Gil Fombellida cites newspaper reviews of the Barcelona premier of De muy buena familia from November 12-13, 1931 (184). I have been unable to locate specific information on Sagarra’s whereabouts at that time, but it seems likely that he saw the play in Barcelona, where he lived in the early 1930s.

23 Sagarra’s most assiduous biographer is Lluís Permanyer, whose foremost work is Sagarra vist pels seus íntims [Sagarra in the Eyes of His Friends]. Of a less academic nature are Permanyer’s biography Sagarra and his anthology Josep Maria de Sagarra en els seus millors escrits [Josep Maria de Sagarra in His Best Writings]. Some of the most recent texts on Sagarra were published to mark the centenary of his birth in 1894. Centenari: Josep Maria de Sagarra [Centenary: Josep Maria de Sagarra] includes biobibliographical information and an anthology of texts, while Sagarra i Barcelona [Sagarra and Barcelona] offers more extensive biographical studies and an archive of photographs. Key texts on Sagarra in Castilian are the prologues to translations of Vida privada (Ordóñez) and Memories (Jordá). Writing in English, Robert A. Davidson also provides information on Sagarra’s life and works (182-83).

24 The history of Sagarra’s family on his father’s side occupies most of the first part of the writer’s monumental 1954 text, Memories (39-203). For a summary of the lineage’s noble affiliations, see the essay by Sagarra’s grandson Josep Maria de Sagarra Àngel.

25 Enric Gallén’s Josep Maria de Sagarra, home de teatre (1894-1994) [Josep Maria de Sagarra, Man of Theater] is an important source on Sagarra’s work as a prolific playwright, translator of Shakespeare, theater critic, and supporter of Catalan theater.

26 Gary Wray McDonogh summarizes the process through which Catalan families entered the nobility from the ninth through early twentieth centuries (111). For a detailed history of Barcelona’s elite prior to 1714, see James S. Amelang. Following McDonogh and Amelang, I use the terms aristocracy, nobility, and patrician class interchangeably to designate characters in Vida privada whose families held noble titles and land prior to the nineteenth century. I use the term bourgeois to describe characters whose wealth owes to trade and industry starting in the late 1700s. Following a trend among industrialists, a few such characters use their income to purchase noble titles. According to McDonogh, 548 “bought” titles augmented the Spanish nobility between 1872 and 1932. For older aristocrats, “[t]he recently ennobled industrialist risked becoming a comic figure” (112).

27 See the texts by Permanyer, Gallén, Ordóñez, Jordá, and Davidson listed in the previous notes, as well as the writings collected in Centenari and Sagarra i Barcelona.

28 Previously, Sagarra had published two other novels (Paulina Buxareu [1919] and All i salobre [Garlic and Brine, 1928]), as well as articles advocating the revival of the Catalan novel, a genre that had taken second stage to poetry following the success of Carles Aribau’s seminal revival of literary Catalan in Oda a la Pàtria [Ode to the Fatherland] (1832) (Davidson 182-83; Ordóñez 9-15).

29 For brief critical commentaries on Vida privada, see the texts by Catalan writers Félix de Azúa, Juan Marsé, Eduardo Mendoza, Terenci Moix, and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán included in Anagrama’s 1994 Castilian translation. Typical judgments include Mendoza’s statement that the novel describes a
world that Sagarra knew, hated, and loved (330), or José Agustín Goytisolo and Vázquez Montalbán’s contention that he loved the world he condemned (9-10).

30 Davidson identifies a stuffed dog in Rosa Trènor’s flat in the Eixample as a second motif in Vida privada with connections to the text itself. He writes that the “grotesque artifice has an especially strong resonance, not only in terms of actual decay but also in a political sense. The dried-out and moth-eaten dog, whose stuffing is coming loose, is an easy metaphor for the run-down woman and for the entire decrepit and frivolous upper class” (195). Like the dog, the novel is a work of “narrative taxidermy” (192).

31 The terms symbolic and economic capital are most frequently associated with French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who uses them throughout his study Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1979) to differentiate between power based on lineage, honor, and culture, on the one hand, and money, on the other.

32 Daniel Pick studies the medical discourse of degeneration in the Naturalist works of Émile Zola (74-96).

33 The narrator states that “[e]l verdet dels Lloberola havia donat en Maria Lluïsa un producte que venia a ésser una variant del seu oncle Guillem” (265) [the Lloberola slime had made in Maria Luisa a product that ended up being a variant of her uncle Guillem].

34 Vida privada initially cost twenty pesetas. Despite the unusually high price for the period, the novel sold “como agua de mayo” [like hotcakes] in late 1932 (Ordóñez 19-20).

35 For an overview of the modernization of Spain’s publishing industry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Jesús A. Martínez Martín’s edited volume. On the role of the short novel collections in promoting reading for pleasure among Spain’s working and middle classes, see Christine Rivalan Guégo’s suggestively titled study Lecturas gratas o ¿fábrica de lectores? [Pleasant Readings, or, Factory of Readers?] (2007).

36 Bourdieu outlines the notion of a literary field in The Field of Cultural Production (29-73). It includes “not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.) but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work—critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such” (37). With respect to the Spanish literary field between 1900 and 1936, Martínez Martín observes that the professionalization of journalism and publishing in that period led to a production “sin parangón posible en fechas anteriores” (“La edición” 171) [without comparison in earlier times]. Bibliographic data about the major collections of short novels from this time period is available in studies by Luis S. Granjel (Eduardo Zamacois 45-151), Lily Litvak (44-56), Federico Carlos Sáinz de Robles (53-93), Louis Urrutia (140-53), and Alberto Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa. More exhaustive studies and catalogs exist for El Cuento Semanal (Magnien et. al.), El Libro Popular (Correa Ramón), La Novela Corta (Mogín-Martin), La Novela Semanal (Fernández Gutiérrez), La Novela de Hoy (Precioso and Martínez-Arnaldos; Labrador Ben et. al.), and La Novela Mundial (Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa and Santamaría Barceló).

37 Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa cites ten relatively unsuccessful short novel collections comparable in format to the pre-war series founded during and after the Civil War. The last appeared in 1953 (41).

38 For cover images from erotic and pornographic collections, see José Blas Vega and José María Lópeez Ruiz. José Antonio Cerezo supplements Vega’s extensive catalog of erotic collections with a list of series published by clandestine presses.

39 Similarly, the first number of La Novela Mundial (1926) published a statement of purpose according to which “[n]os acompaña en el intento de nuestra empresa el más amplio criterio literario, sin más limitaciones que las impuestas por el buen gusto. Por esta razón, nuestras páginas estarán siempre cerradas a la pornografía” (cited in Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa and Santamaría Barceló 27) [we are
accompanied in our endeavor by the most ample of literary criteria, without any other limitations beyond those imposed by good taste. Therefore, our pages will always be closed to pornography.

40 The stories “Del barro” [“From the Mud”] (111-15) and “Ley de herencia” [“Law of Heredity”] (119-22) in De pecado en pecado [From Sin to Sin] are typical of El Caballero Audaz’s Naturalist aesthetic.

41 Antonio Cruz Casado reports that between 1919 and 1929, the works of El Caballero Audaz went through so many editions that he told the Guatemalan writer Enrique Gómez Carrillo that he had decided to stop his publishers from printing the number of editions on his covers so as to avoid making other authors jealous (“José María Carretero” 77).

42 Javier Rioyo provides further details on the curiously parodic Guía de cortesanas en Madrid (324-28). In this case, Pedro González Blanco’s adoption of a female pseudonym does not contradict my argument that many male writers of the early 1900s felt anxiety over female authorship, since the writer perpetuates stereotypes linking female writers and immorality by presenting himself as a seasoned prostitute writing for her younger disciples.

43 Of the 233 numbers published by La Novela Semanal, only thirteen were authored by women (Fernández Gutiérrez 39-209).

44 Serge Salaün offers alternate etymologies for sicalipsis in his discussion of eroticism in popular Spanish songs from the early 1900s (124-38). For him, the word is likely a deformation of apocalíptico [apocalyptic] or epiléptico [epileptic], used to describe the moral effects of scantily-clad singers on male audiences, or the erratic nature of their movements on stage (126-27).

45 Martínez Martín examines the professionalization of publishers in Spain during the early 1900s, noting that the process replaced relationships of friendship and loyalty between authors and their publishers with impersonal business transactions (“La edición” 173-76, 195).

46 Álvaro Retana presents himself as a prostitute in at least two other interviews signed by Precioso: “Casto por naturaleza” (11) and “¡Se ruega al público!” (5).

47 For further evidence of the involvement of poor men and boys in homosexual cruising and book sales in the Puerta del Sol, see Cansinos Assén (I: 87-88, 110, 112, 374-75). Carmen de Burgos’s short novel Los vendedores de la Puerta del Sol [The Peddlers of the Puerta del Sol], published in La Novela de Hoy in 1919, also mentions the plaza as a venue for street urchins to peddle cheap books, including pornography (204-06, 209).

48 Rivalan Guégo emphasizes that assiduous readers had to read one novel per week if they wished to keep up with the rhythm of publication of any single series (Lectura gratas 77).

49 On the evolution of Los Contemporáneos, for example, see Sáinz de Robles (59).

50 La Novela Semanal appeared between June 25, 1921 and December 26, 1925 (Sánchez Álvarez-Insúa 114). The first number of La Novela de Hoy came out on May 19, 1922 (107). The latter collection published Bestezuela de placer on December 29, 1922.
Chapter Three

Seduction and Instruction: Álvaro Retana, a Modern Mephistopheles

He jugado tanto con el fuego que me he abrasado en sus llamas y fatigado de poner cátedra de moral privada, voy a entregarme lealmente en poder de Satán. Iré al Infierno, aunque sea en tren-botijo...

—Álvaro Retana, cited by Artemio Precioso, “Al Infierno en tren botijo” (5)

En tiempos de la Dictadura púsose de moda proclamar bizarramente que yo era un escritor inmoral, consagrado a embarcar pasajeros para Sodoma, Gomorra y restantes ciudades malditas, y como hay gente tan bruta en el mundo, no faltaron papanatas para aceptar estas afirmaciones divulgadas por criticastros y literatoides, envidiosos de la atención que el público me dispensaba.

—Álvaro Retana, A Sodoma en tren botijo (155)

Él, que pudo ser novelista exquisito, transformóse en un traficante de drogas literarias. […] Envuelta en un ropaje seductor, perfumada con culpable habilidad Alvarito entronizó definitivamente la Pornografía literaria.

—Carlos Fortuny, La ola verde (289-90)

I have played so much with fire that I have burnt myself in its flames, and tired of giving private lessons on morality, I am going to loyally turn myself over to Satan. I will go to Hell, even should it be by slow train...

During the Dictatorship it became fashionable to proclaim bizarrely that I was an immoral writer, devoted to embarking passengers for Sodom, Gomorrah, and other cursed cities; and since there are such brutish people in the world, there was no lack of dimwits who accepted these affirmations spread by self-inflated critics and big-headed men of letters, jealous of the attention paid me by the public.

He who could have been an exquisite novelist became a trafficker in literary drugs. …Alvarito permanently enthroned a literary Pornography adorned with seductive vestments and perfumed with culpable skill.

This chapter’s epigraphs introduce the imagery through which the once-famous writer, composer, and costume-designer Álvaro Retana (1890-1970) positioned himself as a Mephistophelean seducer in early twentieth-century Spain. The first comes from the prologue to a short novel published in 1924 and forges a link between Retana and Satan,
a paradigmatic seducer since his encounter with Eve as recounted in Genesis. The second opens the introduction to a comparable novel from 1933 and confirms that Retana’s critics, including leading Spanish intellectuals of the time such as Miguel de Unamuno, considered him a dangerous promoter of queer sexualities, defined below as those which resist classification within normalizing categories and contest the moral imperatives of normative heterosexuality. Although Retana vehemently disavows his advocacy of queer desire, he implicitly affirms his success as seducer by highlighting his popularity with the reading public. A more overt identification of Retana’s tools of seduction appears in the final epigraph, taken from the critical study La ola verde [The Green Wave] (1931). Writing under the pseudonym Carlos Fortuny, Retana acknowledges that his novels are literary drugs laced with alluring perfumes.

Satan, Hell, Sodom, trains, drugs, books, seduction: these motifs pervade Retana’s oeuvre of over one hundred commercial novels and story collections published between 1913 and 1967. They also provide the nodes around which this chapter looks at the author’s ideas on literature, drugs and venoms, and seduction and queer desire. The chapter is structured around three assumptions about why it is worthwhile to examine Retana’s treatment of these phenomena. First, analyzing his approach to these matters is an important step towards understanding how he took advantage of technological and socioeconomic innovations in pre-Civil War Spain to establish himself as a financially successful and notorious artist, influential enough to initiate his readers into the pleasures and dangers of modernity, associated in his texts with consumer capitalism, sexual freedom, and the city. One of my central theses is that Retana capitalized on the publishing revolution brought about by the short novel collections introduced in section
2.III. in order to sell novels meant to seduce and educate readers. Keeping in mind the shared etymological roots of *seduce* (Latin: *se-ducere*, to lead away or astray) and *educate* (Latin: *educare*, to educate; but also, *e-ducere*, to lead forth), I argue that Retana’s most self-reflexive novels lay bare the mechanisms by which they strive to lead readers to embrace queer desire and urbanization. The novels offer readers instruction about how to inhabit modern Madrid and Barcelona, use new modes of transportation, spend leisure time and money, and relate to themselves and others.

A second reason for lingering on Retana’s principal motifs is that they belong to a long tradition of literature and philosophy in the West. Texts as divergent as Decadent novelist Jean Lorrain’s book of stories *Fards et poisons* [*Make-up and Poisons*] (1903) and philosopher Jacques Derrida’s essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination* (1972) equate writing with drugs, venoms, poisons, and medicines. Seduction has preoccupied psychoanalysts, feminists, postmodern theorists, and narratologists. It also figures prominently in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), one of Retana’s most important intertexts. Oscar Wilde’s novel treats the *seduction/education* parallel as it is channeled through the similar pair comprised by *pedagogy* (Greek: *paidagogia*, education or attendance on children) and *pederasty* (Greek: *paiderastia*, love of boys). Philosophical attention to the latter coupling extends from Plato to the present.

This chapter places Retana’s short novels in dialogue with an eclectic archive of literary and theoretical texts to clarify the significance of their meditations on literature, drugs, seduction, and instruction. After an overview of Retana’s life and works, a second section demonstrates that his short novels borrow and modify the Decadent celebration of literature as a drug capable of transporting readers to artificial realms replete with queer
This part draws upon Derrida’s examination of writing as *pharmakon* in Plato’s dialogues to explore ambiguous responses to French Decadence and Hispanic *modernismo* among Retana’s Spanish peers Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent (1885-1940) and Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932). Analyses of Hoyos’s stories *Aromas de nardo indiano que mata y de ovonia que enloquece* [*Aromas of Fatal Indian Spikenard and Maddening Hovenia*] (1927) and Burgos’s short novel *El veneno del arte* [*The Venom of Art*] (*Los Contemporáneos*, 1910) set the stage for distinguishing the aesthetic and thematic peculiarities of Retana’s approach to writing, venom, and queer desire in his novel *El veneno de la aventura* [*The Venom of the Adventure or The Venom of the Affair*] (*La Novela de Noche*, 1923).

A subsequent section reveals that a sophisticated understanding of seduction subtends a pair of Retana’s most self-reflexive short novels, *Mi novia y mi novio* [*My Girlfriend and My Boyfriend*] (*La Novela de Hoy*, 1923) and *Flor del mal* [*Flower of Evil*] (*La Novela de Hoy*, 1924). These works complement the contemporaneous theoretical defense of seduction in *El veneno de la aventura* by staging seduction as a game that blurs the boundaries between hetero- and homosexuality, truth and appearance, writing and reading, and, not least, seducer and seduced. The resultant conceptualizations of literature, self, and seduction resonate with Jean Baudrillard’s postmodern musings in *Seduction* (1979) and Ross Chambers’s narratological study *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (1984).

Retana’s main motifs coalesce in the short novel analyzed in the chapter’s final part, *A Sodoma en tren botijo* [*To Sodom by Slow Train*] (*Los Trece*, 1933). This section mobilizes the insights derived from the previous readings to trace the educational
implications of the narrative seduction enacted in and by the novel. Like other works by Retana, the text can be read as a guide to joining a queer, self-consciously modern subculture in Madrid. In its capacity as Baedeker, the novel provides a homophilic antidote to the comparably conservative sexual pedagogy conveyed by Spanish doctor Gregorio Marañón’s writings on intersexualidad [intersexuality], whose lessons haunt the chaste inverts to be considered in Chapter 4.

A final reason for dedicating the present chapter to a limited number of noteworthy motifs in Retana’s short novels can be attributed to the difficulties involved in their interpretation. This chapter’s epigraphs provide ample evidence of the writer’s complex deployment of images like the Hell- or Sodom-bound train. In the 1924 prologue (epigraph 1), Retana uses the slow train to Hell to proudly announce his betrayal of bourgeois morality. But in the 1933 introduction (epigraph 2), he credits his critics with inventing a similar train to Sodom in an effort to sully his reputation with unfounded allegations of depravity. The third epigraph confuses matters further, for Retana takes a penname to evaluate his own literary trajectory. Although the moralizing “Carlos Fortuny” appears to admonish “Alvarito” for trafficking in literary drugs, La ola verde is also a defense of Retana in the wake of his imprisonment in 1926 and 1928 on charges of writing pornography. Later on, I argue that Retana’s contradictory self-characterizations are a crucial tactic in the game of seduction illustrated by the novels under analysis in this project.

There are many reasons to think of Retana as a specifically Mephistophelean seducer. From the outset of Goethe’s Faust, Mephistopheles labors to seduce the title protagonist. In his wager with God in the “Prologue in Heaven,” he challenges the Lord:
“You’ll lose him yet! I offer bet and tally, / Provided that your Honor gives / Me leave to lead him gently up my alley” (l. 312-14). The image of the devil leading Faust away from his “appointed course” echoes the etymology of seduction and identifies Mephistopheles as an archetypal seducer (l. 329).

He is also a shape-shifter whose transformations beguile his victims. In his study Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World (1986), historian Jeffrey Burton Russell notes that Goethe’s antagonist shifts between the forms of “a dog, a scholar, a knight, a fool, a magician, and a general” (159). On a metaphysical plane, he “appears both as the opponent of God and as the instrument of the divine will; as the creator of the material world and as God’s subject” (158). Both materially and otherwise, Mephistopheles’s identity is dispersed in a network of incongruous appearances that fascinate Faust and precipitate his wager with the devil (Bahr; Durrani). Elusive self-presentation is also a powerful instrument of seduction for Retana.

After he wins over Faust through his transformations, Mephistopheles turns to drugs as another tool to help his new protégé seduce Gretchen. In “Witch’s Kitchen,” he gives Faust a concoction designed to restore his youth and to heighten his sexual prowess. Later, he and Faust furnish Gretchen with a sleeping potion to keep her mother in bed during Faust’s nighttime visit. In both cases, Mephistopheles’s mixtures facilitate heterosexual adultery as a transgressive sexual practice in much the same way that Retana’s literary drugs awaken queer desire.

Despite the prominence of heterosexuality in the Gretchen plot, other sexualities are not absent from Goethe’s play (Falkner; Tobin). If Mephistopheles helps Faust seduce Gretchen, he is himself seduced by the male angels that guide Faust to Heaven in
the drama’s conclusion. Faust escapes the devil’s clutches because the latter cannot contain his homosexual desire. Speaking to one angel who comes for Faust’s soul, Mephistopheles implores:

You, lad, I like the best, so lean and tall,  
That curate’s mien becomes you not at all,  
Give me a little wanton wink, come on!  
You need a decent naked fashion, too,  
That long enfolding robe is over-prim—  
They turn around—now for a backward view!  
I could just eat them up, the lot of them. (l. 11794-11800)

This scene consolidates Mephistopheles’s polymorphous sexuality as developed in the rest of the play. Following his initial advances at female characters like Gretchen’s neighbor or the witches in “Walpurgis Night,” the devil becomes progressively bolder in his praise of Faust’s virility and his attraction to male angels. Mephistopheles’s oscillations between hetero- and homosexual desire are yet another component of a fluid self-construction that links him to Retana.

They also have the potential to enrich Marshall Berman’s allegorical reading of Faust in All That is Solid Melts into Air (1982). For Berman, Mephistopheles incarnates modern capitalism and markets it to others. He is the source of the “money, speed, sex and power” that grant Faust access to modern experience (50). With respect to sexuality, he prompts Faust to violate traditional norms by having relations with Gretchen outside of wedlock. Berman’s comments on this episode foreground the transgressive heterosexual desire between Faust and Gretchen without noting Mephistopheles’s equally heterodox attractions to men and women, witches and angels. By integrating the devil’s multiform sexual impulses into Berman’s allegory, it is possible to recuperate queer desire’s intimacy with modernization. Simply put, Berman’s embodiment of modern
change is queer. As a similar icon for change in Spain in the 1920s and 30s, Retana pushed for urban modernity in novels calculated to endorse queer desire and socioeconomic innovation.

Berman’s choice of Mephistopheles to symbolize modern change signals both the joys and dangers involved in the decision to buy into modernization. The benefits derived by Faust from his collusion with the devil cannot mitigate the ethical doubts raised by his partnership with evil forces. By calling Retana a Mephistophelean seducer, I most certainly do not wish to imply a personal judgment that the writer was evil or immoral. I do want to emphasize how Retana acknowledges risky aspects of queer desire in his short novels.

Retana’s identification of his works as “literary drugs” raises doubts about whether they should be considered beneficent medicines or fatal toxins. The writer confronts the second possibility in novels whose protagonists meet their demise due to their consumption of Decadent and erotic literature. These tragedies smack of playful irony, but they also point to real worries for the proponents of queer sexualities and modern change, including the threat of homophobia. Retana himself faced heterosexist backlash when he was incarcerated for his supposed immorality in 1926 and 1928, and from 1939 to 1948. These imprisonments did not deter the author, for he continued to produce his brand of literature after each stint in jail (Toledana Molina). For Retana, writing’s medicinal properties as an invitation to queer pleasures must have outweighed its injurious side effects. The short novels discussed below suggest that he hoped that his readers would agree.
Before turning to an overview of Retana’s life and works, a final comment on my understanding of the word *queer* is in order. For the purposes of this chapter, queer desires and sexualities are those which evade categorization within hierarchical taxonomies that name ostensibly stable sexual identities and that legitimate some forms of sexuality by stigmatizing others. The adjective *queer* does not refer to a specific *identity* accompanied by predictable actions and behaviors; rather, it describes an array of *positionalities* from which people contest hegemonic social norms (Sullivan 43-44). One target of queer resistance are heteronormative standards that seek to restrict acceptable sexuality to heterosexual relations characterized by unequal distributions of power between men and women. Such norms enshrine monogamous, reproductive sex within marriage as the epitome of “good” sexuality. The term *queer* encompasses a range of desires and behaviors that transgress this standard. Queer sexualities and their practitioners lay bare the insufficiency of categories denoted by labels like *heterosexual* and *homosexual*, *male* and *female*, and *masculine* and *feminine*, as well as others that mark distinctions of class, race, and nationality.4

These binaries are regularly complicated by characters in short novels by Retana who vary in sexual preference, gender, class, and age. By using the term *queer* to describe the desires and relationships of these figures, I mean to recognize the diversity and mutability of the counternormative sexualities depicted by Retana. At the same time, I acknowledge that an account of the full spectrum of queer desire in his oeuvre is beyond the scope of this project. The short novels discussed here have been selected for analysis because they feature erotic and sexual relations between characters perceived socially as males. Given this dissertation’s concern with male (homo)sexualities in early twentieth-
century Spain, these interactions merit special attention. Nevertheless, their importance will not prevent me from examining other queer relations, including those of women, when they appear in the novels at hand.  

Nor will my use of *queer* in this chapter preclude consideration of Spanish terms employed by Retana to designate people on the basis of their sexual desires and gender performances. Retana consciously reflects on labels of this type in his short novels. He interrupts *A Sodoma en tren botijo* to explain that “es sabido que *loca* es el apelativo cariñoso reservado entre gente *bien* para los individuos pertenecientes al tercer sexo; la palabra admisible en público, como sustitutiva a la de *marica*, que reiteradamente emplea Ramón Pérez de Ayala en su producción de malas costumbres escolares *A.M.D.G.*” (193) [it is well known that *loca* is the affectionate term used by classy people for individuals belonging to the third sex; the word accepted in public as a substitute for *marica*, used repeatedly by Ramón Pérez de Ayala in his work about bad boarding school habits *A.M.D.G.*]. Character descriptions elsewhere in the novel reveal that the valorized term *loca* and its homophobic counterpart *marica* refer to individuals who believe that their female psychologies have been misplaced in male bodies. Retana clarifies this idea with reference to a third sex, a term put into circulation across Europe by early homophile activists like Edward Carpenter (England, 1844-1929) and Magnus Hirschfeld (Germany, 1869-1935) to designate a sex indefinable as solely male or female. By stylizing their bodies and speech to perform an exaggerated femininity in pursuit of the sexual attention of more traditionally gendered males, the *locas* in Retana’s novels queer binaries of sex, gender, and sexuality. I return to them below as one vehicle through which Retana
sought in Mephistophelean fashion to lead (seduce, educate) his readers to experience the joys and risks of queer desire and modern life for themselves.

I. Lives and Works of Álvaro Retana

In both his own texts and the writings of contemporary biographers, Álvaro Retana emerges as a complex play of lives wherein traditional distinctions between truth and appearance, bodily existence and textualization, and hetero- and homosexuality fail to hold. Such multiplicity is a frequent topic of conversation for Retana and Artemio Precioso in the interviews published as prologues to the former’s contributions to La Novela de Hoy between 1922 and 1927. In an interview from 1923, Retana explains that his autobiographical statements seek to leave readers with the impression that he is similar to his own characters by veiling him in their sexual ambiguity (Precioso “El novelista de la buena sombra” 10). Elsewhere, he assures that the resultant self-characterization is purely fictional, for he neither shares nor condones his creations’ inclinations in “real” life (Precioso “¡Se desean ayudantes!” 11; Retana El veneno 10). This claim contradicts still other comments that imply a lesser distance between Retana and his characters. In what some readers could perceive as a spoof on Faust’s lament that “[t]wo souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast” (Goethe l. 1112), Retana affirms that “en mí hay dos Álvaros Retana: uno, el artista estrepitoso, hambriento de notoriedad, el ESCLAVO del PUBLICO, el niño turbulento […], y otro, el chico sencillo y modesto, el burguesito todo corazón” (Precioso “El novelista de la buena sombra” 11) [in me there are two Álvaro Retanas: one, the spectacular novelist, hungry for notoriety, the PUBLIC’S SLAVE, the turbulent child..., and the other, the simple and modest boy, a little bourgeois man, all heart].
As textual constructions poised in dynamic relation to the material body once labeled Álvaro Retana, these two Retanas are joined by numerous others in texts by later writers and critics. Significantly, a novel by the Spanish poet and dandy Luis Antonio de Villena (born 1951) represents one of the first contemporary attempts to recover Retana from oblivion. The protagonist of Divino [Divine] (1994) is a loose reconstruction of the writer generously embellished with details of Villena’s own invention (El ángel 107). While this openly fictional text seems to contrast with other biographical studies by Villena, the evolving image of Retana in the latter works belies their self-avowedly modest pretenses to objectivity. From text to text, Villena updates even the most basic information about Retana. For instance, he retracts his 1992 claim that the author was born in 1893 in a 1999 biography that lists the new date as 1890 (“Alvaro Retana” 321; El ángel 23-25). Such amendments are the fruit of Villena’s effort to unearth the historical Retana through archival research and anecdotal evidence. They also confirm that any attempt to narrate the writer’s life must acknowledge its dissemination in texts that often present conflicting lives. The following biographical sketch necessarily supplements this dispersal.

I.A. Biography

An outstanding example of Retana’s endeavor to achieve notoriety by inventing multiple life stories concerns his assertions regarding the circumstances of his birth. In all but his latest texts, Retana maintains that he was born on February 19, 1898 off the coast of Ceylan during his parents’ honeymoon to the Philippines. The date and location are significant, since Spain lost control of the Philippines in the Spanish-American War of 1898. By making his birth coincide with a year and place often considered symbolic...
of Spain’s historical decline, Retana playfully links himself to Decadent obsessions with decay and “exotic” locales. Since he was already publishing erotic lyrics by 1907, he also presents himself as a sexually precocious prodigy.

Villena’s inquiry into the whereabouts of Retana’s father in the late 1800s appears to confirm Álvaro’s confession in a book from 1964 that he was actually born in 1890 in the Philippines (El ángel 23-25). By 1893, Álvaro had moved with his family to Madrid, where his father supported a bourgeois household with income from his post as member of the Royal Academy of History. The capital was Álvaro’s home for the rest of his life, excepting lengthy stays in Barcelona and Torrejón de Ardoz (Madrid).

Madrid was attractive to young Retana because it was a hothouse for the so-called género ínfimo. This designation occupies the lowest rank in a hierarchy that also includes high opera (género mayor) and the Spanish zarzuela (género chico). Shows in the género ínfimo in the early 1900s featured female celebrities who sang, danced, and acted in flamboyant and often scandalous costumes evocative of popular Spanish majas and chulas, Colombines and Pierrots, French divas, and “Oriental” princesses (Anastasio; Salaün).10

As early as 1907, Retana began to compose lyrics and design attire for stars like Rosario Guerrero, La Goya, and Raquel Meller. Over the next three decades, he wrote the words (and to a lesser extent, the music) for racy cuplés [torch songs] once equal in fame to his hit “Las tardes del Ritz” [“Afternoons at the Ritz”], a show piece for the cross-dressing transformista Edmond de Bries.11 He also modeled costumes by drawing hundreds of colorful figurines [costume patterns], many of which rival those of his friend José Zamora.12 Retana’s lifelong devotion to the género ínfimo came to fruition in the
post-Civil War years, when his books *Historia del arte frívolo* [History of Frivolous Art] (1964) and *Historia de la canción española* [History of the Spanish Song] (1967) catered to a renewed demand for the genre triggered by actress Sara Montiel’s popular film *El último cuplé* [The Last Torch Song] (1957). It also left him with memories of affairs with the cupletistas [torch song singers] Lina Valery, Nena Rubens, and Luisa de Lerma, the last of whom bore his only child sometime before 1933.

Contacts with the género ínfimo gave Retana his first opportunities to write as a journalist and novelist. Without retiring from a bureaucratic post won by opposition in 1907, he began to report on entertainment and fashion for the *Heraldo de Madrid* [Madrid Herald] four years later. The themes of his chronicles also figure prominently in his first commercially successful novels, *La carne de tablado* [The Flesh on Stage] (1918), *Ninfas y sátiros* [Nymphs and Satyrs] (1919), and *El crepúsculo de las diosas* [The Twilight of the Goddesses] (1919). A trilogy à clef about the private lives of entertainers in Madrid and Barcelona, the works elicited positive comments from critics as diverse as Carmen de Burgos and Julio Cejador (Fortuny 272-83).

In spite of Retana’s resolution in *El crepúsculo* to stop writing novelas libertinas [libertine novels], the early 1920s witnessed the height of his fame as a risqué novelist (vii). Between 1920 and 1925, Retana published at least sixty four long and short novels with titles such as *El buscador de lujurias* [The Lust Seeker], *El octavo pecado capital* [The Eighth Deadly Sin], *El fuego de Lesbos* [The Fire of Lesbos], and *La señorita Perversidad* [Miss Perversity] in mainstream collections like *La Novela Corta*, *La Novela Semanal*, and *La Novela de Hoy* and more specifically erotic series including *La Novela Pasional* (Barreiro 114-16). In a 1924 prologue, Retana attributes his fame in this period
to the editorial savvy of Artemio Precioso, founder of *La Novela de Hoy* and *La Novela de Noche* [The Novel by Night] (*El veneno* 8-9). Seventeen of the cited novels first appeared in those two collections, including three of the texts under analysis in this chapter.

As he became increasingly popular in Precioso’s publications, Retana also faced censorship and social disapproval under the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). Notwithstanding his own sexual prurience (Litvak 23), the dictator was pressured to combat the boom in public eroticism following World War I by Catholics whose influence also led to the 1928 legislation against homosexuality analyzed above in conjunction with Benavente’s *De muy buena familia* (2.I.A.; see also 4.I.C.). One result was a series of trials that sent Precioso into exile in 1927 and condemned Retana to prison in 1926 and 1928 for his allegedly pornographic novels *El tonto* [The Idiot] (*La Novela de Hoy*, 1925) and *Un nieto de Don Juan* [A Grandson of Don Juan] (*La Novela Pasional*, 1925). Each incarceration lasted no longer than a month, but together they significantly reduced Retana’s literary output following 1925. Javier Barreiro records only twenty four publications between 1926 and 1933 (117-18).

One of the most important of these is *La ola verde: Crítica frívola* [The Green Wave: Frivolous Criticism] (1931), a book cited in this chapter’s epigraphs and sections 2.III.B-C. Retana wrote the work under the pseudonym Carlos Fortuny to rebuke his fellow writers for failing to defend him against criminal charges in the 1920s. Its anthology of licentious texts by authors who were not persecuted by Primo reveals that Retana was not Spain’s only pornographer during the dictatorship. Fortuny’s moralizing stance against erotic literature does not deter him from ironically celebrating Retana as a
“redentor de la sociedad corrompida” [redeemer of a corrupted society] thanks to whose imprisonment “[l]as casadas infieles han vuelto a la fidelidad de los maridos; los esposos descarriados, a los brazos de sus olvidadas mujercitas; las hijas de familia ya no pierden su doncellez, y los adolescentes abominan de las tentaciones carnales” (Fortuny 303, 305) [unfaithful wives have gone back to being loyal to their husbands; lost husbands, to the arms of their forgotten wives; girls from good families don’t lose their virginity any longer, and adolescent boys detest temptations of the flesh].

The sarcasm evident here demonstrates that Retana did not forsake his provocative poses during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939). His impenitence, together with his support for spectacles designed to entertain Republican soldiers in Madrid, made him a target for punishment following the Civil War. On May 17, 1939, a Nationalist court sent Retana to prison until 1948. A frequently cited anecdote claims that the writer responded to accusations that he habitually drank the semen of adolescent boys from sacred vessels with the retort “Señor, prefiero siempre tomarlo directamente” (cited in Barreiro 94) [Sir, I always prefer to drink it from the source]. Whether true or not, the episode’s legendary resonances are consistent with Retana’s effort to construct himself as a play of fact and fiction.

Retana’s signature ambiguity is also manifest in the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death. Following his release from prison, the writer turned once more to Madrid’s entertainment industry to overcome financial difficulties. The revival of the cuplé around 1957 facilitated his comeback in novels and studies tinged with nostalgia for the pre-war years. In fact, novels from the mid-1950s recycled texts from the 20s with just enough modifications to evade Francoist censorship (Toledana Molina 259-66).
These modest successes did not rescue Retana from increasing obscurity in the 1960s. Villena records rumors about his murder at the hands of a rent boy in 1970 (El ángel 100-02). It does not appear that scholars have located other evidence in support of this hearsay. As Villena aptly concludes, it is fitting that Retana’s death should be so doubtful, since his own games made his birth equally ambiguous (El ángel 102).

**I.B. Texts and Paratexts**

However it took place, Retana’s death terminated a succession of literary texts whose heterogeneity matches that of their creator’s varied life stories. Barreiro’s bibliography lists approximately 120 stories and short and long novels in Retana’s oeuvre, only twelve of which date from after the Civil War (114-18). The works include prose narratives, epistolary fiction, and extended dramatic dialogues. While some are erotic, others might be more profitably called crime fiction or tales of fantasy and horror. All draw liberally on an eclectic range of intertexts and conventions derived from Spain’s Golden Age and from nineteenth-century Spanish and European costumbrismo, Realism, Naturalism, and Decadence.

This chapter’s analyses of El veneno de la aventura, Mi novia y mi novio, Flor del mal, and A Sodoma en tren botijo provide examples of Retana’s kaleidoscopic generic affiliations, while also highlighting paratextual features typical of his output as a whole. Retana and his editors insistently advanced the integration of Spain’s publishing industry into a modern order of consumer capitalism by creating paratexts designed to market the writer and his works to a mass readership. The illustrations, prologues, and advertisements that accompany Retana’s novels are supplementary materials both integral to and outside of the texts themselves, which could not exist as such without the
definition provided by their frames. Appropriately, these liminal sites are also a locus of visibility for Retana’s queer slippages between categories of gender and sexuality.¹⁶

The illustrations printed with Retana’s novels vary in number, format, and style according to the publisher of each text.¹⁷ Most works include images on the front and back covers, and interspersed in the narratives themselves. In both locations, drawings and photographs of Retana appear alongside illustrations based loosely on episodes from his works. Christine Rivalan Guégo calls these images a punto de seducción [point of seduction] meant to convince prospective readers to purchase books (Fruición 30). This turn of phrase is especially apropos vis-à-vis the sketches and portraits published with Retana’s works, since many of them do carry an erotic charge. Here, examples from Flor del mal illustrate the queer allure of Retana’s visual paratexts.

One purpose of the photographs and drawings in this novel is to blur the boundaries between Retana as material being and textual creation, on the one hand, and Retana as upstanding bourgeois gentleman and sexually ambiguous dandy, on the other. These binaries begin to collapse in a photograph of Retana inserted after the prologue (figure 3.1). Leaning against a chair with his hands on his hips, the writer gazes defiantly at the viewer. Together with his plucked eyebrows, powdered face, and pomaded hair, his haughty pose undermines the air of sobriety otherwise evoked by his meticulously pressed shirt, tie, and coat.¹⁸

Retana’s dandy-like deviance comes into greater relief in the novel’s next image, a line drawing by José Guillén de Villena that seems to prolong the scene depicted in the photograph four pages earlier (figure 3.2). Wearing the same attire, Retana rises from the chair and throws his right arm over his shoulder, allowing his wrist to dangle. He turns
his head to the left, purses his lips, and squints his eyes in what appears to be a coy invitation. A blossoming plant added to the lower right corner suggests that Retana may be the flower named in the novel’s title.

Figure 3.1. Photograph of Álvaro Retana, *Flor del mal. La Novela de Hoy* 3.106 (1924): 10.

Figure 3.2. Drawing of Álvaro Retana by José Guillén de Villena, *Flor del mal. La Novela de Hoy* 3.106 (1924): 14.

Figure 3.3. Front Cover by José Guillén de Villena, *Flor del Mal. La Novela de Hoy* 3.106 (1924).

By transforming the photograph into a drawing, this image identifies the confusion between the historical Retana and his artistic representations as a crucial theme in *Flor del mal*. The drawing also traces an analogy between Retana and the female protagonist pictured on the work’s front cover (figure 3.3). Like the writer, she holds her left hand on her hip, raises her limp right wrist, and cranes her neck to the left. The repeated poses subtly signal Retana’s queer defiance of polarized codes of masculinity and femininity.
Other dichotomies come under attack in the prologues printed in many of Retana’s novels, the most notable of which take the form of conversations between Retana and Precioso in *La Novela de Hoy* (2.III.C.). Precioso inserts the interviews in narrative frames that relate brief encounters between himself and Retana, often in the latter’s home. This format allows the editor to make Retana’s ostensibly private life available for public consumption. Precioso includes readers in his observations of Retana’s intimacy in an exemplary use of the first person plural: “[e]sta vez sorprendemos a Alvarito Retana sentado gravemente ante la mesa de su despacho, y como no se ha percatado de nuestra entrada, le examinamos con ese detenimiento que requieren los seres extraordinarios” (“El novelista más guapo” 5) [this time we catch Alvarito Retana unawares sitting gravely at his office desk, and since he has not noticed our entrance, we examine him with the care required by extraordinary beings].

Although this type of spying purports to provide insight about Retana in the context of factual prologues clearly distinguishable from the novels that follow, the division between nonfiction and fiction is precarious in *La Novela de Hoy*. Successive prologues string together a coherent narrative with Precioso and Retana as protagonists. The interviews included in *El encanto de la cama redonda* [*The Charm of the Round Bed*] (1 December 22) and *La hora del pecado* [*The Hour of Sin*] (2 March 1923) form part of this suspiciously novelesque story. In the first, Retana reports that the presumably famous entertainer Misia Darrys has named him “el novelista más guapo del mundo” [the most handsome novelist in the world] in the Parisian journal *Revue Artistique* [*Artistic Review*] (Precioso “El novelista más guapo” 8-9).19 In the second, the writer laments the effects of this proclamation: “Desde que apareció *El encanto de la cama redonda* me
llueven declaraciones amorosas y proposiciones matrimoniales; se me asedia, se me importuna y se me agobia, hasta el punto de que estoy abocado a morir por exceso de éxito” [Since The Charm of the Round Bed appeared, I have been inundated with declarations of love and marriage propositions; I am being besieged, disturbed, and exhausted, to the point that I am on the verge of dying due to excessive success]. Precioso’s ironic response—“Sería original” [That would be a first]—underlines the studied theatricality of the writer’s complaint (Precioso “¡Se desean ayudantes!” 4).

Additional references to letters, gifts, and sexual advances from admirers constitute a veritable topos in prologues to Retana’s novels (El veneno 17-19; Precioso “El retrato” 5-7; Precioso “¡Se ruega!” 4-6). Without denying that the author may have had ardent correspondents, it also seems likely that he exaggerated his fame to perpetuate his success. In other words, Retana raucously protests his popularity to attract the attention of even more readers. Notably, he and the other writers of his prologues always emphasize that his admirers include “admiradoras exaltadas” and “admiradores equivocados” (Precioso “Casto” 10) [impassioned female admirers and mixed up male admirers] (see also Hoyos “Álvaro Retana” 148; Retana El veneno 16). Their insistence on this point situates Retana as a queer object of desire impervious to the socially constructed distinction between hetero- and homosexual attraction.

A final paratextual element included in many of Retana’s novels are advertisements for his other works, the most obvious of the mechanisms by which the writer and his publishers hoped to market books to consumers.20 Announcements for Retana’s future publications and compilations of praise for his older works feature monikers coined to exaggerate his fame. Hence, an advertisement for the forthcoming
novel *Todo de color de rosa* [*Everything Colored Pink*] in *Carnaval* [*Carnival*] (*La Novela de Hoy*, 1924) reiterates claims made in earlier installments of *La Novela de Hoy* that Misia Darrys named Retana “el novelista más guapo del mundo” (figure 3.4). Likewise, a list of critical commentaries about Retana in *El veneno de la aventura* includes a faux endorsement from Satan in which the devil claims that if Retana “no fuera un ángel, podría pasar por hijo mío” [were not an angel, he could pass for my son] (22). The same list also reproduces professor Julio Cejador’s assertion that Retana was “el Petronio del siglo XX” (22) [the twentieth-century Petronius].

![Figure 3.4](image.jpg)

Figure 3.4. Advertisement for *Todo de color de rosa* in *Carnaval. La Novela de Hoy* 3.93 (1924).

This last title links Retana to queer desire and Decadence by associating him with Petronius, courtier to the notoriously perverse Roman emperor Nero (27-66 AD). Replete with hedonism and sexual misadventures, Petronius’s *Satyricon* became a queer icon for literary Decadents at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas Oscar Wilde was falsely credited with an English translation, Jean Lorrain and Joris-Karl Huysmans regularly cite the work in their own productions (Boroughs 20).
Retana places himself in the company of these Decadent writers in numerous autobiographical statements. In the prologue to his novel *Los ambiguos* [*The Ambiguous Ones*] (La Novela de Hoy, 1922), he boasts that he cultivates the same literary genre as foreign writers such as Rachilde, Pierre Louys, Barbey d’Aurevilly, or Jean Lorrain, but that he does it “mejor que todos ellos juntos” (Precioso “Casto” 9) [better than all of them combined]. Along with the promotional tactics in the illustrations, prologues, and advertisements examined above, similar examples of self-aggrandizement aim to amuse readers and to peddle Retana and his works in a modern consumer market. They also point to Retana’s complex relationship with his Decadent forebears. If the Decadents provided raw materials for Retana’s laboratory, his own alchemy created a noticeably different brand of literary drug.

II. Decadence and Queer Desire as *Pharmaka* in Spanish Commercial Literature

The pharmaceutical metaphors used by Retana and others to discuss art and literature come into sharp focus in light of philosopher Jacques Derrida’s 1972 essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” (Dissemination 67-186). Derrida hopes to undermine Western philosophy’s foundational distinction between living speech and dead writing by emphasizing the multiplicity of the term *pharmakon* in the Platonic dialogues. As Socrates’s preferred metaphor for writing, the word is entangled in a “chain of significations” embracing such disparate meanings as remedy, recipe, poison, and drug (98, 77). While most translations render *pharmakon* unambiguously according to its context in the dialogues, Derrida argues that Socrates can never escape the term’s “malleable unity” in the original Greek (77). Even when Socrates references the
**pharmakon** to subordinate writing to speech, he frames writing as a drug that acts as both a salvific medicine and a deadly venom.

Writing’s curative and fatal effects are also connected to its relation to sexuality for Derrida and Socrates. As literary critic Robert Tobin notes in a queer reading of Goethe, “if writing is the pharmakon, then it is, in Derrida’s view of Plato, linked to a sexuality of dissemination. Derrida emphasizes queer sexuality when looking for metaphors of the pharmakon” (99). In one example from “Plato’s Pharmacy,” the philosopher glosses a passage of the *Phaedrus* in which Socrates congratulates the title character for discovering the *pharmakon* required to lure him out of Athens. Phaedrus has captured Socrates’ attention by concealing a written text under his cloak. Sexualized through metonymy, writing as *pharmakon* seduces Socrates, leading him away from his habitual post in the city and towards his provocative young interlocutor (75-77). Here and elsewhere, Derrida’s reading of Plato binds drugs, writing, and queer desire in a compact semantic circuit.

This cluster of metaphors also looms large in texts related to *fin de siècle* decadence in Spain and the rest of Europe. Although Derrida analyzes the Socratic *pharmakon* to advance an argument about writing on an abstract plane, the term proves equally useful for examining concrete works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that engage with “the idea of decadence” (Carter; Valis 5). In this section, I argue that proponents and critics of cultural decline at the *fin de siècle* construct decadence as a polyvalent drug whose medicinal and noxious properties owe much to its sexual side effects; namely, texts about decadence depict queer sexualities and sometimes transmit them to readers.
Following an overview of decadence’s role as *pharmakon* across Europe, I turn to Spanish-language works by Retana and his colleagues Antonio de Hoyos y Vinient and Carmen de Burgos. Readings of texts that overtly equate art, literature, and poison reveal that Spanish commercial literature was another forum for debate about whether decadence and queer desire were a medicine or a toxin. Within this polemic, Retana emerges as the author who most enthusiastically promotes decadence and queer sexualities as viable life options. At the same time, his celebration of technological and socioeconomic modernization pushes him to go further than his contemporaries in modifying the aesthetic and thematics of the Decadent movement proper.

**II.A. European Debates on Decadence**

Scholars agree that the word *decadence*, like its counterpart *pharmakon*, is riven by competing meanings (Constable et. al. 1; McGuinness 8). One way to clarify the term is to distinguish between decadence as an idea, preoccupation, or worldview concerning politics, culture, and other spheres of human life; the stylistic and thematic Decadence of concrete *fin de siècle* literary and artistic trends; and the incarnation of decline in people labeled Decadents (Valis 7-22). Throughout this chapter, I navigate between these overlapping categories by capitalizing the term *decadence* and its derivatives when I intend them to refer to aesthetic Decadence as conceived within the French Decadent movement and Hispanic *modernismo*.

Decadence emerged as a wide-ranging concept in nineteenth-century Europe as an array of socioeconomic, scientific, and political currents made anxieties about death and decay an increasingly weighty counterbalance to the century’s positivist trust in progress. Rapid industrialization and urbanization across the continent led to astounding
improvements in life for some, but to poverty, exploitation, and disease for others (Carter 148). Charles Darwin’s popularization of evolutionary theory made way for claims that humans evolved from apes and could either regress to primitive states through atavism or develop excessively through degeneration (Pick 1-33). In Spain, the stalemate between Liberals and Conservatives following the Bourbon Restoration of 1875 and the concurrent colonial wars further contributed to a sense of decline and loss (Valis 3, 18). The common result of these processes was a popular belief in decadence defined as “social deterioration, the defeat of a society, or in individual cases, pathological degeneracy or the descent of a healthy personality into mental or spiritual instability” (Valis 15).

This idea of decadence concerned legal, medical, and literary writers regardless of whether they belonged to the Decadent movement proper. In a passage that merits extensive citation, literary critic Noël Valis elaborates that

the preoccupation with decadence and the decadent movement in literature (and the other arts) can be considered, on the whole, as two distinct categories. Quite often, the two categories will overlap, but a writer obsessed with the idea of social, political, moral, and literary decline is not necessarily a member of the decadent literary movement. […] Indeed, the critical realists and naturalists—the Goncourts, Flaubert, Zola, Galdós, Father Coloma, for example—were as much interested in the idea of decadence as decadents like J.-K. Huysmans, Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and the modernistas; but not only do the literary techniques differ (with considerable mutual borrowing, one might add): the point of view varies to a great extent also.

In rather simplified terms, the critical realist or naturalist sees decadence from a moral mountaintop, while the decadent revels in the lush valley below. (10)

Valis’s vivid imagery shows how the notion of decadence came to be constructed as a pharmakon by contending groups in fin de siècle Europe. Viewed from alternate perspectives, the same ideas about morbidity and putrefaction could be considered a
dangerous poison to be eradicated by attempts at regeneration and a welcome antidote to a stale faith in progress.

The writers most likely to celebrate decadence as an anti-bourgeois remedy were those whom literary histories record as members of a Decadent movement. Inspired by precursors like Charles Baudelaire, authors such as Joris-Karl Huysmans, Jean Lorrain, and Rachilde began to write consciously as Decadents in the 1880s, following the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. They were joined by artists elsewhere in Europe such as the Irish aesthete Oscar Wilde and the Italian Gabriele D’Annunzio.

Alberto Mira observes that traditional literary manuals tend to obfuscate the presence of similar Decadents in Spain by substituting the term modernismo for closer Spanish equivalents of Decadence (De Sodoma 108). The thesis of Begoña Sáez Martínez’s study Las sombras del modernismo: Una aproximación al decadentismo en España [The Shadows of Modernismo: An Approach to Decadence in Spain] (2004) is that nationalist critics before and during the Franco regime used modernismo to distance Spanish literature from the allegedly perverse influence of French Decadence (327-29). More recent scholars emphasize the convergence of Decadence and modernismo, without for that matter viewing Decadence in Spain as an exact equivalent or inferior imitation of its French counterpart (Cardwell; Mira De Sodoma 107-28; Sáez Martínez Las sombras).

Neither operation is required to recognize that many fin de siècle writers in Spain and abroad shared thematic and aesthetic concerns. In keeping with the idea of decadence as cultural decline and the exhaustion of progress, the Decadents and modernistas subscribed to an anti-utilitarian, anti-positivist vision of art as an end in itself. Their characters and poetic personae maintain a cult of artificiality that compels
them to reject conventional ideas of Nature, to withdraw from the drab realities of bourgeois existence, and to seek refuge in exotic paradises and the deep recesses of their own tortured minds. Egoism and individualism reign supreme among these characters, who tend to view other people as sensuous *objets d’art*. Formally, Decadent literature “deviates from the established norms in an attempt to reproduce pathology on a textual level” (Hustvedt 23). Typical mechanisms used to this end include synesthesia, esoteric diction, and baroque syntax. Eclectic allusions to Classical mythology, the Bible, occult religions, and the “Orient” accumulate alongside many others.

The opposition of the Decadents to anything that might be considered natural or normative from a bourgeois perspective makes Decadence a privileged site for queer desire. In fact, the terms *Decadent* and *queer* display a similar historical trajectory. Considering that literary Decadence was first described in France in the 1830s in a pejorative context, Liz Constable and her co-writers draw a parallel between the way “segments of the contemporary gay community have appropriated the previously derisive term *queer*” and the way some self-identified Decadent writers “shaped themselves and their works by ironizing and revaluing the judgment of their critics” (12). The word *queer* also seems suitable for summarizing the diverse modes of willfully counternormative, perverse, and sterile sexualities present in Decadent literature: male and female homosexuality, sadism, masochism, fetishism, and bestiality, among others. Normative dichotomies of sex and gender collapse in characters who engage in these practices, be they effete dandies, voracious *femmes fatales*, or indeterminate androgynes (Sáez Martínez *Las sombras* 64-82).
What is most extraordinary about the Decadents vis-à-vis Derrida’s meditation on the Socratic pharmakon is that both they and their critics couch Decadent literature and its queer refusal of heteronormativity in metaphorical references to drugs and poisons (Ziegler). Accordingly, Baudelaire compares his most famous poems to toxic blossoms under the title Les Fleurs du mal [Flowers of Evil] (1857) and Lorrain imagines a group of stories as items in a druggist’s collection of Fards et poisons (1903).

Similar metaphors also preside literary analyses included in Max Nordau’s attack on cultural decay in his well-read study Entartung [Degeneration] (1892). Translated into French as Dégénérescence in 1894, the book circulated widely in Spain shortly after its appearance and probably played a role in the fabrication of Pompeyo Gener’s suspiciously similar work Literaturas malsanas: Estudios de patología literaria contemporánea [Unhealthy Literatures: Studies in Contemporary Literary Pathology] (1894) (Davis “Max Nordau” 307-23; Sáez Martínez Las sombras 83-93). Both Nordau and Gener turn to science to survey a range of literary manifestations of decadence (Tolstoism, Ibsenism, Naturalism, and Decadence, among others) in order to diagnose their authors as degenerates or hysterics whose works are literary toxins. As Nordau explains, “[r]eaders intoxicate themselves in the hazy word-sequences of symbolic poetry,” and fictional books vaunting sodomitical pleasures “diffuse a curious perfume yielding distinguishable odours of incense, eau de Lubin and refuse, one or the other preponderating alternately” (13-14). Nordau and Gener try to cleanse their own books of these fragrances by presenting them as sterilized medicines, complete with conclusions entitled “Therapeutics” (Nordau 550-60) and “Terapéutica estética” [“Aesthetic Therapeutics”] (Gener 379-91).
How well they do so is a matter of debate. Critics have recognized that despite the apparently opposed usage of poison as a metaphor in Decadent writers and their detractors, the two groups are rarely able to sustain a clear distinction between their positive and negative evaluations of decadence. In the introduction to his anthology of Symbolist poetry *Poison and Vision* (1974), David Paul writes that the word *poison* in Baudelaire “can denote pleasure, drugs, even the sense of happiness,” but most often “expresses the pain, the impurity and the horror of experience” (xi). Conversely, Constable and her colleagues find that “whereas Nordau writes from the confident perspective of the scientific investigator, he nevertheless seems at many points inadvertently, and yet significantly, to breach the boundary between himself and his pathologized subjects” (5). In other words, decadence’s queer poison presents itself to Baudelaire and Nordau as something at once agreeable and agonizing, attractive and repulsive—a *pharmakon* in all the contradictory senses of the term.

The same occurs with Hoyos y Vinent, Burgos, and Retana in their varied engagements with the idea of decadence and the Decadent literary movement. Both individually and in tandem, works by these authors inscribe decadent notions of decay, social withdrawal, and sterile eroticism as both a medicine and a poison. Upon first inspection, Hoyos argues for decadence as an antidote against bourgeois norms in his eager embrace of literary Decadence. Burgos, on the other hand, hopes to regenerate Spanish society through a repudiation of venomous Decadent literature. Yet neither writer can sustain his/her position, for Burgos is attracted to Decadent toxins, while Hoyos acknowledges their potential dangers. Retana overcomes this deadlock by reframing queer sexualities associated with decadence as plausible life choices in modern
Spain. Doing so necessitates that he simultaneously accept Hoyos’s exaltation of decadence as cure and eschew a strict adherence to Decadent literary tenants.

II.B. Hoyos’s Decadent Pharmacy: *Aromas de nardo indiano que mata y de ovonia que enloquece*

Writing under the penname Carlos Fortuny, Retana declares in *La ola verde* that Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent (1885-1940) was *envenenado* [poisoned] by Decadent literature (77). In effect, Hoyos was an avid consumer of works by Decadent writers such as Huysmans, Rachilde, Lorrain, Wilde, and D’Annunzio. His readings made an important impact on his art, both written and embodied. Hoyos celebrated the Decadent cult of artificiality and perversion, and took advantage of his socioeconomic privilege as Marquis of Vinent to craft himself as an icon of queer desire in Madrid before the Civil War.21

Judging by other writers’ descriptions of Hoyos as a living piece of art, his self-styling was quite effective.22 Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964) condenses the most frequently noted components of Hoyos’s public image in a scene from his memoir *La novela de un literato* significantly entitled “Estampa decadente” [“Decadent Picture”]:

> Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent ha heredado la popularidad de la infanta Isabel. Su aparición en las verbenas constituye un número sensacional. Todas las miradas convergen en su figura exótica, con su monóculo, su pulsera de oro y su tacón alto… […]
> Antonio goza con la expectación que produce, y acompañado de su *secretario* Luisito Pomés, que parece una señorita amazona con su hongo y su cara de rosa, empieza a dar la vuelta a los puestos […]
> Por entre la gente, asombrada, corre un rumor de escándalo y alguien explica benévolo: —Es el marqués de Hoyos…
> Antonio pasea impunemente la leyenda de su vicio, defendido por su título y su corpulencia atlética. Porque este degenerado tiene todo el aspecto de un boxeador…
> Antonio de Hoyos es una estampa, ya aceptada, del álbum de la aristocracia decadente… (italics in original, I: 114-15)
Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent has inherited the infanta Isabel’s popularity. His appearance at festivals constitutes a sensational act. Everyone’s gaze converges upon his exotic figure, with its monocle, gold bracelet, and high heels...

Antonio takes pleasure in the anticipation he produces, and accompanied by his secretary Luisito Pomés, who seems like a young Amazon with his bowler hat and rosy cheeks, he begins to walk around the stands...

Scandalized murmurs spread through the astonished crowd, and someone benevolently explains, ‘It’s the Marquis of Hoyos’...

Antonio displays his legendary vice with impunity, defended by his noble title and athletic bulk. For this degenerate has all the look of a boxer...

Antonio de Hoyos is a picture, already accepted, from the album of the decadent aristocracy...

With his references to vice, degeneracy, and an effeminate companion, Cansinos alludes to the open secret surrounding Hoyos’s homosexual inclinations that, together with his dandified attire, made him a full-fledged urban spectacle in early twentieth-century Madrid.

Aside from dress and comportment, Hoyos also took advantage of his literary works to augment his personal notoriety. Like his self image, they draw inspiration from texts by Decadent writers across Europe. Between 1910 and 1925, Hoyos popularized literary Decadence for a wide Spanish public in a constant flow of commercial story collections and novels, many published in the leading short novel series of the time (Alfonso García 290-301).

If, following Fortuny, Hoyos was intoxicated by his readings of the European Decadents, other writers claim that he hoped to poison further readers with books of his own invention. Wenceslao Fernández-Flórez asserts in the prologue to Hoyos’s novel La lluvia de oro [The Golden Rain] (1928) that the book is like “un licor demasiado fuerte” [an excessively strong liquor] that derails readers from their daily routine (cited in Gálvez...
Similarly, Cansinos-Asséns states in a 1919 study that Hoyos prepared his works “con arte farmacéutico” (cited in Granjel “Vida” 498) [with pharmaceutical art].

Nowhere is this formulation more pertinent than with respect to the extravagantly titled book *Aromas de nardo indiano que mata y de ovonia que enloquece* (1927), a compilation of stories and essays first published between 1918 and 1924 in the Madrilenian newspaper *La esfera* [*The Globe*] (Alfonso García 283). The collection’s title comes from a passage in Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) in which the title protagonist investigates the psychological effects “of spikenard that sickens, of hovenia that makes men mad” (101). Besides linking Hoyos’s volume to Wilde, to whom I return below (3.IV.A-B.), this title suggests that the texts included within are venoms. Hoyos arranges these verbal toxins in the apothecary shop represented by the tome itself, whose further debt to Lorrain is made patent by a reference to *Fards et poisons* in the opening story (10).

The index of *Aromas* serves as a catalogue of the categories of merchandise comprised by each of its sections: *Los perfumes, Los narcóticos, Las horas, Los venenos, Las especias, Perfumes de huerto y de jardín, and Los revulsivos y los calmantes* [*The Perfumes, The Narcotics, The Hours, The Venoms, The Spices, Perfumes from the Orchard and Garden, and Revulsives and Tranquilizers*] (213-14). On occasion, the pieces classified under these headings are also named after chemical substances. Each of the perfumes is titled with the name of a fragrance manufactured by the perfumist indicated in parentheses: “Noche de China (Atkinson)” [“Chinese Night (Atkinson)”] or
“Atinea (Poiret).” In this way, the book offers readers a range of literary drugs from which to sample.

It was among the last of Hoyos’s works to do so, since it was his final collection of Decadent stories and essays (Alfonso García 298-99; Villena “Antonio” 12-15). In spite of its temporal distance from his better known Decadent novels La vejez de Heliogábalo [The Old Age of Heliogabalus] (1912), El monstruo [The Monster] (1915), and El caso clínico [The Clinical Case] (La Novela Corta, 1916), Aromas displays manifold connections to the author’s earlier productions. As Antonio Cruz Casado observes, the collection’s title appears in the prologue to Del huerto del pecado [From the Garden of Sin] (1910), Hoyos’s first book of stories. According to that text, “indianos nardos que matan y ovonias que enloquecen” grow in the Garden of Sin (cited in “Aromas” 77). The inclusion of this phrase in the 1910 prologue has two major implications.

First, it points to a calculated continuity between Hoyos’s works throughout his Decadent period. Assiduous readers will find that the writer recycles characters, descriptions, situations, and narrative structures in such a way that many of his texts seem interchangeable (Rivalan Guégo Fruición 66-72). As a result, the title Aromas could be extended to many of his works, all of which belong to his pharmacy of literary toxins. Without claiming to account for the diversity of the author’s texts, my reading of Aromas is meant to be broadly applicable to his other Decadent productions.23

Additionally, the notion that the spikenards and hovenia from the title of Aromas grow in the Garden of Sin clarifies the peculiar nature of Hoyos’s verbal venoms. The orchard or garden named in the title of the 1910 collection alludes to the Biblical Garden
of Eden, where Eve sins by eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2-3). The forbidden fruit is an archetypal *pharmakon*, for it both cures Adam and Eve of their innocence and precipitates their expulsion from paradise. By placing his spikenards and hovenia in the same garden, Hoyos identifies them as similarly ambiguous drugs.

This connection is further sealed by invocations of the Biblical fruit in texts from *Aromas* entitled “La fruta prohibida” [“The Forbidden Fruit”] (27-33), “Le poison de l’arbre du Paradis” [“The Poison of the Tree of Paradise”] (49-53), and “El mito de la manzana” [“The Myth of the Apple”] (199-202), the last of which puts an irreverent spin on the Edenic apple by emphasizing its curative properties: “Si [Eva] no se la hubiese comido, en el Paraíso seguiría, harto aburrida viendo pasear los camellos y los canguros” (201) [If Eve had not eaten it, she would have remained in Paradise, completely bored watching the camels and kangaroos]. The transformation of what might often be considered a dangerous poison into a safeguard against routine is emblematic of an important operation in *Aromas* as a whole and of Hoyos’s Decadent literature in general. For Hoyos, Decadent venoms are remedies for middle-class Judeo-Christian social and religious values, especially to the extent to which they expose readers to queer desire.24

Strategically situated at the outset of *Aromas*, “Noche de China (Atkinson)” exemplifies the role of queer sexualities in Hoyos’s literary pharmacy (7-16). Even more so than the volume’s other pieces, it foregrounds the nexus of Decadent storytelling, queer desire, and chemical substances in the form of the perfume named in the title. Both structurally and thematically, the story pivots on a scent called *noche de China* [Chinese Night].
From a structural standpoint, the work is a frame tale in which the perfume forges a link between two diegetic levels. In the first, a third-person narrator relates how the Count of Medina la Vieja, protagonist of *La vejez de Heliogábalo*, smells the fragrance emanating from Sonsoles Javier during a soirée of Decadent aristocrats. The scent causes the Count to recall a Carnival episode in London. His oral narration of the experience occupies the second diegetic level. As he wanders the streets during the pre-Lenten festivities, the aroma of *noche de China* lures him into a Chinese tea house where the smoky atmosphere, strange women, and frenzied sword dance send him into a delirium. Upon waking, he finds himself in a blind alley, tied up and nearly naked. “Noche de China” concludes with the protagonist’s confession that he verged upon madness and death for the following month.

Distant in time and place, the Decadent soirée and the Carnival come together as a result of a scent that functions differently in the two diegetic levels. In the Count’s first-person story, the fragrance is a poison that leads its victim to the brink of insanity in an atmosphere saturated with queer eroticism. As a time of inverted hierarchies, cross-dressing, and hedonism, Carnival gives free reign to counternormative gender performances and sexual desires (Bakhtin). Even before he smells *noche de China* during the celebration, the Count notes that the streets are crowded with hermaphroditic masked figures: “Siluetas confusas flotaban como condensaciones de la niebla que fingian […] mujeronas con ademanes de marimacho y soldados de adamada apostura” (13) [Blurry silhouettes were floating about like condensed fog mimicking...big women with butch gestures and soldiers of effeminate bearing]. The collapse of heteronormative gender binaries intensifies when the protagonist follows the scent into the tea house. In
the misty room, he cannot discern whether one person is a beautiful young woman or an old prostitute.

The Count’s confusion worsens with the start of a dizzying sword dance. Surrounded by dense fumes, he can barely distinguish fragments of the male dancers: menacing, wrinkled faces; high-peaked caps; red scarves. He focuses most intensely on their spark-throwing blades. The phallic daggers, wielded by men “maculados por todos los vicios” [stained by every vice], come progressively closer to the Count until grazing his skin (15). He finally allows himself to give into a stupor, and later wakes up almost naked.

Mira has observed that Hoyos’s novel El martirio de San Sebastián [The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian] (1917), the story of a sexually ambiguous adolescent in a brothel in Barcelona, constantly hints at the protagonist’s homosexual inclinations without ever naming them as such (De Sodoma 139). This is also true of the treatment of same-sex relations in the climax of “Noche de China.” References to vice, phallic weapons, passive submission, grazed flesh, and nudity evoke the specter of sadomasochistic male homosexuality, if not rape. The Count’s subsequent struggle with madness and death can thus be interpreted as a case of homosexual panic following an intense and disturbing contact with queer sexuality. In his oral narrative, the perfume noche de China is a potentially fatal toxin.

Lest the Count’s story be read as a moralizing tale about the risks of queer desire, it is important to note the fragrance’s significantly different role in the third-person frame. There, it operates as a catalyst for the production of a story interpreted by its intradiegetic listeners not as a moral fable, but as a fascinatingly Decadent narrative.
After detecting Sonsoles’s scent, the Count overtly connects it to his desire to narrate:

“¿qué duda cabe de que los olores tienen un poder de sugestión, mejor de evocación sobre nosotros? Yo sé decirles a ustedes que para mí los perfumes […] plasman en imágenes de una realidad tan perfecta que, sin quererlo, vuelvo a vivir los minutos aquellos” (9) [can there be any doubt that scents have a suggestive power, an evocative power over us? I can tell you that for me perfumes capture a reality so perfect that, against my will, I relive those minutes]. The Count refers to the experience at the tea house, the narration of which he describes as “muy Lorrain” (9) [very Lorrain].

As the protagonist begins to describe the episode, he mesmerizes his listeners with his consciously Decadent tale. The storyteller feels a hold over his audience, whose members “le escuchaban ahora ansiosos, interesados, seguros de algo atroz” (11-12) [listened to him anxiously now, interested, certain he would say something atrocious]. Far from having killed the Count during Carnival, the perfume makes him the center of attention at the soirée, where he captivates his audience’s attention with his story’s alluringly queer “atrocities.” In the end, the admittedly dangerous poison is also a cure that allows the protagonist to indulge himself in the pleasures of narrative seduction.

Insofar as the Count can be read as an intradiegetic double of his creator, Hoyos too turned to literary Decadence as a venom that would ultimately save its consumers from heteronormativity and solidify his own fame as producer and work of art.25

II.C. Art as Venom and Antidote: Decadence and Realism in Burgos’s El veneno del arte

One astute cultural commentator over whom Hoyos exercised a seductive appeal was the feminist novelist and journalist Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), also known as
Colombine. In *La novela de un literato*, her close associate Rafael Cansinos-Asséns explains that a visit to Hoyos’s home in Madrid inspired her to compose the short novel *El veneno del arte* (*Los Contemporáneos*, 1910). According to Cansinos, Hoyos’s flamboyant décor and prominently displayed photographs of *jovencitos* [young boys] captivated Burgos: “*Colombine* lo mira todo curiosa, cual si buscara en todo aquello las huellas del misterioso pecado de su *cicerone*. Oh, ¿dónde celebrarán éste y sus amiguitos sus bacanales heterodoxas y cómo serán éstas?” (I: 338) [*Colombine* looks at everything with curiosity, as though she were searching for traces of her guide’s mysterious sin. Oh, where might he and his little friends celebrate their strange bacchanales, and what could they be like?]. At the same time, the middle-class Burgos felt uncomfortable in Hoyos’s aristocratic quarters. After abruptly departing, Cansinos has her say: “Habría que hacer una sátira contra esta gente..., combatir esta plaga social... Bien..., yo ya tengo elementos bastantes para una novela..., realista, fuerte... Tengo hasta el título: *El veneno del arte...*” (I: 340) [We ought to write a satire against these people..., to combat this social plague... Well..., I already have enough elements for a novel..., realist, strong... I even have the title: *The Venom of Art...*].

Even allowing for a wide margin of invention in Cansinos’s memoir, his recollections reveal Burgos’s ambivalent feelings of attraction and repulsion in relation to Hoyos’s Decadence and homosexuality. Although Burgos purportedly set out to write a “strong” novel censuring these “venoms,” the actual text *El veneno del arte* is also ambiguous. The very title raises the question of whether the novel is an artistic poison or an antidote to some sort of art from which Burgos seeks to distance herself.
Scholars have provided widely varying responses. Some emphasize what they see as the novel’s subversive portrayal of the protagonists’ counternormative gender identities and sexual desires (Bell 22-70; Rodríguez). From this perspective, María Pilar Rodríguez concludes that the text “poisons” readers in the positive sense that it exposes them to varieties of sexuality rarely represented in literature from early twentieth-century Spain (183). Other writers claim that Burgos conjures the specters of Decadence and queer sexualities only in order to exorcise them, and that her novel is symptomatic of her early middle-class regeneracionismo and its accompanying homophobia (Davies 135-36; Establier Pérez 69-79; Mira De Sodoma 89-91). For Helena Establier Pérez, the novel is not a poison, but a “vaccine” against the dangers of Decadent art, especially for women (79). Finally, a few scholars (Bieder 9-11; Johnson 230-33, 307-08; Krauel 138-56) note the potential validity of both readings and deduce that “Burgos was adept at exploiting issues without ever taking an explicit stand” (Bieder 11). This argument implies that the novel is a pharmakon, both purveyor of and cure for the venom of its own art.

My reading follows this last line of thought by showing how the text constructs literary Decadence and the male protagonist’s queer relations with men as polyvalent drugs, both beneficial and maleficent for characters and readers. On the one hand, anecdotal, structural, and stylistic aspects of the novel establish a series of binaries in which the first term is a cure for the second: realism/Decadence, nature/artifice, bourgeois productivity/bohemian sterility, normative heterosexuality/queer desire. On the other hand, the same textual mechanisms sometimes undercut the stability of these oppositions, such that it is often unclear whether Decadence and queer sexualities are poisons or remedies.
El veneno del arte contains four chapters and an epilogue labeled “Nueve años después” [“Nine Years Later”]. The first chapter describes a literary soirée in the mansion of the Decadent aristocrat Luis de Lara, whose dandified dress and willfully defiant homosexuality recall those of Hoyos. The invitees are vehemently anti-bourgeois individuals who range from impoverished urban artists or bohemians to wealthy, snobbish nobles whom I label Decadent aristocrats. A third-person narrator mercilessly caricatures all those in attendance using a tone reminiscent of Mariano José de Larra’s sardonic articles or Benito Pérez Galdós’s biting satires.

An important stylistic shift takes place in chapters 2 through 4, where the narrator recedes to the background to allow Luis and his confidant María to engage in a lengthy conversation in the latter’s hilltop home. Far from the bustle of Madrid and the previous evening’s gathering, Luis and the retired singer commiserate about their shattered ideals and lost or unrealized loves. The temporal leap in the epilogue stages another meeting of these two heart-broken souls. Upon Luis’s return to Madrid following a stay abroad, María explains that the guests at his soirée have since renounced their artistic aspirations and bohemian or Decadent poses. Luis plans to emulate their example by becoming a model husband.

The ambiguity of the novel’s message about Decadence and Luis’s queer sexuality is owed in large part to a disconnect between the realist aesthetic and moralizing tone of the first chapter and the epilogue, and the Decadent style and first-person stories of the central chapters. The overtly moralizing intent of the framing sections is clearest in the novel’s last pages, where María tells Luis that his friends “[p]referían aquella existencia a la tranquila de su pueblo, donde podrían trabajar, comer,
gozar el dulce cariño de la familia y de la delicada ternura de la novia provinciana. Se hacían ingratos, crueles, desdeñando los afectos puros en el ensueño de placeres y perversiones, influídos por el espíritu de Baudelaire y de Lorraine [sic]” (269) [preferred that existence over the tranquil life of their town, where they could work, eat, and enjoy the sweet affection of their family and the delicate tenderness of a provincial girlfriend. They became ungrateful and cruel, scornfully eschewing pure affection in a dream of pleasures and perversions, influenced by the spirit of Baudelaire and Lorrain].

With these accusations, María establishes a series of hierarchical dichotomies between town and metropolis, heteronormative family life and sexual perversion, productive work and sterile pleasure, and purity and corruption. By invoking Baudelaire and Lorrain, she suggests that Decadent literature is the venom that causes Luis and his associates to fall (Latin: de-cadere, to fall down or apart) from the superior to the inferior term in each binary. In the process, she mimics the third-person narrator in chapter 1.

Like María, the narrator laments that Luis’s invitees are unable to imagine a literary genius who dresses well, fulfills his/her social obligations, eats every day, and does research for his/her works. Artists who do put study into their work are targets for the attacks of the guests, who have nothing but disdain for Galdós, Diego Velázquez, and Miguel de Cervantes (230). Prolonging the binary logic noted above, the text creates a contrast between the invitees and the canonical, realist artists whom they despise. The narrator’s reference to Galdós hints that his socially engaged brand of realism could be an antidote for what is presented as the aesthetic escapism and false rebelliousness of Decadent art (231).
The first chapter makes use of this cure by adopting a Galdosian aesthetic of critical realism. Just as Galdós often cites his characters in order to mock them, Burgos’s narrator ridicules the Decadent musing of her creations through narrative framing. Hence, a feminist writer harshly criticized by the narrator for her pompous vulgarity emits a stereotypically Decadent speech: “Este té es el néctar de los dioses. Soy feliz en esta atmósfera azul; en la vulgaridad me aburro olímpicamente. Debiéramos tener alas para volar sobre los demás mortales” (233) [This tea is the nectar of the gods. I am happy in this blue atmosphere; I get Olympically bored in the vulgar realm. We ought to have wings to fly above other mortals]. In the mouth of this degraded character, images associated with fin-de-siècle aestheticism become a string of platitudes.

The feminist writer forms part of a cast of characters who come under attack by the narrator’s use of animal imagery, also evocative of Galdós. While the wife of a South American minister is a “vieja cacatúa cubierta de joyas” (232) [an old bird covered with jewelry], an aristocratic gentleman moves “con andar de buey gordo” (235) [with the stride of a fat ox]. It is within this context of dehumanizing caricatures that the narrator introduces the queer contingent of Luis’s soirée: “Entre los artistas se mezclaban muchos jovencitos dulces, femeninos, soñadores, con los cabellos ensortijados, pintadas ojeras, perfumados y con el cutis lleno de polvos de arroz y de colcream virginal a la glicerina” (231) [Among the artists circulated a lot of sweet, feminine, dreamy young men, with curly hair, bags painted under their eyes, perfume, and skin covered with rice powder and virginal cold cream made of glycerin]. With their noms de guerre—la Reina de Chipre [the Queen of Cyprus], el Hada de Invierno [the Winter Fairy], la Pelos [the Hairs], or la
Juanona (the name adopted by Luis himself)—these individuals are akin to the *locas* in novels by Retana like *A Sodoma en tren botijo* (3.IV.C).

For the critic Amy Joanne Bell, the narrator’s depiction of these self-styled gender-benders is progressive because it “tampers with firmly established masculine and feminine roles” and shows characters who “def[y] preset notions of gender” (45, 48). While it is clear that the *locas* do elude norms of hegemonic masculinity, it is less obvious that the narrator is able to evade gender stereotypes. On the contrary, Mira has argued that the narrator describes the invitees using clichés about homosexual effeminacy, weakness, and frivolity (*De Sodoma* 89). These characteristics faithfully reproduce the medical stereotype of the invert to be studied in depth in Chapter 4. The narrator reinforces this medicalization of queer gender performances and sexualities throughout the novel by using the pejorative term *degeneration* without any trace of irony to allude to Luis’s personal style and homosexuality. For the narrative voice, queer sexualities are a venom like Decadence. The presence of the heavily made-up *locas* among the other animalized guests at Luis’s party signals the artificiality, sterility, and frivolity of an aesthetic and worldview that opposes the curative forces of nature, productive work, family life, and socially-conscious literary realism.31

Carefully established in the opening chapter and epilogue, these distinctions lose much of their clarity in the intervening chapters of *El veneno del arte*. The first lines of chapter 2 transport readers from Luis’s gathering to María’s home: “En el silencio de aquella tarde otoñal, sola en el amplio salón, medio tendida en los almohadones de una meridiana, María dejaba vagar los ojos verdes sobre el panorama que se ofrecía a su vista por las entreabiertas cristaleras. Era un lienzo de Patiniers” (239) [In the silence of that
autumn afternoon, alone in the large room, half-splayed on the pillows of a divan, María let her green eyes roam over the panorama offered to her view by the open windows. It was a Patiniers painting]. As in the feminist’s speech in the previous chapter, this passage accumulates Decadent clichés of decay and artificiality with its references to the end of daily and yearly cycles and its assimilation of the setting to a painting. What is different here is that there is no hint of parody to distance the narrator from the text’s Decadent language. Comparable linguistic features predominate without any sign of stigmatization for the next three chapters.

In this part of the novel, María and Luis usurp textual authority from the third-person narrator and install themselves as agents of their own narration. Their statements often contravene the moralizing tone of the framing chapters. At one point, María poses the rhetorical question: “¿cree usted que si no viviéramos más que para comer, trabajar y realizar funciones animales valdría la pena de que la tierra nos sustentara?” (256) [do you believe that if we lived only to eat, work, and carry out animal functions it would be worthwhile for the earth to sustain us?]. In contrast to the same character’s exaltation of middle-class productivity and country life in the epilogue, this query suggests that art for art’s sake may be a necessary antidote for an excess of bourgeois utilitarianism. In chapters 2 through 4, Decadence is not a deadly venom from which Brgos distances herself through a realist aesthetic, but a medicine that prolongs life and El veneno del arte itself.

Besides offering a less condemnatory perspective on literary Decadence, the novel’s central chapters also upset the matrices established elsewhere between normative heterosexuality and nature, and queer sexualities and artificiality. This happens most
prominently in Luis’s story in chapter 3 about how he came to seek male sexual company. The character recalls his adolescence in a boarding house in Madrid. He falls in love with the owner’s niece Rosita, a blond-haired, blue-eyed girl. When she joins him one morning in bed, he respects her apparent purity. The innocent idyll between Luis and Rosita ends when the latter’s aunt discovers them in bed and wrings a promise of marriage out of the boy. Unwilling to allow his son to marry below his social station, Luis’s father sends him to a Jesuit boarding school to avoid the union. Luis interrupts the narration to warn his listener: “Lo que sigue es muy escabroso, María; no me atrevo a contar delante de una dama los misterios de un colegio de jesuitas… Baste decirle a usted que mis compañeros y los reverendos padres procuraban consolarme por todos los medios… Paseos, lecturas… dulzura femenil… Me despertaban cariciosos, en fin…” (251) [What follows is very distasteful, María; I don’t dare recount for a lady the mysteries of a Jesuit school… Let it suffice to say that my companions and the reverend fathers tried to console me by any means possible… Walks, readings… feminine sweetness… They woke me up with their caresses, as it were…].

In keeping with Burgos’s well-known populism and anti-clericalism, Luis’s homosexuality appears to be the outcome of his father’s aristocratic conservatism and the Jesuits’ corrupting influences (Establier Pérez 16). At least until this point in the narration, the protagonist portrays his heterosexual relations with Rosita as innocent, pure, and natural, and his subsequent homosexual contacts as a degenerate and artificial alternative. In Establier Pérez’s euphemistic language, the Jesuits “consiguen cambiar sus inclinaciones naturales…” (my emphasis, 76) [manage to change his natural inclinations...].
This interpretation becomes difficult to sustain later on, since Luis’s story does not end with his stay in the boarding school. After leaving the institution, he meets Rosita on the street and finds that she has become an elegant prostitute, surrounded by an aura of degeneramiento [degeneration] (252). Although Luis blames himself for his girlfriend’s supposed fall, she confesses that she was never actually an angelic adolescent. She explains that when she told Luis that he was the first man whom she had kissed, she had just returned to Madrid having given birth to a son in her hometown.

Rosita’s unexpected revelation necessitates a retrospective reading of Luis’s account of his stay in the boarding house, along with a renewed interpretation of the inception of his queer desire. The protagonist’s tryst with Rosita is not so “natural” after all. Rosita deceptively performs the role of virginal maiden and Luis, deluded by cultural scripts that construct purity as women’s true nature, fails to recognize the artful farce (Bell 41). Following the exposure of his girlfriend’s cunning, Luis’s continued attraction to men may be considered a “natural” defense mechanism. The character himself qualifies his queer sexuality as natural when he explains that he kept seeing men upon leaving the Jesuits and reclaiming his family’s wealth: “como es natural es estos casos, volvían los amigos” (my emphasis, 251) [as is natural in these cases, the male friends returned].

The confusion of the boundaries between normative heterosexuality and queer desire, nature and artifice, culminates at the end of El veneno del arte in Luis’s plans to marry. Some critics interpret this conclusion as a reinscription of bourgeois norms through which Burgos cures Luis of his artificial homosexuality through his return to the natural order of marriage (Davies 136; Establier Pérez 79; Mira De Sodoma 89, 91).
Others, noting María’s sly smile following Luis’s statement of intent, consider the ending ironic. For these writers, Luis’s proposed marriage is a self-serving artifice designed to grant him access to aristocratic socioeconomic privilege while barely veiling his underlying queer tendencies (Bieder 10-11; Rodríguez 182-83). The character himself admits that he will marry only if “me compran en lo que me tengo tasado” (270) [they buy me at the price I consider worthy].

The diverse scholarly readings of this ending confirm my point that Luis’s queer sexuality is a pharmakon in Burgos’s novel. Together with literary Decadence, it wavers between normalizing categories and blurs the lines between medicine and poison. This instability is largely the result of a contrast between the narrative voices and literary style of chapter 1 and the epilogue, and of the intervening chapters. The staunch binary logic of the framing sections labors hard to contain the deconstructive thrust of the rest of the novel. In the end, it also testifies to Burgos’s discomfort with her narrative’s concessions to the Decadence and queer desires that it otherwise seeks to critique.

II.D. Decadence Dances the Charleston: Don Juan, Marañón, and Retana

The preceding explorations of texts by Hoyos y Vinent and Burgos help situate the short novels published by Retana in the early 1920s within the commercial literary scene of the time, fraught with debate about cultural decline, literary Decadence, and queer sexualities. One of Retana’s own interventions in this polemic appeared in Precioso’s collection La Novela de Noche on May 15, 1924 under the heading El veneno de la aventura.32 The novel’s title invokes the most salient trope in the controversy over Decadence and raises questions comparable to the ones posed above in relation to El veneno del arte. Is Retana’s text a venomous literary adventure, or a cure for poisonous
affairs? What is the relationship between the *aventura* [adventure or affair] named in the title, literary Decadence, and queer desire?

Tensions in Retana’s prologue concerning the aesthetic affiliation and social implications of his novel offer some hints as to possible responses. Regarding his text’s literary aesthetic, the author implies that the narrative is both a Decadent work designed to please a public voracious for novels of that type, and a sort of realist report on social customs in Barcelona. He admits to writing a text reminiscent of Lorrain, but he also calls himself a *costumbrista* “pintor de escenas” [painter of scenes], a Realist “reportero de la vida” [reporter on life], and a Naturalist “doctor en su laboratorio” [doctor in his laboratory] (10-13).

Taking into account the opposition between Decadence and critical realism delineated above, these affirmations could seem contradictory. While Decadents typically exalt the notion of decay in consciously subjective and aestheticized texts willfully defiant of bourgeois customs, realists of varying persuasion purport to objectively represent extraliterary realities so as to critique and remedy social problems of interest to the middle class. Yet Retana overcomes this divide in *El veneno de la aventura* and other novels by fusing Decadence and realism into what Luis Antonio de Villena has called second generation Decadence (“Álvaro Retana” 318). As a result of this merger, Retana is able to use realist claims to transparent mimesis to portray queer sexualities associated with Decadence as a more viable life option than in any of Hoyos’s narratives; at the same time, he evades the homophobic and stigmatizing force of Burgos’s caustic realism.
If Retana oscillates between naming himself a Decadent or a realist, his comments about his distance from or identification with his characters are equally indecisive. He protests in upper-case letters: “NO COMPARTO, NI SIQUIERA SIMPATIZO, CON NINGUNA DE LAS IDEAS SUSTENTADAS POR LOS PERSONAJES DE MIS NOVELAS” (10) [I DO NOT SHARE, OR EVEN SYMPATHIZE, WITH ANY OF THE IDEAS DEFENDED BY THE CHARACTERS OF MY NOVELS]. As a doctor to those who find themselves in mortal sin, he has “estudiado en las almas de los más grandes pervertidos complicaciones psicológicas y si se quiere patológicas, dignas de ser expuestas a la voracidad de los lectores con una finalidad muy moral: para que los viciosos se avergüencen de sí mismos y los puros no los imiten” (12) [studied in the souls of the greatest perverts psychological, and, if you prefer, pathological complications worthy of being submitted to the voracity of readers with a very moral end: so that the debauched feel ashamed of themselves and the pure do not imitate them].

Notwithstanding this fragment’s moralizing tone, Retana aligns himself with his protagonist, a self-proclaimed Don Juan Ambiguo [Ambiguous Don Juan], when he calls himself a novelista ambiguo [ambiguous novelist] and admits to having had wild Saturday night outings in Madrid and Barcelona (7, 14). José Guillén de Villena’s drawing on page 81 strengthens this connection (figure 3.5). Ostensibly a depiction of the protagonist, comparison with other images by Guillén such as those in Flor del mal (figure 3.2) shows that the male figure is a portrait of Retana.33

As noted earlier, such vacillations in Retana’s proximity to his creations are typical of his prologues. I argue below that they are an important mechanism of narrative seduction. Here, I want to suggest that the author’s self-contradictions also have the
effect of constructing his novel as a *pharmakon*. If taken seriously, Retana’s claims to medical authority position his text as an antidote to the venomous ideas and behaviors of its protagonists, which nevertheless fascinate the doctor who administers the cure. From a different angle, the author’s references to the medical profession can be interpreted as an allusion to an essay published by a real Spanish physician earlier in 1924.

*El veneno de la aventura* can be plausibly read as Retana’s critique of Gregorio Marañón’s pathologization of Don Juan in his article “Notas para la biología de Don Juan” [“Notes on the Biology of Don Juan”], published in the prestigious *Revista de Occidente* [*Journal of the West*] just four months prior to the novel’s appearance. While Marañón combats the Spanish icon as an undifferentiated half-man whose femininity and possible homosexuality threaten the nation, Retana grants Don Juan Ambiguo agency as a spokesperson for seduction and queer ethics, however problematic. As a *pharmakon*, Retana’s venomous adventures, like those of Hoyos, turn out to be a cure for heteronormativity, though they also reinforce some unfortunate prejudices.
Aside from a prologue, *El veneno de la aventura* contains six relatively autonomous chapters connected by recurrent characters. As will become important later on, about three-quarters of the text replicates parts of Retana’s long novel *El crepúsculo de las diosas: Escenas alocadas de la vida en Barcelona* [*The Twilight of the Goddesses: Crazed Scenes of Life in Barcelona*] (1919), the last installment in his trilogy about the *cuple* (3.I.A.). Of that novel’s subplots, *El veneno de la aventura* retains the story of the deteriorating love affair between the twenty-five-year-old actor Jacinto Morales and the retired singer Guadalupe Montoya. While Guadalupe is willing to sacrifice her financially lucrative relationship with an older businessman for Jacinto, the younger man is less devoted to the affair. Most of the novel traces his infidelities with young men and women, including Guadalupe’s daughter. Throughout, the tellingly named Morales defends his queer desire in expositions of what the third-person narrator and other characters call *teorías disolventes* [demoralizing theories], *una ética malsana* [an unhealthy ethics], or a self-serving *moral* [morality] (68, 34, 50). By the end, Jacinto has driven Guadalupe to such a state of despair that she tries to shoot him in his dressing room at the theater. She misses her target, but does manage to end her relationship with Jacinto with two slaps to the face that also conclude the novel.

From a formal and thematic standpoint, Decadent elements proliferate in Jacinto’s philosophical justifications of his queer sexuality, and in the descriptions, often quite explicit, of sexual acts. In lengthy speeches and dialogues in four of the six chapters, the protagonist systematically explains his sexual program, based upon an exaltation of free love, beauty, youth, happiness, and harmlessness to others; a constant search for new
pleasures with members of both sexes; and a willful repudiation of heteronormative social restraints, deemed old-fashioned (34-35, 47-52, 65-75, 102-07).

Jacinto’s worldview in these passages is often noticeably Decadent. His hedonistic comparison between pleasure and music recalls the Decadent appreciation for art and sensuality for their own sake, free from the impositions of bourgeois utilitarianism and the reproduction of the species. It also evokes the Symbolist and modernista fascination with music as the most obliquely suggestive of the arts (34). Similarly, his belief that the secret to happiness is to seek out novel sensations with new people echoes the Decadent longing for increasingly refined pleasures in the face of impending ennui (102-03). Finally, Jacinto’s assertion that one must destroy bourgeois realities in order to pursue the unknown and to achieve something great in life coincides with the counternormative stance of the Decadents and their investigations into the murky depths of the individual psyche (103).

The Decadent and queer valence of Jacinto’s theorizing also carries over into the descriptions of his sexual exploits by the third-person narrator. Varied sexual encounters accumulate in rapid succession in this unabashedly erotic text: a skirmish between Jacinto and Guadalupe turns into a session of passionate love-making; a lazy river at an amusement park provides Jacinto and his friend Carlos an opportunity to take turns fondling Guadalupe’s daughter Pura and her friend Susanita; Jacinto and Carlos have an orgy with the dancer Pachita Mínguez and then have sex between themselves; Guadalupe recalls Jacinto’s wise use of a sex toy during love-making. The scenes in chapters 2 through 4 display a calculated gradation of encounters in which there is a progressive reduction in female partners: two men and two women, two men and one woman, two
men alone. All of this can be read as a self-consciously ludic inflation of the Decadent fascination with non-heteronormative sexualities.

What is most innovative about these queer performances are the modern urban settings and realist aesthetic in and through which they are presented. Whereas a paradigmatic Decadent like Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans’s novel *À Rebours [Against the Grain]* (1884) withdraws from the world in a rural mansion, Retana’s characters exhibit themselves in a public sphere saturated with signs of urbanization, technological progress, and the economic prosperity of Spain’s upper classes following World War I. The main episodes take place in Barcelona at an amusement park, a concert hall, a theater, and a beach populated by scantily clad sun bathers. The first of these spaces is the text’s most obvious showcase for modern technological and sexual novelties. Given a choice between the slide, the lazy river, miniature planes and trains, and the swings, Jacinto selects the roller coaster as the ride upon which to seduce his seventeen-year-old companion Carlos (43). The narrator connects speed and technology to Jacinto’s sexual excitement: “Las montañas rusas eran el recreo predilecto de Jacinto Morales, porque su espíritu, aniñado y ávido de sensaciones más o menos pueriles y perversas, gozaba una increíble volupuosidad cuando las vagonetas se deslizaban con estrépito por las empinadas cuestas y ascendían vertiginosas” (44) [Roller coasters were Jacinto Morales’s preferred form of recreation, for his spirit, child-like and eager for more or less puerile and perverse sensations, enjoyed an incredible voluptuousness when the wagons glided noisily over the steep slopes and ascended dizzily].

Technology as a mediator of transportation and sexual exchange is a noteworthy motif in many of Retana’s novels, as discussed below with respect to trains in *Mi novia y
mi novio (3.III.C.) and taxis in A Sodoma en tren botijo (3.IV.C). By foregrounding new forms of mobility, the author traces the impact of technological modernization on social customs in Madrid and Barcelona. Within this context, it is unsurprising that he uses the costumbrista trope of the writer as painter of social mores to describe himself in the prologue to El veneno de la aventura. While ideologically conservative nineteenth-century costumbristas such as Serafín Estébanez Calderón and Fernán Caballero produced nostalgic verbal portraits of the clothing, speech, and occupations of social types in danger of being wiped out by modernization, Retana uses some of the same techniques to record and solidify the expansion of modern change in Spanish cities. In the process, he situates queer sexualities in realistically portrayed modern spaces at a remove from the recondite, exotic, fantastic, and otherwise aestheticized settings typical of Decadent literature (Mira De Sodoma 158).

Another way Retana departs from Decadent aesthetics is through his use of language. In a survey of what he calls first generation Decadence in Hoyos and second generation Decadence in Retana, Luis Antonio de Villena states that “Retana escribió una prosa más sencilla, más directa, más clara, menos retorcida, preciosista y pretenciosa” (“Álvaro Retana” 321) [Retana wrote with a more simple, direct, and clear prose, less twisted, baroque, and pretentious]. Villena adds elsewhere that Retana’s language has more points of contact with newspaper chronicles in the roaring 20s than with the Baroque metaphysics of perversity characteristic of Decadence (El ángel 35).

These observations are applicable to El veneno de la aventura, most of which openly rejects the stylistic ornamentation of Decadent prose. When Carlos begins to praise Panchita’s beauty in a sequence of rhetorical flourishes—“esas espaldas, que
oscurecen al alabastro; esa nuca, que ha robado su transparencia al nácar; esos hombros, cien veces más rosados que las rosas; esos contornos embriagadores y esos pies breves y ligeros como el céfiro” (68) [that back, which darkens alabaster; that nape, which has robbed mother-of-pearl of its transparency; those shoulders, a hundred times more rose-colored than roses; those intoxicating curves and those small feet, light like the zephyr]—Jacinto cuts him off with ironic praise: “Chico, ¡qué poético estás hoy!” (70) [Boy, how poetic you are today!]. Turn-of-the-century aestheticism becomes a strand of hackneyed metaphors in a novel that is less concerned with art for art’s sake than with textualizing contemporary social realities.

*El veneno de la aventura* thus borrows an interest in queer desire from the Decadents while transforming their aesthetic so as to weave queer sexualities into the social fabric of modern urban life in Barcelona. As Villena puts it, “Retana, es cierto, no olvidó nunca el antiguo decadentismo modernista (que late siempre al fondo de sus libros), pero tiró el sombrero al aire, bailó el charlestón, y se fue de jarana…” (El ángel 37) [it is true that Retana never forgot the old modernista Decadence (which is always present deep in his books), but he threw his cap into the aire, danced the Charleston, and went out on the town].

Without being devoid of frivolity, the textual festivities in Retana’s 1924 novel are also at the service of social critique. This is particularly true of the lengthy speech about Don Juan Ambiguo emitted by Jacinto Morales half-way through the work. The Don Juan character popularized by the canonical plays of Tirso de Molina and José Zorrilla was a major point of reference for a variety of writers in early twentieth-century Spain (Mandrell 227-72; Pérez-Bustamente; Wright). Following the inception of a tepid
political regime under Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, the emergence of leftist political ideologies, and the loss of the colonies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, many intellectuals appropriated Don Juan as either a symbol of Spain’s decadence or an instrument for national regeneration.\textsuperscript{34} One of the most well-known contributions to this project was Marañón’s essay “Notas para la biología de Don Juan,” published in January of 1924 in José Ortega y Gasset’s elite journal \textit{Revista de Occidente}. It was the first of Marañón’s many publications on Don Juan between 1924 and 1961 (Aresti \textit{Médicos} 130-61; Keller 24-67; Paraíso 313-37; Vandebosch 110-59).

The physician parts from the premise that the Don Juan figure is a social reality in contemporary Spain and that the literary myth has many followers for whom indiscriminately seducing women is the epitome of masculinity. For Marañón, this belief is specious, since the man who does nothing other than look for sex is actually a half-man (22). Don Juan is a prototype of \textit{pseudovirilidad} [pseudo-virility], a \textit{pobre medio-hombre} [poor half-man], and a \textit{variedad anormal} [abnormal variety] of humanity (21-23).

This diagnosis is based upon Marañón’s disturbingly homophobic and misogynistic ideas about \textit{intersexualidad} (Aresti \textit{Médicos} 120-30; Vandebosch 84-106). According to his theory, all human embryos begin in a bisexual state (both male and female), and sexual differentiation is part of an evolutionary process. The telos of normative evolution is full masculinity, represented by a hardworking, monogamous, often timid and voluntarily chaste man (Marañón “Notas” 33). All others, including women, male homosexuals, and children and adolescents, are less fully developed on the spectrum of intersexuality. Don Juan shares with them a lack of differentiation; he is puerile and effeminate, and he suffers an \textit{inversión parcial} (47) [partial inversion]. This
last assertion raises the question of Don Juan’s possible homosexuality, a topic around which Marañón tiptoes with the following doubt and disclaimer: “la escasa virilidad de Don Juan, ¿es puramente psicológica, o alcanza también a su actividad sexual primaria? Adelantemos que una mentalidad femenina o feminoide, y acompañada incluso de una morfología descaradamente equívoca, como acaece con muchos donjuanes, puede coexistir con una aptitud generatriz perfecta” (47) [Is Don Juan’s scant virility purely psychological, or does it also affect his primary sexual activity? Let us be quick to say that a feminine or pseudo-feminine mentality, even accompanied by a brazenly equivocal morphology, as happens with many Don Juans, can coexist with a perfect reproductive ability].

Despite this clarification, popular readings of Marañón’s work on Don Juan interpreted the seducer’s intersexuality as unequivocal evidence of his homosexual inclinations (Keller 43, 237; Wright 71-83). Critic Sarah Wright notes that the doctor’s 1924 essay brought him rapid fame with a mass audience (75). His ideas were so influential as to filter into the comic dramatist Pedro Muñoz Seca’s 1935 play La plasmatoria [The Time Machine]. When a time machine resuscitates Don Juan in the 1930s, he draws his sword and threatens “¡A ver!! ¿Dónde vive Marañón?” [Let’s see!! Where does Marañón live?], presumably in an attempt to discredit the physician’s supposed accusations against his manly honor (cited in Wright 71).

The comic tone of Muñoz Seca’s play misses the more sinister implications of “Notas sobre la biología de Don Juan.” In the words of literary scholar Alfredo J. Sosa-Velasco, Marañón’s desire to extirpate the seducer from contemporary Spain is part of a eugenic project of “masculinización y heterosexualización de una España intersexual”
(99-144) [masculinization and straightening of an intersexual Spain]. Wright elaborates that the doctor chose Don Juan as a pedagogical vehicle to advance his program since he knew that his denunciation of the popular icon could “reach the masses” with a message about “the threat (to the nation) of nebulous gender” (79) (for more on eugenics, see 4.I.B.).

It is within the context of the wide dissemination of Marañón’s teachings on Don Juan that Jacinto Morales’s defense of Don Juan Ambiguo in El veneno de la aventura may be considered a counter-pedagogy or a queer antidote to heteronormativity. As mentioned earlier, about seventy five percent of Retana’s novel was published in 1919 in El crepúsculo de las diosas (Vernet Pons 476-84).35 The material derived from the earlier text establishes Jacinto as a character sharing many traits with Marañón’s intersexual Don Juan. While women consider him attractive, a closer inspection reveals that he is algo femenino (31) [somewhat feminine], with the look of a “colegial recién salido del Instituto” (44) [a recently graduated schoolboy]. Finally, as a victim of “el veneno de la aventura,” he avidly seeks homosexual relationships (44, 92, 105).

In spite of these convergences, the 1919 novel never directly compares Jacinto to Don Juan. It would appear that Retana wrote the character’s four-page apology for Don Juan Ambiguo specifically for his 1924 re-working (72). He also inserted the passage in the prologue in which he calls himself a doctor interested in the pathologies of perverts (12). Together, these additions strongly suggest that Retana was aware of the polemic surrounding the appearance of Marañón’s essay and that he published El veneno de la aventura as a reply just four months later. Retana must have recognized that his pre-existing creation Jacinto Morales was similar to the doctor’s Don Juan. He decided to
resurrect the character so that Jacinto could baptize himself a Don Juan Ambiguo and defend his queer sexuality. By calling himself a doctor in his prologue, Retana parodies Marañón’s claim to medical authority in the pathologization of Don Juan.

Jacinto’s speech on Don Juan Ambiguo appears mid-way through the novel and makes insistent use of anaphoric repetition. Six consecutive paragraphs begin with the words Don Juan Ambiguo or A don Juan Ambiguo and proceed to detail the figure’s genesis as the product of an indolent civilization plagued by modern Decadent literature (72); his seductive power over perverted girls and boys (74); and his queer modernity: “es el don Juan más ‘siglo XX’ de los don Juanes de la época. En tiempos de Zorrilla no le hubiera disputado doña Inés a don Luis, porque le habría convencido para raptarla ‘al alimón’ y pasar la velada los tres juntos sobre el célebre sofá” (75) [he is the most twentieth-century Don Juan of all today’s Don Juans. In Zorilla’s day, he would not have fought with Don Luis over Doña Inés, for he would have convinced him to jointly abduct her and to spend the evening as a trio on the famous sofa]. The ludic nature of this last affirmation signals that the moralizing and medicalizing tone of the preceding comments must also be taken lightly. In effect, what most stands out about Jacinto’s description of Don Juan Ambiguo is the figure’s harmlessness, both to himself and others. The orator claims that his deviance does not affect him much, and that it is impossible for his lovers to be upset after having fallen to temptation (73). Most importantly, “Don Juan Ambiguo es un trucoso admirable, que se hace respetar de la parte beligerante” (75) [Ambiguous Don Juan is an admirable trickster who wins the respect of his opponent].

This statement identifies Jacinto himself as a Don Juan Ambiguo, for one of the most constant refrains of his ethical commentaries elsewhere is that his queer sexuality
harms neither him nor his partners (34, 50-51, 105-06). He laments that his bourgeois foes do not critique him for anything that could be threatening to a third party, but for benign, consensual sexual acts (51). Jacinto also explains that he vociferously defends his sexuality to promote tolerance for harmless sexual freedoms (50). By allowing his character to express his opinions so vehemently within the framework of a self-conscious social program, Retana permits Marañón’s Don Juan to talk back to his creator and to contest the physician’s paranoia regarding Spain’s contamination by queer sexualities. In the final analysis, El veneno de la aventura is an antidote for what the text posits as the real poison: Marañón’s project of straightening the Spanish nation.

That said, it is important to acknowledge some of the cure’s limitations. First, Jacinto’s assertions that his sexual behavior does not harm other people are contradicted by the plot. The protagonist’s infidelity worries Guadalupe to such an extent that she tries to shoot him in the final chapter. Retana makes a mockery of her grandiose designs to trigger a melodramatic scandal. After she misses her target, Guadalupe recognizes that “[l]a tragedia había concluido en sainete” [the tragedy had ended in farse] and that “[a] pesar de su inteligencia y su prestigio de mundana, se había conducido como una vulgar modistilla atacada por celos” (125) [despite her intelligence and her worldly prestige, she had acted like a vulgar dressmaker attacked by jealousy]. These reflections seem to shift the blame for the episode from Jacinto to his frustrated lover by implying that Guadalupe’s desire for fidelity is trite and outmoded. The operation is ethically suspect insofar as it tacitly pardons Jacinto’s misogynistic treatment of the ex-singer as a disposable sex object. She regains some agency by slapping Jacinto in the final lines.
Another problematic passage appears in chapter 3 when Jacinto and Carlos watch the show of a male *transformista* or cross-dresser. Jacinto comments that “[e]stos tipos debiéramos matarlos, no por su perversión sexual, sino porque son ridículos” (65) [we ought to kill these guys, not because of their sexual perversion, but because they are ridiculous]. He proposes a genocidal program more horrifying than Marañón’s eugenic project. Jacinto later explains that he finds the presumably homosexual cross-dresser disgusting because he is exclusively attracted to men. It is lamentable that Jacinto sets up his own queer sexual relations with men and women as a voluntary and superior alternative to what he sees as the performer’s inborn desire for males, a “burla que [le] jugó la Naturaleza” (65) [prank pulled on him by Nature]. The character fails to recognize that the cross-dresser’s gender performance queers the hetero/homosexual binary just as much as his own bisexuality to the extent that it destabilizes the naturalized links between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire. As discussed below, *A Sodoma en tren botijo* presents cross-dressing *locas* in a more sympathetic light and throws into question whether Retana ever identified with Jacinto’s comments in this scene.

Finally, the protagonist’s defense of his queer desire never directly addresses two of the most condemning arguments in Marañón’s invective against Don Juan: that he does not work and that he lives off his inherited wealth (“Notas” 26-27). Although Jacinto’s praise for beauty and pleasure can be read as a necessary counterbalance to the type of middle-class work demanded by Marañón of “real” men, it is also true that Jacinto’s ability to spend his time at theaters, amusement parks, and beaches is predicated on his unexamined socioeconomic privilege. The other novels analyzed in this chapter also relegate class struggle in early twentieth-century Spain to the background by
focusing primarily on financially solvent characters. This is hardly surprising given Retana’s personal investment in the expansion of consumer capitalism to the country’s publishing industry.

Recent contributions to queer theory emphasize that queer analyses of social injustice should take into account norms that uphold unfair hierarchies, not only of sexuality and gender, but also of race, class, nationality, and other markers of subjectivity (Hall 86-108; Sullivan 57-80). In its failure to problematize some forms of misogyny, homophobia, and classism, El veneno de la aventura exposes limitations of its queer critique that are also extensible to other novels by Retana, and that require attention lest hagiographic accounts posit the author as a heroic transgressor of all social norms. At the same time, given the virulence of Marañón’s attack on a sexually ambiguous Don Juan, it is important to recognize how Retana’s novel was medicinal for its time: the literary venom was also an antidote for a toxic reproof of sexual diversity and gender difference in the nation.

III. Narrative Seduction in Mi novia y mi novio and Flor del mal

The vindication of Don Juan Ambiguo in El veneno de la aventura underscores the centrality of seduction as a paradigm in Retana’s literature for relationships among characters and between texts and their readers. Two contemporaneous short novels confirm that an aim of Retana’s literary drugs is to draw readers into a game of seduction. Mi novia y mi novio (La Novela de Hoy, 28 September 1923) and Flor del mal (La Novela de Hoy, 23 May 1924) form a tightly knit intertextual circuit with El veneno de la aventura. Not only does the prologue to Mi novia state that El veneno will be Retana’s next publication (Precioso “¡Se ruega!” 6), but a character in Flor del mal shares Jacinto
Morales’s advocacy of sexual freedom “sin perjuicio de un tercero” (61) [without harm to a third party]. *Flor del mal* also echoes *Mi novia* by featuring a character who has read the earlier novel.

These connections help solidify the relationship between *El veneno de la aventura* as a theoretical statement in favor of Don Juan Ambiguo’s seductive strategies, and *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal* as dramatizations of their enactment. The latter works stage seduction as a queer game that upsets distinctions between hetero- and homosexuality, truth and appearance, reading and writing, and seducer and seduced. These deconstructive dynamics are thrown into relief by a contrast between the two texts. Seduction comes to a halt in *Mi novia* due to one player’s blindness to the rules of the game. This breakdown exposes the mechanics of seduction in such a way that the intradiegetic reader in *Flor del mal* is able to learn from *Mi novia* and prolong a more successful seductive encounter.

The varying destiny of seduction in the two novels entails not only different erotic relations between the characters, but also distinct conceptualizations of the text/reader relationship. *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal* are concerned with “sexual seduction” as a play of bodies, “textual seduction” as a play of words, and the interpenetration of the two (Tsuchiya 104). Self-reflexivity is a decisive technique for emphasizing these preoccupations, for Retana inserts himself into his novels as a character who seduces and is seduced by other figures identified as enthusiastic readers of his fiction. For clarity’s sake, I use the surname Retana in this section to refer to the historical author of *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal*. The name Álvaro designates the textualization of the writer as a character in his works.
By dramatizing himself and his readers as characters facing off in contests of erotic and narrative seduction, Retana establishes seduction as a crucial metaphor for the production and consumption of his literature. Furthermore, by contrasting Álvaro’s relationships with an unskilled adversary in *Mi novia* and a worthy opponent in *Flor del mal*, the author offers extradiegetic readers two methods for interpreting his texts, the more successful of which invites them to participate in an active co-creation of meaning. The events in *Flor del mal* suggest that this interpretative strategy has the effect of maximizing the queer potential of Retana’s novels.

**III.A. Theories of Seduction**

Drawing upon the terminology of narratologist Lucien Dällenbach as deployed in chapter 2, the staging of the author/reader relationship as a seductive encounter between characters in *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal* generates a *mise en abyme* of the novels’ enunciation through which Retana models an equally seductive relationship between extradiegetic writer, text, and readers. In other words, the two novels are *situationally self-reflexive*, a term coined by narratologist Ross Chambers in his study *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (1984). For Chambers, a situationally self-reflexive narrative uses textual means to inscribe within itself the ideal context for the communicative transaction between the text and its readers (24-28). The theorist’s analyses of nineteenth-century stories such as Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” or Honoré de Balzac’s “Sarrasine” lead him to conclude that situationally self-referential texts often posit the relationship between themselves and readers as one of seduction in disguise. In Chambers’s chosen texts, “[w]hat is constant is the basic duplicity whereby a seductive program is condemned so that a seductive
program can be pursued” (217). For instance, the failure of seduction among intradiegetic characters may obscure its success between the text and its extradiegetic readers. My interpretations of Mi novia and Flor del mal suggest that Retana understood “the seductive power inherent in the device of denying seduction” (Chambers 216).

Chamber’s recognition of the duplicity involved in seduction links his narratological investigation to other discussions of the topic by postmodern and feminist writers. One extensive meditation on seduction from a philosophical perspective is postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard’s book De la Séduction (1979), translated into English by Brian Singer as Seduction (1990). Baudrillard situates seduction in a realm of appearances, signs, and artificiality apart from the order of truth, reality, and nature. The distinction between the two orders hinges upon the reversibility of seductive appearances and the irreversibility of truth. Within the traditional Western epistemology questioned by Baudrillard, the opposite of truth can only be non-truth or falsehood. In seduction, however, absolute opposites are elusive. Even if seduction is a game based on “a duel and agonistic relation” between players, the actors do not set themselves in rigid opposition (italics in original, 105). Instead, they circulate between subject positions such that the seducer is always becoming the seducee and the seducee the seducer. In Baudrillard’s words, “to be seduced is the best way to seduce. It is an endless refrain. There is no active or passive mode in seduction, no subject or object, no interior or exterior: seduction plays on both sides, and there is no frontier separating them. One cannot seduce others, if one has not oneself been seduced” (81).

Texts by feminist scholars both illuminate the reasons for the reversibility of seduction and caution against Baudrillard’s celebration of seduction as a means of
overcoming supposedly exhausted notions of truth. Following other critics, Jane Miller observes that seduction cannot involve physical force, for otherwise it would be rape (Miller 2, 21; Baudrillard 46, 86; Chambers 212; Gallop *Daughter’s* 56). A seducer must instead elicit “an ambiguous assertion of consent” from a seducee by making the person believe that s/he is acting upon his or her own agency (Miller 21). Within this context, one possible tactic of the seducer would be to claim that s/he is not a seducer at all and that the seducee is in fact the agent of seduction. Baudrillard transforms this reversal into the basis of seduction and extends the process into “an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends. And cannot end since the dividing line that defines the victory of the one and the defeat of the other, is illegible” (22).

Baudrillard’s sweeping pronouncements merit the criticism leveled against him by feminist writers. Jane Gallop has convincingly censured parts of *Seduction* that denigrate what the Frenchman sees as feminism’s misguided abandonment of seduction as an essentially feminine mode of acting in the world (“French Theory” 111-15; Ross 217-18). Baudrillard’s invective on feminism and essentialist linkage between femininity and seduction are both disturbing and unhelpful for my readings of Retana. Additionally, it is clear that his description of the infinite reversibility of seducer and seducee does not take into account the asymmetrical power relations involved in many actual cases of seduction. In real seductions, differences between the players regarding sex, gender, age, socioeconomic class, and a host of other factors often inhibit reversal so that one actor becomes the seduced, often to his/her detriment. Miller draws renewed attention to power imbalances in seduction by comparing the phenomenon to Antonio Gramsci’s
notion of hegemony as a means by which subaltern groups are coerced into accepting the norms of dominant social formations (6-8, 22-23).

Despite important drawbacks to Baudrillard’s concept of seduction, particularly with respect to its implications for women in concrete social settings, some of his ideas prove useful for discussing *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal*. Although Retana wrote significantly earlier than Chambers and Baudrillard, his novels are constructed upon comparable observations about seduction and its relation to self-reflexivity, duplicity, game, appearance, truth, and reversibility. Hence, the apparent failure of seduction in *Mi novia* stimulates its renewal in *Flor del mal*. In both novels, Álvaro and his admirers seduce most successfully when they claim not to be seducers. Characters who wish to know the “true” identity of others fail to remain in the game, while those who understand the value of appearances are able to seduce and be seduced. In the following pages, I examine how Retana stages seductions between characters in his novels, and how he attempts to enact seduction between the texts and their extradiegetic readers. My focus lingers on the queer effects of these seductions on the erotic and interpretative practices of the characters and consumers of Retana’s commercial literature.

**III.B. Staging Seduction through Story and Discourse**

The stories of *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal* are similar, since both texts put the famously perverse erotic writer Álvaro into contact with enthusiastic readers who, having already been seduced by his literature, try to seduce him and in turn are seduced by him. The two novels also share discursive features including formal and generic mechanisms caught up with their portrayal of seduction. Most notably, the texts are structured around Álvaro’s first-person narration.
On the one hand, this circumstance sets *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal* apart from the other primary texts analyzed in this dissertation. As the textual creations of a first-person narrator who can easily be seen as occupying queer subject positions, the novels are a rare instance in which a recognizably queer voice assumes responsibility for the majority of a text in early twentieth-century Spanish literature. On the other hand, the innovative use of the first person in these works may undermine their focus on seduction. Since seductive encounters involve at least two parties, the mediation of the narratives through a single voice places restrictions on the ways in which all the implicated subjectivities can be represented.

Retana compensates for this limitation through his use of dialogic formal devices in both novels. The first of these involves directly quoted conversations transcribed by Álvaro within his first-person narration. Spoken dialogues between the narrator and his admirers reveal the verbal strategies employed by the participants in seduction. In the first third of *Flor del mal*, written dialogues in the form of an exchange of letters serve a similar function. Álvaro interrupts his narrative to transcribe three missives sent to him by his reader Gloria Fortuny and one of his responses. Gloria uses her letters to bridge the distance between Gibraltar and Madrid and to initiate a seductive program that continues in person when she meets Retana in the capital.

The relationship between letters and seduction in *Flor del mal* links the work to other epistolary novels that exploit the seductive possibilities of letter writing. Janet Gurkin Altman affirms that “[a]n entire plot tradition, the novel of seduction through letters, is built around the letter’s power to suggest both absence and presence, to decrease and increase distance” (15). In works such as Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni’s *Fanni*
Butlerd (1757), Claude Joseph Dorat’s *Les Malheurs de l’inconstance* [*The Tragedy of Fickleness*] (1772), and Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons dangereuses* [*Dangerous Liaisons*] (1782), “the letter is an insidious device used by the seducer to break down his victim’s resistance” (15).

Taking into account Baudrillard’s perspective on seduction, one reason for the appeal of letters in novels of seduction is their capacity to upset distinctions between truth and appearance. In an examination of queer elements in Spanish epistolary fiction that does not consider *Flor del mal*, Patrick Paul Garlinger observes that a perceived “association of letter writing with confession and secrecy” in Spain makes “psychological self-examination” and the desire for sincere self-disclosure a hallmark of canonical letter novels such as Juan Valera’s *Pepita Jiménez* (1874) (xliii). In contrast, Linda S. Kauffman notes that a strain of epistolary writing present in the genre since Ovid’s *Heroides* “challenges the concepts of unity, fixity, and consistency; instead, it celebrates the fluid, the multiple, the capricious. Rather than seeing illusion as veiling a central reality or a fixed truth, Ovid values illusion for its own sake and recognizes how large a role artifice plays in arousing desire” (21).

The letters in *Flor del mal* collapse sincerity and artifice so that the former becomes an instrument of the latter. In her missives to Retana, Gloria expresses her wish to make a confession to the writer and to reveal her innermost being with complete honesty (15-16). Nevertheless, her later meeting with Retana reveals that her expressions of sincerity are themselves one of the veils that make her an alluring enigma.

While both *Mi novia* and *Flor del mal* use first-person narration and spoken and written dialogues to portray scenes of seduction between Álvaro and his admirers, their
stories take different courses due to divergences between their characters. The intradiegetic readers met by Álvaro vary dramatically in their capacity to engage him in the seductive contest. While a reader in Mi novia fails in seduction because of his attachment to irreversible truths, Gloria succeeds by mobilizing the destabilizing power of appearances. A close reading of Mi novia clarifies how the breakdown of seduction between the characters exposes the rules of the game and prolongs it into Flor del mal.

III.C. Seduction Laid Bare: Mi novia y mi novio

The paratextual materials published with Mi novia in La Novela de Hoy put into motion the queer effects of seduction before readers reach the text itself. Printed across the bottom of the front cover, the title Mi novia y mi novio flaunts a copulative conjunction that defies heteronormative demands for monogamy and sexual self-definition within the normalizing categories hetero- or homosexual (figure 3.6). The first-person possessor appears to have concurrent amorous relations with individuals marked in Spanish as feminine and masculine.

If this circumstance deconstructs the hetero/homo binary of sexuality, it could be seen to leave traditional gender dichotomies intact. Yet the cover image bearing Retana’s signature belies this objection. It shows an oval portrait of a couple identified in the text as the sixteen-year-old twins Tito and Graciela Moliner, Álvaro’s competitors in seduction. Their clothing initially reinforces hegemonic norms of masculinity and femininity. While a tight-fitting dress exposing much of Graciela’s bust makes the female body an erotic spectacle, a trench coat, dress shirt, and necktie identify Tito as a bourgeois gentleman. At the same time, the twins have androgynous faces: they cock their heads in tandem, have identical plucked eyebrows, and wear the same eye make-up.
and lipstick. Retana’s title and drawing thus evoke gender dichotomies in order to better blur them.

The cover image also raises questions of reality and appearance regarding Tito and Graciela’s possible sexual precocity. The characters’ puerile smiles contrast with their wanton poses: Tito rests his hand on his sister’s buttocks, while she allows her dress straps to fall from her shoulders. So, are they innocent adolescents who simulate a sexual maturity beyond their years? Or are they young perverts whose feigned innocence is a tool for seduction?

The ambiguities of the novel’s cover extend into Artemio Precioso’s prologue, a text that exploits the seductive principles of duplicity, denial, and play (“Se ruega” 3-6). Like Precioso’s other prologues for Retana, this one narrates a meeting between the two writers. When Precioso meets Retana on Madrid’s Gran Vía and informs him that he will conduct an interview for a prologue the following day, Retana replies that *Mi novia* does not require the usual biographical text: “siendo […] una novela autobiográfica, sería
hablar demasiado de mí” (4) [being...an autobiographical novel, it would mean talking too much about myself]. Instead, the writer wants to use the space at the start of the novel to communicate a series of requests to his admirers. After recording Retana’s demands, Precioso concludes by asserting that, true to the novelist’s wishes, Mi novia lacks a prologue (6).

In other words, the prologue to Retana’s novel playfully denies that it is a prologue. The paradoxical outcome of its duplicitous self-reflexivity is that the text draws even more attention to its status as prologue than might otherwise have been the case. This formal operation strikingly prefigures the reversibility of seduction in the following novel. Seen as a master seducer by Tito, Álvaro disavows his connection to seductive literature and, in so doing, beguiles Tito and his sister more than would have first seemed possible, at least for a time.

By undermining binary logic and introducing the concepts of denial and reversibility, the introductory paratexts of Mi novia set the stage for the text’s aborted enactment of seduction. The novel contains six chapters distributed unevenly into three parts. While the game of seduction between Álvaro and the Moliner twins progresses steadily in chapters 1-4, play comes to a stalemate in chapter 5 and ends completely in the final part’s single chapter.

As happens with the roller coaster in El veneno de la aventura (3.II.D.), the speed and sound of a train facilitate seduction in the two chapters that comprise the first part. During a trip from Madrid to Barcelona to sign a publishing contract, Álvaro contemplates how his fame as a licentious novelist has prevented him from finding loyal friends, whether male or female (11). His reflections emphasize his narrative’s acute
self-awareness, as when he exclaims: “¡Yo, que he hecho felices a tantos personajes de
mis obras por el Amor o por el Vicio, he deseado tantas veces descubrir otro novelista
que me hiciera dichoso a mí […]!” (10) [Having made so many characters of my works
happy through Love or Vice, I have wanted so many times to discover another novelist
who would make me happy…!]. Retana not only makes himself his novel’s intradiegetic
protagonist, but also draws attention to the operation by framing Álvaro as a novelist who
seeks another writer to make him a character. Ironically, the second author turns out to
be “himself,” the historical Retana who pens Mi novia.

These metafictional games continue on the train when Álvaro is recognized by
Tito Moliner, a teenager who immediately identifies himself as the author’s enthusiastic
admirer (13). Tito later calls himself “un tipo de novela de Retana” (17) [a character
from a Retana novel] and insists that if Retana were to hear his story, he would write an
outstanding book based on his life (24). The paradox is that boy is a character and
Retana does recount his life in a novel.

With respect to seduction, Tito’s self-identifications reveal that Álvaro has
seduced the teenager through his novels even before they meet on the train. In a sense,
the game has already ended because Tito is eager to submit himself to his idol without
putting up any resistance. Álvaro’s next move thus serves to resume play. He denies that
he is the infamous novelist Álvaro Retana and instead introduces himself as the lawyer
Rafael Heredia, for whom he invents “una existencia correcta y honorable que habría
satisfecho al fiscal más severo en tocante a moralidad” (22) [an upstanding and honorable
existence that would have satisfied the most stringent judge on moral grounds]. By
assuming the role of a prudish lawyer, Álvaro reverses his relationship with Tito and challenges the boy to seduce a presumably heterosexual gentleman.

Tito takes advantage of the intimacy of the railway carriage to accept the challenge. When his mother and sister Graciela fall asleep on one side of the car, he lies down with Álvaro on the other side and begins to make erotic advances. The noise and darkness of the train aid Tito’s seductive endeavor:

El traqueteo del tren amortiguaba el ruido de nuestra conversación, que había derivado a un terreno bastante peligroso, y Tito, persuadido de que nadie le oía, confortado por aquella oscuridad que dominaba el departamento, e imprudentemente expresivo por las copiosas libaciones de la comida, me llegó a confiar secretos e inquietudes que habrían alarmado a las durmientes si las hubiesen escuchado. (23)

[The train’s jolting muffled the sound of our conversation, which had digressed into a rather dangerous territory, and Tito, convinced that nobody could hear him, comforted by the darkness that reigned in the car, and imprudently expressive due to the copious libations at lunch, managed to confide in me secrets and longings that would have alarmed the sleepers had they heard them.]

Later on, Álvaro positions himself as Tito’s seducee when he explains the fascination exercised over him by the boy (36). In fact, after spending three weeks in Barcelona with the Moliner twins and their mother, the novelist acts as though the entire family has managed to seduce him. He claims to be realmente seducido (20) [truly seduced] by the family’s generosity and notes that Tito and Graciela have become his tiranos (37) [tyrants].

The continuing instability of the seducer/seducee relationship is not evident until the fourth chapter, where it becomes clear that Álvaro’s pose as lawyer ends up seducing Tito even more effectively than his fame as racy novelist. In a dialogue with Tito, “Rafael” explains that he is tired of the boy’s perversity; he wants Tito to take him as a
professor of morality so as to learn the pleasures of reproductive sexuality (41). The lawyer promises to find Tito a female friend to teach him “las vibraciones del deleite normal” (42) [the vibrations of normal pleasure]. The boy responds: “¡Rafaelito, qué bueno eres! ¡Cuando estemos en casa voy a darte un abrazo que te voy a hacer polvo!” (43) [Rafaelito, you are so good! When we get home I am going to give you a hug that will turn you to dust!]. In the following chapters, Tito submits to the will of his moral teacher.

What is ironic about this scene is that by denying that he is a seducer, and much less one who is interested in same-sex contact, Álvaro successfully fascinates Tito. The teenager’s promise to give his teacher a hug that will turn him to dust reveals that the attraction is not merely platonic, since the Spanish word polvo has sexual overtones, as in the vulgar expression echar un polvo [to screw].42 In the first half of Mi novia, the distinctions between hetero- and homosexuality, purity and perversion, and seducer and seduced collapse when Álvaro dons the mask of a straight-laced lawyer in order to seduce and be seduced by Tito and his family.

This game ends abruptly in the fifth chapter due to the unexpected revelation of Álvaro’s subterfuge. One day when Tito and his teacher are gazing over Barcelona from Mount Tibidabo, the cupletista Carmen Flores recognizes Álvaro and unwittingly spoils his ruse.43 Shocked that the novelist would hide his identity, Tito insists that Álvaro introduce him to the world of perversion that he considers to be the writer’s “true” element. The boy persists in his demands even when Álvaro argues that his perverse reputation does not correspond to his underlying desire for chaste companionship.
The subsequent deterioration of the relationship between Tito and Álvaro lays bare the principles of seduction that formerly undergirded their interactions. The breakdown reaches its climax in an argument in which Tito hopes to compel Álvaro to expose his *alma desnuda* (53) [naked soul]. The novelist responds with a key speech: “¡Mi alma desnuda! […] ¡Pero, nene!, ¿sabes lo que pides? Yo jamás me despojaría totalmente de los velos que la hacen apetitosa. […] Prefiero danzar ante el mundo como Salomé, con los siete velos que adornan mi alma, y agitarlos de tal suerte que sólo vean lo que a mí me convenga. ¡Mi alma desnuda!” (55) [My soul laid bare! ...But, boy, do you know what you’re asking for? I would never totally remove the veils that make it attractive. ...I prefer to dance for the world like Salome, with the seven veils that adorn my soul, and to wave them in such a way that others see only what is convenient for me. My soul laid bare!]. Álvaro concludes by speculating that he interests Tito “porque me has hallado difícil” (55) [because you have found me to be difficult]. Tito concurs, adding that “tú me rechazas porque me has encontrado fácil” (55) [you reject me because you have found me to be easy]. The conclusion of the conversation in a shouting match marks the end of the interlocutors’ equivocal friendship.

The contrast between Álvaro’s “difficulty” and Tito’s “ease” reveals the varying capacity of the two characters to exploit the reversible play of appearances key to seduction. While the novelist recognizes that he is most seductive when he shrouds himself in veils that perpetually defer any revelation of an “authentic” identity, Tito clings to a desire for sincerity. As a reader of both Álvaro’s texts and Álvaro as text, the boy assumes that he can know the author’s “truth.” Tito tells the novelist: “[p]ara mí siempre serás el artista licencioso al cual hay que juzgar con arreglo a sus obras. Y para
mí tu vida será irremediablemente una continuación de tu literatura. Tarde o temprano, serás conmigo franco” (56) [for me you will always be the licentious artist who must be judged according to his works. And for me your life will always be a continuation of your literature. Sooner or later, you will be frank with me]. Furthermore, Tito is confident that he has been honest with Álvaro about his own identity: “me ofrecí a ti ingenuamente desde el primer momento, abriéndote de par en par las ventanas de mi corazón” (55) [I offered myself to you naively from the very beginning, opening wide the windows of my heart].

Tito’s attachment to notions of authenticity and interiority prevent him from staying with Álvaro in the game of seduction. Instead of seeing the writer’s role-playing as a seductive reversal, he can interpret it only as a malicious lie. As the novel comes to a close, Tito distances himself from Álvaro, estranges the writer from the rest of the Moliner family, and eventually commits suicide.

Although seduction fails between the intradiegetic author and readers in Mi novia, there is evidence to suggest that Retana hoped the novel would seduce his extradiegetic audience. Flor del mal, published just eight months later, dramatizes this seduction. The character Gloria Fortuny identifies herself as a reader of Mi novia who has been moved by the novel to establish a friendship with its author. Gloria’s perceptive reading of the earlier text gives her greater insight than Tito into the dynamics of seduction. Having learned from the boy’s mistakes, she is able to compete with Álvaro in an intense, unresolved struggle for the power to seduce. In the process, Gloria models queer interpretative practices that starkly contrast with Tito’s quest for epistemological certainty.
III.D.  Seduction Uninterrupted: *Flor del mal*

With its blatant plagiarism of a title by Charles Baudelaire, also used for a *cuple* performed by the well-known singer and actress Raquel Meller in 1922, *Flor del mal* situates itself from the outset within Retana’s collection of Decadent literary drugs. The novel consists of a prologue by Artemio Precioso and seven chapters, although the 1924 original ends with chapter 6 due to the inclusion of two chapters labeled 5. Interspersed throughout are photographs of Retana and drawings of the author and his characters by José Guillén de Villena, some of which were already discussed in section I.B.

The continuities and ruptures between *Flor del mal* and *Mi novia* become evident in their prologues. While Retana seeks to distance himself from his overly zealous admirers in the conversation with Precioso before *Mi novia*, he is ready to cede to their temptations in the prologue to *Flor del mal*. Retana reverses his typical claims to moral probity in this prologue, from which I derive this chapter’s first epigraph. In a clever use of foreshadowing, the author justifies his desire to go to Hell by slow train with the paradoxical assertion that “[s]e debe de estar en el Infierno como en la Gloria” (6) [being in Hell must be like being in Glory/Heaven]. It cannot be coincidental that a character named Gloria Fortuny later upsets the intradiegetic Álvaro’s moral ideals. In *Flor del mal*, the alleged distinction between the historical Retana of the prologue and the literary creation Álvaro fails to hold, since the presumably fictional novel helps explain why Retana has decided to yield to his fame as a perverse writer in “real” life.

Following the prologue, chapter 1 sets in motion an epistolary exchange between Álvaro and Gloria, a wealthy older woman who writes to the novelist in Madrid from her residence in Gibraltar. Transcriptions of Gloria’s letters use various means to signal that
she has been an attentive reader of *Mi novia*. Most obviously, the woman identifies herself as a reader of the novel and reproduces the language of its prologue. Countering Retana’s claim in *Mi novia* that he fears letters because they may draw him into a relationship with someone who later turns out to be a *feto* [ogre] (Precioso “Se ruega” 6), she insists that “yo no soy ningún *feto*” (emphasis in original, 13) [I am no ogre].

Beyond this readily visible game of citations, Gloria’s first letter more subtly suggests that she has learned the mechanics of seduction from Tito’s errors in *Mi novia*. Whereas the boy introduces himself as one of Álvaro’s keenest fans, Gloria adopts the more distant tone of a skeptic who will need to be convinced of the novelist’s seductive appeal. She writes:

No voy a pedirle ningún favor material ni a dispararle una declaración amorosa, entre otras razones porque estoy acostumbrada a que me las hagan; pero tampoco puedo suplicarle que me cuente entre sus múltiples admiradoras, en ningún sentido, pues físicamente sólo le conozco por sus retratos, de los cuales no me fío, y solamente le leído su novela grande *La carne de tablado* y algunas cortas, entre ellas *Mi novia y mi novio*. (12)

[I’m not going to ask any material favors of you nor spit out a declaration of love, among other reasons because I’m used to others making them to me; nor can I implore you to include me among your multiple admirers, in *any sense of the term*, since physically I know you only through your portraits, which I do not trust, and I have only read your long novel *The Flesh on Stage* and a few short ones, including *My Girlfriend and My Boyfriend*.]

An accumulation of negative expressions shows that Gloria understands the link between seduction and denial. That her disavowal of any kind of attraction to Álvaro fascinates the writer is made clear by his response in a second letter, where he confirms that Gloria has successfully distinguished herself from more routine admirers who court him with the hackneyed language of passion (15).
After Álvaro censures her first letter’s arrogance, Gloria softens her tone in two subsequent missives. She constructs herself as a woman whose innate attraction to vice has not yet blemished her innocence, and who understands Álvaro’s desire for an ideal friendship as expressed in *Mi novia*. Gloria again makes extensive reference to the earlier text:

> Yo, que tengo tendencia al mal, no puedo ser ingrata con quien me impone el bien. Por eso al conocer tu novela *Mi novia y mi novio*, y apreciar tus sentimientos, comprendí que tú, como yo, no te entregabas al Vicio por miedo al Pecado, ni por temor a destruir una reputación ya bastante comprometida, sino *por ti mismo*. Esto me hizo simpátizar contigo y desear fervientemente ser tu mejor amiga para abrirte mi corazón de par en par comunicándote que existe una mujer que piensa como tú. (21)

[Being inclined towards evil, I cannot be ungrateful to him who makes me want to be good. Thus, after becoming familiar with your novel *My Girlfriend and My Boyfriend*, and appreciating your feelings, I understood that you, like me, did not give into Vice for fear of Sin, nor for fear of destroying an already precarious reputation, but *on your own initiative*. That made me sympathize with you and fervently long to be your best friend in order to open up my heart to you, expressing that there is a woman who thinks as you do.]

Eschewing her first letter’s denial of seduction, Gloria now presents herself as someone who has been seduced by Álvaro’s self-presentation in *Mi novia*. She mimics Tito’s assertion about opening the windows of his heart in order to mobilize the language of sincerity and identify with Álvaro’s situation as a reputed libertine who secretly desires a mundane bourgeois life.

Gloria’s purportedly honest self-disclosure shapes how Álvaro receives her when she meets him in person in his Madrilenian apartment during one of his soirées with four young women and five young men. Because Gloria has led him to believe that he has already seduced her in his capacity as a “false” pervert and clandestine gentleman, Álvaro
presents himself as a “true” pervert. In other words, the writer deploys the same seductive principle of reversibility as he did with Tito on the train, but now in the opposite direction. Whereas Álvaro reacts to Tito’s belief that he is a licentious artist by posing as a prim lawyer, he responds to what he perceives as Gloria’s faith in his underlying purity by making himself master of a witch’s sabbath. Acting upon a “deseo general de espantar a la Fortuny” (28) [general desire to frighten the Fortuny woman], the author announces that he and his friends will fly “de dos en dos sobre una escoba hacia un diván propicio y sólo se aburrirán los que se asusten” (25) [two by two on a broomstick to a propitious divan, and only those who are afraid will get bored].

What Álvaro does not realize is that Gloria also understands the value of duplicity in seduction. The woman’s nonplussed reaction to his racy statements during the gathering leaves Álvaro unsettled: “Yo esperaba que mis palabras escandalizasen a Gloria Fortuny; pero ésta, a medida que yo hablaba, expresaba en su rostro una grata sorpresa” (27) [I hoped that my words would scandalize Gloria Fortuny; but as I talked, she expressed a pleasant surprise]. When Gloria invites the writer to dinner at her hotel, she confesses that she is “una criatura toda sensualidad que vive en un estado de permanente excitación y que nunca ve saciado ni su sexo ni su cerebro” (33) [a creature full of sensuality who lives in a state of permanent arousal and never satiates her genitals nor her mind].

Gloria’s revelation forces Álvaro and readers of Flor del mal to revise their interpretations of her earlier letters. It turns out that her claims to authenticity are an artifice by which she gives herself the appearance of moral integrity. The resultant simulacrum is comparable to Álvaro’s role-playing as lawyer in the train with Tito. Like
the novelist, Gloria realizes that the best way to seduce is to present herself as an innocent victim of seduction.

By chapter 4, it is clear that Álvaro has found in Gloria a worthy opponent in seduction, armed like him with the tactics of denial and reversal. In fact, the sudden exposure of the woman’s epistolary ruse derails Álvaro’s seductive strategies and destabilizes his identity throughout the remainder of the novel, leading him into increasingly more queer erotic situations. Although the novelist continues to present himself to readers as a seemingly perverse celebrity who is actually quite upstanding, once he poses as a genuine pervert for Gloria during his party, she compels him to play that role until the theoretical distinction between the appearance and reality of perversion is no longer tenable.

The process by which Gloria re-scripts Álvaro’s identity begins in her hotel, where the novelist decides that he must prolong his earlier performance so as not to disappoint his hostess: “comprendiendo que después de mi actitud de la tarde pecaría de ridículo si me empeñase en exigir un respeto del cual yo mismo la había dispensado, juzgué discreto continuar en mi ‘pose’ desmoralizante” (32) [understanding that after that afternoon’s performance it would have seemed ridiculous for me to demand from Gloria the very respect from which I had absolved her, I considered it discreet to continue in my demoralizing pose]. At the same time, some of Gloria’s questions about Álvaro’s supposed perversity leave the writer uncomfortable. Commenting on the imbalance of males and females at his gathering, Gloria assumes that one of the young men must be Álvaro’s paid lover. Frustrated that Álvaro should refuse to say which of the boys is his chulo, Gloria is pleased when one of them, Rafael Delgado, unexpectedly arrives to ask
the writer for money to attend a dance. Gloria imposes her interpretation of the episode on Álvaro: “Me figuro que ahora no negarás que éste es tu favorito. […] Este chico es tu ‘chulo’. Este es el que se lleva lo que otras personas te damos” (39-40) [I reckon that now you will not deny that this one is your favorite. …This boy is your paid lover. This is the one who takes what other people give you.]

Gloria’s financial wherewithal later prolongs her capacity to reposition Álvaro as a queer sexual actor. After she begins to buy them expensive clothing on the condition that they remain together, Álvaro and Rafael decide to foster Gloria’s belief that they are lovers in exchange for continued economic benefits. The problem for the novelist is that the line between pretending to hire Rafael as chulo and actually paying the boy is extraordinarily tenuous. When Gloria invites Álvaro and Rafael to a Carnival ball, the boy demands that the writer purchase his expensive attire. Álvaro reflects that “este mono empieza a costarme el dinero como si verdaderamente fuera ‘mi chulito’” (47) [this rascal is beginning to cost me money as though he really were my “lover”]. Additionally, orgies organized by Gloria bring the two men into intimate physical contact, for the woman’s preferred pasttime is to undress Álvaro and Rafael and to compare the tone of their skin (49).

This ambiguous situation goes on until Gloria announces her imminent departure from Madrid. Relieved that he no longer need maintain appearances in exchange for her financial support, Álvaro informs his benefactor that Rafael is not in fact his lover (56). For Gloria, the confession represents a reversal of the revelation of Rafael Heredia’s identity by Carmen Flores in Mi novia. While the bourgeois lawyer is shown to be an infamous novelist in Mi novia, the infamous novelist insists that he is actually a
straightlaced writer in *Flor del mal*. Unlike in *Mi novia*, however, the moment of anagnorisis in the latter novel does not put an end to the enactment of seduction. Gloria has so thoroughly unsettled Álvaro’s identity that his protestations of innocence from sexual complicity with Rafael ring hollow. Just after Álvaro and Rafael admit to their subterfuge, they have another orgy with the woman (63).

Moreover, after Gloria leaves Madrid, memories of her visit strengthen the bond between the two men. Without recognizing Álvaro’s financial insolvency in Gloria’s absence, Rafael continues to demand that the writer buy him fine clothing, “como si verdaderamente se tratase de un efectivo ‘chulo’ de cortesana caprichosa” (67) [as though he really were the “lover” of a capricious courtesan]. The novel’s ending raises the possibility that Álvaro has started to require the boy to serve as his lover in all senses of the term. In the final pages, the novelist meets with two women who make fun of an acquaintance for maintaining a lover without receiving any sexual favors. Listening to the conversation, Álvaro is thankful that he no longer occupies that position and recalls “errores cometidos y a tiempo subsanados” (75) [errors committed and remedied before it was too late]. Without further clarification, it is difficult to specify the implications of this concluding phrase. Álvaro has either cut off his financial support from Rafael, or forced the boy to pay back his debt in sexual services.

This open ending suggests that the game of seduction initiated by Gloria could continue unabated between Álvaro and Rafael, and between the novel and its readers, who must resolve the final enigma as they see most fit. While extradiegetic readers can certainly choose to assume that Álvaro finally does away with Rafael, there are ways in which the text itself favors the queer reading that he will take the boy as his lover. Most
importantly, Gloria is an intradiegetic reader who favors that interpretation by taking for
granted that the two men are sexual partners and by forcing her belief upon their
relationship so that they do become progressively closer.

The reading practices of Gloria are far more complex than Tito’s search for
intrinsic truths. After learning the techniques of seduction from her reading of *Mi novia*,
Gloria goes on to interpret her surroundings in such a way that she modifies those
realities. To echo language used earlier, her appraisal of Álvaro’s perverse performance
when she meets him in person *re-scripts* his identity and his relationship with Rafael
throughout the rest of the novel. In other words, Gloria’s acts of reading double as acts
of writing. Within this context, it comes as no surprise that the character states in one of
her letters that writing is her greatest consolation (18). Likewise, it can be of little
coincidence that Gloria’s surname Fortuny was also a pseudonym used by Retana, or that
similarities between the cover image of Gloria and a later sketch of Álvaro draw a visual
parallel between the two characters (3.I.B., figures 2-3).

Gloria deconstructs the binary of writing and reading, showing them to be
inseparable processes in the production of meaning. In doing so, she also destabilizes
Álvaro’s identity and draws him into a relationship with Rafael whose ambiguity merits
the label queer. Álvaro confirms that Gloria’s perceptions of reality search out and
generate that which is strangely erotic. In his words, “[e]lla poseía el secreto de revestir
cualquier momento de inquietud, y en el más leve detalle sorprendía una doble intención
culpable que estremecía sus nervios” (43) [she possessed the secret of clothing any
situation in restlessness, and of seeking out a culpable, nerve-wracking double meaning
in the smallest detail].
As an intradiegetic reader, Gloria models an interpretative practice for Retana’s historical readers that calls them to actively intervene in the creation of queer meaning. From a practical standpoint, Gloria urges readers to be suspicious of Retana’s shifting masks in his prologues, and not to see any of them as his final “truth.” As mentioned above, Retana often appears to impose moralistic interpretations on his texts in order to downplay their subversive possibilities. This is the case in both *El veneno de la aventura*, where the novelist stigmatizes characters like Jacinto Morales, and *A Sodoma en tren botijo*, whose explicit moral is that “quien ama el peligro, en él perece, y nunca se recomendará suficientemente a la juventud curiosa, inexperta y excéntrica los peligros de la convivencia con los individuos pertenecientes al tercer sexo” (156) [he who loves danger perishes in it, and curious, inexperienced, and eccentric youth can never be warned enough about the dangers of living with individuals belonging to the third sex].

In one of the few commentaries about Retana by Luis Antonio de Villena with which I cannot agree, Villena claims that the *introito* to *A Sodoma* ought to be taken seriously. Consequently, he reads the text as a daring but antiquated and reactionary novel, and he indicts Retana for condemning his own lifestyle (Introduction 21-22, 24). Villena reads like Retana’s character Tito: he accepts without question what the text seems to propose as its truth. My goal in this chapter’s final section is to read like Gloria, and to see *A Sodoma’s* moralistic prologue as a duplicitous device, a denial of the intent to seduce by which Retana leads his readers to seek out queer and modern pleasures.

**IV. All Aboard!: *A Sodoma en tren botijo* as Queer Pedagogy**

Published in El Caballero Audaz’s short-lived novel collection *Los Trece* nearly a decade after the novels considered above, *A Sodoma en tren botijo* (21 May 1933)
culminates Retana’s earlier efforts to use narrative seduction to educate readers about queer sexualities and modernization, and to consolidate queer subcultures in Madrid and Barcelona. The pedagogical and culture-building implications of the author’s games of seduction are present in previous works whose self-reflexive devices stage acts of reading that provide characters with sexual instruction and a common subcultural imaginary. In _Las «locas» de postín [The Posh Fairies]_ (1919), two _locas_ declare that a novel by Retana is more entertaining than works by canonical male authors such as the playfully renamed “doña Benita Pérez Galdós” (46). The intradiegetic novel does not simply reflect the characters’ sense of solidarity, but unites them around a shared archive of fictional representations. In _Los extravíos de Tony (Confesiones amorales de un colegial ingenuo) [Tony’s Deviance: Amoral Confessions of a Naive Schoolboy]_ (1919), a schoolboy receives his sexual education from erotic novels written by his uncle. As literary critic Fermín Ezpeleta Aguilar points out, the protagonist’s formal schooling is inseparable from his initiation into queer eroticism (45). Pedagogy and eros also coalesce in _El veneno de la aventura_, where one character calls Jacinto Morales a professor of sexual ethics (50).

The nexus of queer desire and subcultures, teaching, and reading in these works indicates that Retana was attuned to mounting fears in Spain from the late nineteenth-century onwards regarding the purported spread of queer sexualities through “proselytism” on the part of “corrupt” educators and authors. _A Sodoma_ suggests that his awareness of this issue peaked following his imprisonment on charges of writing pornography in 1926 and 1928. As with earlier novels whose characters embrace the roles of queer teacher or student, the 1933 text responds ironically to sexual paranoia by
confirming the legitimacy of the worst heterosexist fears about queer self-promotion. In spite of the introito’s disavowal that Retana is dedicated to embarking passengers to Sodom and Gomorrah (epigraph 2), other parts of the novel offer a wealth of information on Madrid’s subculture of locas and position the author as a queer pedagogue.

In what follows, I contend that allusions to Don Quijote (Miguel de Cervantes, 1605-1615) and The Picture of Dorian Gray (Oscar Wilde, 1891) situate A Sodoma in a lineage of novels featuring characters whose desires come under the sway of teachers and texts. For Retana’s protagonist, this disorienting influence is a stimulant to abandon traditional life in provincial Almería and to join a self-consciously modern circle of locas in the capital. The subsequent narrative of the character’s journey constitutes a veritable Baedeker for extradiegetic readers, a guide to Madrid’s queer subculture and modern technological and socioeconomic innovations, with all their delights and risks. These dangers come under scrutiny throughout the text. While Retana writes in the overtly moralizing introito that queer sexualities and modern change are intrinsically perilous, subtler novelistic elements found elsewhere undercut his moral credibility. Self-reflexivity, intertextuality, and humor teach alternate lessons and point to homophobia as the real threat for locas and others who would join them in their wager for queer desire and modernization.45

IV.A. Queer “Proselytism” in History and Theory

In the first volume of The History of Sexuality (1976), Michel Foucault defines “the pedagogization of children’s sex” as a process with roots in eighteenth-century Europe through which children were recognized as easily corruptible sexual beings upon whom mechanisms of surveillance would need to be exercised (103-04). There is ample
evidence to suggest that concerns about childhood sexuality also increased in Spain between 1850 and 1936 (Cleminson and Vázquez García ‘Los Invisibles’ 137-73). Whereas Foucault includes educators in a list of adults who might be enlisted to regulate children’s sexual behaviors, historians Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García note that texts by Spanish sexologists after the 1890s often suspect teachers of causing youth to deviate from the heteronormative path (139-40). This fear came to a head in the 1920s and aided the passage of the 1928 legislation discussed above in relation to Jacinto Benavente’s *De muy buena familia* (2.I.A.; see also 4.I.C.). One purpose of the law distinguishing between dishonest abuses and public scandal for hetero- and homosexual offenders was to reserve the strongest punishments for schoolmasters who were found guilty of wrongdoing in their sexual comportment with pupils of the same sex (143, 152).

Preoccupations regarding teachers in the 1920s coincided with more general concerns about queer proselytism in Spanish cities, particularly on the part of homosexual men (Mira De Sodoma 82-86). The economic prosperity and relaxation of social norms for the middle and upper classes following neutrality in World War I gave some men the chance to defend their relations with other males. In a conversation about Retana recorded by Cansinos-Asséns, Carmen de Burgos accuses outspoken homosexuals of taking recourse to famous writers to justify their sexuality: “Se escudan con Wilde y Benavente…” (I: 373) [They shield themselves with Wilde and Benavente...].

Leaving aside for the moment the important allusion to Wilde, it is unsurprising that Burgos links apologies for homosexuality to literature. Other commentators from the time see the written word as a vehicle for spreading queer desire. In his 1911 criminological study *La mala vida en Barcelona* [*Low Life in Barcelona*], Max Bembo
laments that magazines, novels, and stories with pornographic drawings are disseminating obscenity throughout the city (218). This commercial literature presents a problem for Bembo, since novels and other *lecturas irritantes* [irritating readings] are a possible etiology for the sexual inversion by which *locas* come to see themselves as female psychologies trapped in male bodies (32).

Bembo’s complaints about mass-produced texts look forward to Retana’s notion of *la ola verde* of erotic literature in Spain in his book of that title published under the penname Carlos Fortuny. Written while the 1928 Penal Code was still in effect, the study attends to the way cheap novels may be “immoral teachers” with a disorienting impact on the sexuality of their pupils (Gallop “The Immoral”). It concludes that “[l]a infancia, ávida siempre de emociones; la adolescencia, devorada por el problema de la inquietud sexual; la juventud, sensible a toda vibración de la carne, no tiene por qué hallar fácilmente a su alcance cierta clase de libros” (300) [children, always eager for emotion; adolescents, devoured by the problem of sexual restlessness; youth, sensitive to the flesh’s every vibration, have no reason to find a certain type of book easily at their disposition]. Fortuny’s warning shows that Retana was adept at parroting the conservative rhetoric of his day about teaching, reading, and the sexuality of young people. He does the same in the moralizing statements in *A Sodoma*, published just two years after *La ola verde*. In the novel, Retana’s mimicry barely contains an enthusiasm for the possibilities of queer teaching.

Retana’s appropriation of homophobic associations between pedagogy, literature, and sexuality prefigures contemporary approaches to those topics in contemporary queer theory. David Halperin’s article “Deviant Teaching” (2002) exemplifies the push to
reclaim “pedagogical eros” from a queer perspective (Hanson 105). Halperin considers “the possible reusings of such a crossing for and by a scholarship, a paedagogy, and a politics friendly to queers” (Halperin 8).

Literature is a useful tool for Halperin’s project on several counts. First, canonical works featuring seductive teachers such as the Bible, the Platonic dialogues, or the novels of Sade have played a significant role in constructing a longstanding connection between education and the spread of queer sexualities (Gallop “The Immoral”; Halperin; Hanson; Keroes 2-3; Morlock). Analyzing these texts helps place the moral panic regarding corrupt teachers and queer proselytism in Spain in the 1920s within a wider cultural trend whose effects extend into present-day fears concerning sexual harassment and the “promotion of homosexuality” in the classroom (Gallop Anecdotal Theory and Feminist Accused; Haggerty; Watney).

Additionally, literature itself can become a seductive teacher by making queer desires available to readers through identification. Literary critic Michael Moon maintains that representations “of ostensibly perverse desires and fantasies disorient our currently prevailing assumptions […] about our own and other people’s sexual orientations by bringing home to us the shape of desires and fantasies that we ordinarily disavow as our own” (16). His term sexual disorientation designates “the position of reader- or viewer-subjects at least temporarily dislocated from what they consider their ‘home’ sexual orientation and ‘disorientingly’ circulated through a number of different positions on the wheel of ‘perversions’” (16-17).

Moon’s ideas on sexual disorientation draw on French theorist René Girard’s belief that an agent’s desire for an object is always mediated by his or her imitation of a
third party. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961), Girard uses *Don Quijote* to illustrate what he means by *mimetic desire* (1-52). Cervantes’s character Alonso Quijano el Bueno emulates the fictional character Amadís de Gaula in his longing to become the knight Don Quijote, for example.

Similarly, Wilde’s title protagonist in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* borrows his hedonistic caprices from the Decadent hero of Joris-Karl Huysmans’s novel *À Rebours*. Various aspects of Wilde’s text make it central to queer theory’s investigation into the erotics of reading and education. On the one hand, the relationship between Sir Henry Watton and Dorian constitutes another instance of the conflation of pedagogy and pederasty, instruction and seduction, established previously in the Platonic dialogues and elsewhere (Morlock; Nunokawa). On the other hand, Dorian confirms Moon’s theory of sexual disorientation by deriving many of his queer desires from *À Rebours*, “a poisonous book” that “seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, before he had lived it” (Wilde 96-97). Curiously, the chapter that most fascinates Dorian is one in which Huysmans’s hero Des Esseintes imitates figures from his library such as Nero and Caligula (108-09).

Allusions to *Don Quijote* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *A Sodoma* demonstrate Retana’s understanding of reading’s power to destabilize desire. They also add his novel to the genealogy of Decadent works whose protagonists mimic the perversions of characters from previous texts. If Des Esseintes follows Roman emperors from his historical tomes, and Dorian follows Des Esseintes, Retana’s protagonist Nemesio Fuenteepino wants perverse teachers of the stature of Sir Henry and *À Rebours* to
fashion him into a new Dorian Gray. In turn, Retana’s extradiegetic readers may identify with Nemesio.

IV.B. From Province to Metropolis

*A Sodoma*’s links to works by Cervantes and Wilde are apparent from the outset. The novel begins with a dialogue in which eighteen-year-old Nemesio’s mother orders him to stop reading and to prepare for bedtime. Although the third-person narrator never reveals the title of Nemesio’s text, the character is later described as a fan of Decadent novels who would like to take on the existence of one of their protagonists (162-63). Nemesio’s longing to emulate Decadent characters disorients his libido: “Algunas veces, pensando que él merecía inspirar una novela y ser amado como Dorian Gray, Nemesio preguntábase a sí mismo alarmado: —¿Seré yo un invertido?” (163) [Sometimes, thinking that he deserved to inspire a novel and be loved like Dorian Gray, Nemesio asked himself with alarm: ‘Might I be an invert?’]. Although the boy is eager to deny the possibility, his interest in Madrid’s subculture of *locas* casts doubt on his disavowal of queer desire.

References to Dorian Gray and Oscar Wilde in *A Sodoma* would likely have been interpreted by Spanish readers of the early 1930s as clues about Nemesio’s potential sexual “deviancy.” Following Wilde’s trials in 1895, his name became a veritable code-word for male homoeroticism in Spain (Mira *De Sodoma* 35-37, 65-67). As mentioned above, Cansinos-Asséns claims that Burgos once complained that homosexual men invoked Wilde to defend their behavior (I: 373). Elsewhere, Cansinos uses the adjective *wildiano* to “out” men like Benavente and Retana (Constán 141-53). In one passage of *La novela de un literato*, the pejorative label is calculated to reinforce the devastating
opinion that Retana writes “novelillas o noveluchas sicalípticas, de pornografía sin interés” (III: 144) [unimportant erotic novels, full of boring pornography].

Like Cansinos, other intellectuals viewed Wilde’s Spanish admirers as second-rate spin-offs. As Miguel de Unamuno laments in an 1899 essay, turn-of-the-century Madrid was full of literatillos [mediocre writers] trying unsuccessfully to be the Spanish Oscar Wilde (cited in Davis “Oscar Wilde” 142). For Unamuno, frivolous imitators of Wilde in Spain betrayed their national heritage and had no role to play in the serious work of the country’s regeneration (Davis “Oscar Wilde” 139-42).

Retana often mocked the self-appointed intellectuals of his day by calling them unamunos (Villena El ángel 53). He continues this critique in A Sodoma through a fusion of his Wildean intertext with allusions to Don Quijote, one of the foremost emblems of Spain’s renewal following the Spanish-American War (Johnson 69-110). In a practice familiar to readers of Retana, the author deploys heroic language reminiscent of Don Quijote and earlier novels of chivalry throughout his novel’s first chapter. During his train ride to Madrid, for instance, Nemesio “imaginaba lances y aventuras extraordinarias, triunfos insólitos alcanzados merced a su tajante hermosura” (169) [imagined extraordinary episodes and adventures, unheard of victories achieved thanks to his indisputable beauty].

A Sodoma’s transformation of Don Quijote’s altruistic mission to right wrongs and aid widows and maidens into Nemesio’s egoistic plan to score financial and social success in Madrid, la moderna Sodoma [the modern Sodoma], parodies and “perverts” Don Quijote and early twentieth-century texts that seek in it a national spirit (Cervantes 85; Retana A Sodoma 169). It also draws a parallel between the mimetic desire at work
in the novels by Cervantes and Retana. Nemesio’s imitation of Dorian recalls Don Quijote’s relation to Amadís. Established towards the start of A Sodoma, this connection will be important for my reading of the denouement.

Besides the unsettling pedagogical influence of Decadent novels, contact with a flesh-and-blood educator also prompts Nemesio’s decision to abandon Almería for Madrid. The boy’s friend Pepín Alcayde is the first of several characters with biographical links to Retana who initiate Nemesio into the capital’s subculture of locas. As a newspaper correspondent for Madrid in Almería, Pepín urges Nemesio to depart from his hometown by describing other migrants who achieved financial stability in the capital as the lovers of wealthy members of the third sex.

Pepín’s conversations with Nemesio establish the contrast between modernity and tradition as an important motif in A Sodoma. The reporter pits Almería’s agrarian social structure against Madrid’s material and social progress. Whereas Nemesio’s income in the province is limited to profits derived from his family’s holdings in land, he could make a rapid fortune in Madrid’s film industry (161-62). Similarly, the scandal caused by the arrival of a bidet in Almería would be unthinkable in Madrid, where a novelist’s concurrent affairs with a mother and her two daughters are met by public indifference (Nemesio exclaims, “¡Eso sí es modernismo!” [That really is modernism!]) (165-66). By the time Nemesio steps on the train to travel to modern Sodom at the end of chapter 1, Pepín has convinced him that Madrid is a brilliant showcase of modern change (169). The reporter also prepares readers to interpret subsequent chapters as a guide to how a subculture of locas engages with technological and socioeconomic advances in the city.
IV.C. A Guide to Modern Sodom

Echoing costumbrista and Realist images used elsewhere in his oeuvre, Retana writes in A Sodoma’s introito that his goal is to faithfully paint the malas costumbres [bad habits] of his age and to walk through previously undocumented urban spaces with his novelistic mirror (155-56). To meet this objective, the author abandons a linear, causally-motivated plot in the novel’s central chapters. Chapters 2-4 revolve around tenuously connected gatherings of locas in Madrid: a soirée in the mansion of the Marquis of Pijo Infante, a formal party given by the Marquis for a reading of one of his plays, and a Carnival ball. Retana makes the locas a collective protagonist of these reunions by accumulating sketches of secondary characters and dialogues between the guests. Together, the locas form a cohesive subculture.

In the introduction to an anthology of academic approaches to the notion of subculture, Sarah Thornton notes that scholars working in a range of disciplines would probably agree that “subcultures are groups of people that have something in common with each other […] which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups,” particularly those which position themselves as “normal, average and dominant” (1, 5). Ken Gelder’s book Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice (2007) refines this definition by analyzing the cultural logics according to which mainstream groups classify subcultures (3-4). While Retana evades the stigmatizing force associated with these modes of thought, several of Gelder’s cultural logics are useful for identifying aspects of A Sodoma that portray Madrid’s locas as a subculture in intimate contact with its modern urban setting.
Gelder notes that “subcultures have routinely been understood and evaluated negatively in terms of their relation to labour or work. Many subcultures might not work at all” (3). Instead of participating in activities defined by the middle class as useful labor, they dedicate themselves to “excess or exaggeration” (4). The mainstream tends to register “the ‘deviance’ of subcultures through a range of excessive attributes—behaviour, styles and dress, noise, argot or language, consumption, and so on—which are then contrasted with the restraints and moderations of ‘normal’ populations” (4).

By depicting the upper-class locas at a series of parties, A Sodoma creates the impression that they form a subculture at a far remove from the sphere of bourgeois work. The locas intervene only in those sectors of the workforce that make use of flashy new technologies for entertainment purposes. The Marquis of Pijo Infante has ties to Madrid’s film industry and writes comedies for fashionable theaters. At the reading of one of his scripts, an actress suggests that he update his historical reconstruction of the scene portrayed in Velázquez’s Las meninas to modernize it: “¿Por qué no adapta su comedia al siglo XX?” (206) [Why don’t you adapt your play to the twentieth century?].

A similar push for modernity is equally evident in the leisure time devoted by the locas to the creation of a “subcultural style” characterized by shared linguistic practices and tastes in attire and music (Hebdige). A Sodoma features locas who speak “en femenino, trastocando los sexos con regocijante facilidad” (176) [in a feminine mode, changing grammatical genders with delightful ease]. In one dialogue, a member of the third sex explains that he has allowed his lover to attend the Teatro Español, “donde anunciaban una función en honor de la Calderona de la Barca” (200) [where they were advertising a performance in honor of Ms. Calderón de la Barca]. The grammatical
emasculcation of a Golden Age dramatist known for his honor code can be read as a ludic dismissal of traditional patriarchal standards for relations between the sexes.

The clothing, make-up, and accessories donned by the locas at their parties also upset rigid distinctions between males and masculinity, and females and femininity. Despite their plucked eyebrows, powdered faces, lipstick, eyeliner, and delicate suede shoes, the locas at one gathering “se juzgaban machísimas” (194) [considered themselves extremely macho]. For them, the accoutrements are a sign of distinción ultramoderna (220) [ultramodern distinction]. Indeed, acquiring this kind of attire places the third sex at the crux of modern consumer capitalism.

The locas also rally around cuplés as a point of reference for what they consider a unified subculture. The second chapter of A Sodoma transcribes the lyrics to several songs in which the locas see allusions to the inhabitants of su mundo (179) [their world]. During the soirée at the Marquis’s mansion, some men dance to the radio and the gramophone in an appropriation of modern technologies for queer socialization.

The occupation of urban space by the locas in A Sodoma is another phenomenon that links the group to the cultural logics of subcultures. As Gelder observes, “[s]ubcultures territorialise their places rather than own them, and it is in this way that their modes of belonging and their claims on place find expression” (3). This happens most visibly on city streets, where subcultures promote the promiscuous intermingling of people from distinct socioeconomic classes. Such cross-class contacts account for the logic according to which “subcultures are seen as having deviated from their class background” (3).
Although the parties in Retana’s novel take place in private homes in Madrid, dialogues between the guests reveal that they have claimed particular public spaces in the city as sites for shared subcultural practices. The aristocratic locas exchange stories about their luck cruising the Puerta del Sol, Calle Alcalá, Glorieta del Bilbao, and Plaza del Progreso for working class men called chulánganos who are willing to have sex for pay (173, 220). In attributing an erotic aura to men on metropolitan streets, the locas participate in what sociologist Henning Bech calls the “sexualization of the city” (118). In *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* (1987), Bech explains that the availability of bodies in the anonymous crowds characteristic of the modern city makes the metropolis “a space where sexuality is generated” (118). Desire fixes itself most readily to figures who inhabit the threshold where the body merges with the speed, sound, and texture of technology. For Bech, cab drivers are a prime example (118). They are also a fetish for Retana’s locas, one of whom plans to seduce all the Republican drivers (211). This obsession with taxi drivers reinforces Retana’s recurrent conflation of queer sexualities and modern modes of transportation such as the roller coaster in *El veneno de la aventura* (3.II.D.) and the train in *Mi novia y mi novio* (3.III.C.).

The chapters in *A Sodoma* dedicated to describing Madrid’s subculture of locas relegate Nemesio to the background in allusions made by other characters to his arrival in the capital. When he reappears in person during the Marquis of Pijo Infante’s second party, he feels “mareado como una colegiala a quien repentinamente introdujeran en un baile de máscaras” (214) [queasy like a schoolgirl suddenly transported to a masked ball]. The comparison of the boy to a schoolgirl underscores the instructive potential of the gatherings represented in Retana’s novel. Just as direct contact with the locas in Madrid
teaches Nemesio about their subculture, information about the leisure activities, language, attire, music, urban haunts, and sexual preferences of the third sex has the potential to guide certain readers of *A Sodoma* into that group.

The good humor and wit of Retana’s *locas* would surely not dissuade readers from seeking out Madrid’s queer subculture. The *locas* derive pleasure from the city, technology, consumer capitalism, and their gender performances and sexual contacts. At the same time, threats of danger always haunt queer desire and modernization. Whether these perils are intrinsic to queer sexualities and modern change or imposed upon them by homophobia is a central question in *A Sodoma*.

**IV.D. Dangers of the Modern City**

Different parts of the novel offer varying responses. While the frame provided by the *introito* and the final chapter insists that the inherently perverse circle of *locas* corrupts risk-taking youths, other passages locate the danger in the subculture’s struggle with a brutally homophobic mainstream.

The *introito*’s moral regarding the need for young people to avoid contact with the third sex returns with a vengeance in chapter 5. At the Carnival ball of *locas*, two aristocrats slip Nemesio an aphrodisiac and seduce him in a private room. Although the adolescent puts up some resistance, losing his virginity turns out to be a benign if not enjoyable experience: “no encontró ofensivo, ni siquiera desagradable nada” (234) [he did not find anything offensive or even disagreeable]. Nevertheless, having narrowly escaped a police raid the following morning, Nemesio realizes the risks of involvement with the third sex. He returns to Almería and resolves to abandon his Decadent readings (236). In the novel’s concluding sentences, the character decides to become “lo que se
dice todo un HOMBRE. Con mayúsculas” (237) [what is called a real MAN. With upper-case letters.] The denouement casts Nemesio’s trip to Madrid as a cautionary tale meant to dissuade readers from following him into the locas’ tutelage.

This explicit warning competes with several more covert yet equally effective novelistic techniques elsewhere in the text that transmit a more queer-friendly message. First, Retana undermines his framing moral by citing three characters who defend queer sexualities and modern innovation, and share his life experiences. Pepín Alcayde’s job as chronicler of Madrid’s entertainment scene recalls Retana’s early work as a journalist. The reporter persuades Nemesio to visit Madrid by assuring that life in Almería is a bore (166). In the capital, the Marquis of Pijo Infante’s involvement with variety shows and theatrical spectacles echoes Retana’s participation in the world of the cuplé. In a conversation with one of his male lovers, the Marquis resists heteronormative imperatives to root queer desire in pathology, criminality, or sin. He speaks on behalf of his fellow locas when he says, “[n]otamos un impulso, porque sí; nos atrae otra persona de nuestro sexo, porque sí” (italics in original, 185) [we feel an impulse, because we do; a person of our own sex attracts us, because he does]. Finally, an erotic novelist who attends one of the Marquis’s parties faces a legal scandal similar to the ones surrounding Retana in 1926 and 1928. The novelist precipitates Nemesio’s sexual encounter during the Carnival ball by inveighing against virginity (208-10). In each of these cases, readers familiar with Retana’s biography may legitimately identify the characters as the novelist’s intradiegetic doubles. By inserting versions of himself into his narrative as outspoken critics of agrarian Almería, homophobia, and sexual prudery, Retana self-reflexively defies the authority of his moralizing voice in the introito.
The interface between *A Sodoma* and *Don Quijote* established by the first chapter’s heroic language also contributes to this challenge. Cervantes’s novel is a crucial intertext in Retana’s denouement, where Nemesio’s return to Almería and renunciation of Decadent novels correspond to Alonso Quijano’s rejection of novels of chivalry at the end of *Don Quijote*. An extension of this parallel to its logical conclusion spells doom for Nemesio. In the *Quijote*, Quijano’s dismissal of his earlier ideals paves the way for his death. Having grown fond of Don Quijote’s journeys, Sancho Panza desperately urges Quijano to adopt a new persona based on further readings. Although Nemesio believes that giving up his Decadent texts and performing normative masculinity will atone for his *mala aventura* [bad adventure] in Madrid, readers can choose to think otherwise (236). They may see his sacrifices as a mortal mistake after having joined him in an exploration of the capital’s queer subculture by reading his story. While Retana abandons his protagonist in Almería without Decadent literature, his readers remain free—and empowered by *A Sodoma*’s instructive dimension—to embrace modern Madrid’s subculture of *locas* and to purchase further texts by Retana.

One goal of this chapter has been to demonstrate that, besides *A Sodoma*, various “literary drugs” by Retana deploy seductive and pedagogical techniques to lead readers into buying short novels, valuing queer sexualities, and taking a stance in favor of Spain’s modernization. While works such as *Las «locas» de postín* and *A Sodoma* depict an entire queer subculture, others feature eloquent individual spokespeople for queer seduction like Jacinto Morales, Gloria Fortuny, and intradiegetic analogues of Retana himself.
Despite the pro-queer thrust of these novels, Retana does not imply that standing up for queer desire and modern change in early twentieth-century Spain is a carefree enterprise. In *A Sodoma*, the arrest of the *locas* at their Carnival ball and the subsequent publication of their names in the newspaper is only the most visible sign of their struggle with systemic homophobia in Madrid.49 Throughout the novel, the *locas* deploy humor and irony to confront physical and intellectual threats to their subculture. Rafaelito Morenal, for instance, “tenía la obsesión de manifestarse invertido y experimentaba una indecible voluptuosidad cuando a su paso escuchaba en la calle exclamaciones ofensivas. Las injurias producíanle deleite y su placer más exquisito era presentir la posibilidad de una agresión violenta” (202) [was obsessed with presenting himself as an invert, and experienced unspeakable pleasure when he heard offensive exclamations on the street as he walked along. The insults delighted him, and his most exquisite pleasure was to anticipate the possibility of violent aggression]. His masochism ironically appropriates the threat of homophobic violence so as to transform it into a source of pleasure. The potential humor of this strategy does not obscure the danger of acting queer in a heteronormative urban milieu.

Rafaelito also appropriates Gregorio Marañón’s theory of *intersexualidad* for his own queer agenda. As noted in section 3.II.D., the Spanish doctor’s belief that human embryos undergo a process of sexual differentiation that culminates in adult masculinity has homophobic implications. Leaving aside those aspects of Marañón’s thought, Rafaelito turns to the physician as an authority for defending the third sex. The character’s ideas on *intersexualidad* lead to hilarious dialogues like the following:

—Ya sabéis lo que dice el doctor Marañón—advirtió cierto día—. Que todo hombre lleva dentro una marica dormida.
—Pues la tuya debe de haber tomado café—sentenció la bella Chelito. (203)

[ ‘You already know what Dr. Marañón says,’ he said one day. ‘That every man has a fairy asleep within him.’ ‘Well yours must have had coffee,’ retorted the beautiful Chelito.]

In the midst of this humor, one of Rafaelito’s interlocutors recognizes that he has twisted Marañón’s arguments: “Pero, Rafaelito, por Dios, ¿cómo va a decir Marañón esas atrocidades?” (203) [But Rafaelito, for God’s sake, how is Marañón going to say those atrocities?]. The locas are well read in the medical literature of their day and acknowledge its heterosexist politics.

They are not alone as readers of Marañón. Not only are the chaste inverted to be discussed in Chapter 4 aware of sexological manuals from early twentieth-century Spain, but they are also creations of authors with close connections to the country’s scientific establishment. Whereas Retana’s locas reclaim notions of intersexualidad to promote their own brand of queer, modern pedagogy, their chaste counterparts seek instruction about how to repress their same-sex desire and to uphold the norms of the “little world” of traditional Spanish patriarchy (Berman 55).
Important Spanish intellectuals such as Miguel de Unamuno, José Ortega y Gasset, Ramiro de Maeztu, and Azorín wrote vehement invectives against the erotic literature of which Álvaro Retana was a proponent in the first third of the twentieth century. They even had plans to found an Antipornographic League in 1911 (Litvak 51-52; Rivalan Frunción 25-26; Zubiaurre “Velocipedismo” 217, 236). Retana is rumored to have dismissed such intellectuals with the pejorative label unamunos (Villena El ángel 53).

Literary critic Forbes Morlock notes the etymological link between seduction and education in a discussion of those themes in Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) (66).

Javier Barreiro provides a complete bibliography of Retana’s oeuvre (114-19). Three main considerations have determined my selection of the four short novels analyzed in this chapter. First, they are more readily available for consultation than other texts by Retana because they have contemporary editions. Although I quote from the original texts of *El veneno de la aventura* and *Mi novia y mi novio*, I also list newer editions by Lily Litvak and Editorial Odisea in the bibliography. Litvak’s edition of *El veneno de la aventura* lacks the prologue and illustrations from the original. Luis Antonio de Villena has published a facsimile edition of *Flor del mal* to accompany his biography *El ángel de la frivolidad* [The Angel of Frivolity]. I quote from Odisea’s contemporary edition of *A Sodoma en tren botijo*. Second, previous scholars have placed these texts among those which most foreground sexual relations between male characters (Cleminson and Vázquez García ‘Los Invisibles’ 244-45; Mira De Sodoma 155-75). To the best of my knowledge, however, there are no previous readings of *El veneno de la aventura*. Finally, these texts intensify the sort of self-reflexivity found in many, though not all, of Retana’s novels. In doing so, they expose the author’s ideas about how literature functions, especially in relation to queer desire. For less reflexive texts typical of Retana’s melodramatic and sensationalistic vein, see *Una noche de Carnaval en Niza* [A Carnival Night in Nice] (La Novela Corta, 1922) or the text (not the prologue) of *Los ambiguos* [The Ambiguous Ones] (La Novela de Hoy, 1922). For brief summaries of other novels by Retana, see Villena (El ángel 27-43, 59-63, 85-89).

Given the diversity of meanings ascribed to the word queer in academic and activist settings today, any definition is necessarily open to debate. Discussions that have influenced my understanding of queer resistance against heteronormativity include Gayle S. Rubin’s analysis of attitudes towards sexuality in the West in “Thinking Sex” (9-16), Eve Kosofosky Sedgwick’s reflection on sexual variation in *Epistemology of the Closet* (22-27), and Judith Butler’s explanation of the heterosexual matrix in *Gender Trouble* (47-106). Summaries of debates surrounding the word queer, particularly with respect to its relation to class, race, gender, and non-normative heterosexuality appear in Nikki Sullivan (37-80, 99-135, 151-88) and Donald E. Hall (1-111).

In an analysis of Retana’s short novel *El príncipe que quiso ser princesa* [The Prince who Wished to Be a Princess] (1920), critic Isabel Clúa Ginés notes that most previous scholars have detected homoerotic elements in Retana’s literature (43-49). Without disputing this finding, she emphasizes that his novels also tend to “abrir el abanico del deseo e insertar el homoerotismo en un panorama más amplio” [to open the fan of desire and to insert homoeroticism into a wider panorama], a panorama that I call queer (47).

Ramón Pérez de Ayala’s *A.M.D.G.* (1910) includes scenes of homosexual abuse of boys in a Jesuit boarding school. Ricardo Krauel explores the conjunction of anticlericism and homosexuality in the novel (41-49).

Compare Retana’s statement with Faust’s full speech in Goethe’s play:

> Two souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast,
> And either would be severed from its brother;
> The one holds fast with joyous earthy lust
> Onto the world of man with organs clinging;

Chapter Three Notes
The other soars impassioned from the dust,
To realms of lofty forebears winging. (l. 1112-17)

8 For introductions to Retana’s biography and works, see Javier Barreiro (89-122), Antonio Cruz Casado (“Álvaro Retana”), Jacqueline Heuer, Alberto Mira (De Sodoma 155-175), Vincenc Vernet Pons (35-62), and Villena (“Álvaro Retana”; El ángel; Introduction 5-14).

9 Villena calls his biography El ángel de la frivolidad a relato [story] and a biografía literaria [literary biography] (103).

10 Serge Salaün provides an exhaustive history of the género ínfimo and cuplé in Madrid between 1900 and 1936. He tends to emphasize the alienating aspects of the cuplé as mass culture and to question its capacity to modify patriarchal gender norms (79, 98, 135, 167-201). More recently, Pepa Anastasio has contested this analysis by studying politically subversive and feminist aspects of the cuplé in Barcelona.

11 Barreiro analyzes the erotic metaphors in an ample selection of Retana’s cuplés (101-10).

12 See the catalog of Retana’s figurines compiled by Andrés Peláez Martín.

13 For variants on this anecdote, see Barreiro (94), Mira (De Sodoma 175), and Villena (El ángel 94).

14 For works written in dialogue with stage directions, see Carnaval [Carnival] (La Novela de Hoy, 1924) and “Caperucita llora…” [“Little Red Riding Hood Cries...”] (Mis mejores cuentos 133-44). Flor del mal and La conquista del pájaro azul [The Conquest of the Blue Bird] (La Novela de Hoy, 1925) display characteristics of epistolary fiction.

15 Eroticism takes second stage to crime in Una noche de carnaval en Niza and to fantasy and horror reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe in “La dama del salón de Mornant” [“The Lady of the Mornant Room”] (Mis mejores cuentos 9-30).

16 For theoretical elucidations of paratexts that have influenced my language here, see Gérard Genette (Paratexts) and Jacques Derrida (The Truth). Genette defines the space occupied by paratexts like titles, prefaces, and illustrations as a threshold, “a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned towards the world’s discourse about the text)” (1-2). Likewise, Derrida holds that a work’s parergon is “neither work (ergon) nor outside the work, neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below.” Instead, “it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work” (4).

17 See Christine Rivalan Guégo for an overview of the format, style, and function of the illustrations in commercial novels from early twentieth-century Spain (Lecturas gratas 91-97, 149-76). Carlos Reyero studies the disconnect between image and text in novels by Retana and Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent.

18 Retana dressed less modestly for other photographs. Images on the back covers of El encanto de la cama redonda [The Charm of the Round Bed] (La Novela de Hoy, 1922) and Lolita, buscadora de emociones [Lolita, Seeker of Emotions] (La Novela de Hoy, 1923) show him wearing a night robe opened to reveal his chest.

19 Misia Darrys may be an invention of Retana. Cruz Casado was unable to locate her name in the Revue Artistique in the National Library in Paris (“Álvaro Retana” 45).

20 Rivalan Guégo offers a broad analysis of the promotional materials developed by commercial publishing houses in Spain in the early 1900s (Lectura gratas 120-47).
María del Carmen Alfonso García has published a book-length study of Hoyos’s life and works. For shorter overviews, see Cruz Casado (“La novela erótica”), Fermín Jesús Gálvez Yagüe, Luis S. Granjel (“Vida”), and Mira (De Sodoma 128-42). José Antonio Sanz Ramírez’s doctoral dissertation examines Hoyos’s sources in Decadent and related literatures. Villena emphasizes the interpenetration of life and literature as part of Hoyos’s self-construction as a Decadent dandy (Corsarios 117-26; “A propósito”).

Various pre- and post-Franco writers have produced verbal portraits of Hoyos in memoirs, novels, and poems. See the bibliography in Gálvez Yagüe (321-26). Granjel offers an ample selection of examples (“Vida”).

In his introduction to a contemporary edition of Aromas, Villena also argues that the collection epitomizes the themes and stylistic devices of Hoyos’s Decadent works more generally (“Antonio” 12-13).

For analyses of Hoyos’s peculiar brand of eroticism, see Begona Sáez Martínez (“Eros”), Alfonso García (121-31), and Cruz Casado (“La novela erótica”). These scholars have not yet used the word queer to characterize the sexual behaviors and desires in this literature. Still, their descriptions signal the applicability of the term as it is defined in this chapter. Sáez Martínez writes that Hoyos cultivates a fiercely anti-bourgeois, pervers, and cursed Decadent eros (par. 31).

In a reading of two short novels from Hoyos’s 1917 collection Novelas aristocráticas [Aristocratic Novels], Luisa Elena Delgado also notes an ambivalent equation between Decadence and poison in the texts: Decadence is both “el tipo de arte donde late la vida auténtica” [the type of art where authentic life pulses] and “un veneno que intoxica y corrode” [a venom that intoxicates and corrodes] (117). Delgado’s study focuses on the relationship between male artist and female characters in the novels under analysis.

For an extensive analysis of her life and works, see Concepción Núñez Rey’s biography Carmen de Burgos. Núñez Rey (Introduction 9-51) and Catherine Davies (117-36) offer brief overviews in Spanish and English, respectively.

In the Spanish context, regeneracionismo refers to a wide-ranging program of political, social, economic, and cultural reform in the face of perceived threats to the nation such as political deadlock between Conservatives and Liberals, rural and urban workers’ alliances, and the 1898 Spanish-American War. Figures generally associated with this movement include writers classified by traditional literary histories in the Generation of 1898 (Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, Antonio Machado) and their immediate precursors (Joaquín Costa) (Balfour “The Loss”). The regeneracionistas’ search for a national identity often focused on the supposed “valour of Spanish men, their highly developed sense of honour, and their ‘manliness’” (30). Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García have studied the homophobic potential of this patriarchal rhetoric (‘Los Invisibles’ 175-215).

Although Burgos makes some allusions to the late nineteenth-century aesthetic typically called Realism in El veneno del arte, her understanding of literary realism involves a longer tradition of Spanish artists including Diego Velázquez and Miguel de Cervantes. I avoid capitalizing realism to acknowledge that what Burgos understands for realism in art is not limited to the type of literature defended in Spain by nineteenth-century novelists such as Benito Pérez Galdós or Emilia Paro Bazán. More broadly, it seems to include most art based on the observation and “reflection” of social relations in a concrete time and place.

Aside from El veneno del arte, Burgos’s novels Ellas y ellos o ellos y ellas [The Girls and the Guys or the Guys and the Girls] (1917) and Quiero vivir mi vida [I Want to Live My Life] (1931) also provide conflictive readings of queer sexualities, including male homosexuality and lesbianism. Amy Joanne Bell (75-167), Clúa Ginés (55-59), Helena Establier Pérez (122-45), Krauel (138-56), and Susan Larson (Introduction vii-xii) have written on these texts.
For an overview of bohemian subcultures in Madrid in the late 1800s and early 1900s, see Barreiro, Allen W. Phillips, and Pedro M. Piñero and Rogelio Reyes. Cleminson argues that there is a strong queer component in the sexual behavior of Spanish bohemians at the turn-of-the-century, although some of his literary examples deal with characters (for instance, the protagonist of the 1935 novel *La antorcha apagada* [*The Extinguished Torch*] by Eduardo Zamacois) whose solid socioeconomic privilege distinguishes them from proudly impoverished bohemians (“La antorcha”).

Robin Ragan explores *La mujer fría* [*The Cold Woman*] as another novel by Burgos indicative of her discomfort with Decadent literature. Burgos’s distaste for Decadence may have been linked to her friendship with Max Nordau and her probable familiarity with *Degeneration* (Establier Pérez 79-80; Núñez Rey Carmen de Burgos 145, 334, 456, 522).

Artemio Precioso published 61 numbers of *La Novela de Noche* between 1924 and 1926. Novels were issued every two weeks and contained approximately 120 pages. For a study and catalogue of the collection, see Julia Labrador Ben et. al. (269-351).

Besides the cover portrait of a melancholy cupletista, *El veneno de la aventura* contains twenty drawings by Guillén of flamboyantly dressed dancers and their effeminate adolescent companions. There is no strong connection between the generic images and the novel’s plot and characters. As Rivalan Guégo notes with respect to the evolution of the illustrations in Spain’s short novel collections, over time, the drawings became increasingly stereotypical and distant from the texts themselves (*Lecturas gratas* 92). Guillén’s illustrations for Retana are examples of “ilustraciones comodines que permitían al artista ganar tiempo” (97) [generic illustrations that allowed artists to save time].

For instance, the novelist Blanca de los Ríos “sees Don Juan (a degenerate with profligate ways) as a symbol of the degeneration of the Spanish nation” in her novel *Las hijas de don Juan* [*The Daughters of Don Juan*] (1907) (Wright 25). On the other hand, Ramiro de Maeztu’s book *Don Quijote, Don Juan y La Celestina* (1927) proposes that “Spaniards should seek to combine Don Quixote’s capacity for selfless love, with La Celestina’s wisdom and Don Juan’s brute energy as a paradigm for the regeneration of Spain” (Wright 43).


This passage invites comparison to Marañón’s opinion that Zorrilla’s Don Juan is the “más repleto de substancia donjuanesca” (“Notas” 39) [most replete with Don Juanesque substance].

Previous scholarship on Retana has focused primarily on his transgression of bourgeois social norms. Villena in particular construes what he sees as Retana’s frivolity as an ideology opposed to conservative middle-class morals (*El ángel* 81-84). “Consideraciones sobre la frivolidad” [“Considerations on Frivolity”] in *En ángel de la frivolidad* uses Retana as a vehicle to advance Villena’s own defense of frivolity as developed in other works like the novel *Divino*.

Mira’s brief reading of *Mi novia y mi novio* and *Flor del mal* identifies them as Retana’s novelistic biography and examines camp strategies by which Retana presents himself as both a bourgeois gentleman who pretends to be a pervert, and a pervert who pretends to be a bourgeois gentleman (*De Sodoma* 163-65). Like *El veneno de la aventura*, *Mi novia* originally formed part of a longer novel, *Mi alma desnuda* [*My Soul Laid Bare*] (1923) (Villena *El ángel* 48). Vernet Pons has studied the relationship between the short novel and its predecessor (331-36, 475-76).

Hispanist Akiko Tsuchiya uses the terms “sexual” and “textual seduction” in passing in an analysis of female reading in Emilia Pardo Bazán’s novel *La tribuna* [*The Platform*] (1883) (104).
Translator Brian Singer notes that “[i]n French, the word duel means both duel/dual” (42). By calling seduction a duel and agonistic relation, Baudrillard “is clearly playing on the double meaning of the word—agonal relations and reciprocal challenges” (42).

Jane Gallop reaches a similar conclusion from a psychoanalytic perspective informed by writings on seduction by Freud and Lacan. She writes that “[t]he dichotomy active/passive is always equivocal in seduction, that is what distinguishes it from rape” (Daughter’s 56). For an overview of theoretical approaches to seduction, especially those of psychoanalytic and feminist bent, see Dianne Hunter’s edited volume.

Erotic novelists from early twentieth-century Spain played frequently with the sexual connotations of the word polvo, as in the title of Joaquín Belda’s 1916 novel Aquellos polvos [Those Dusts/Powders/Fucks].

Carmen Flores was a historical cupletista in the circle of Retana (Villena El ángel 16). See Anasastio for a feminist analysis of her songs (206-08).

The song Flor del mal, with lyrics by Eduardo Montesinos and music by José Padilla, was sung by Raquel Meller in the Madrid-Cinema in 1922. Since Meller was among the most successful of Spanish cupletistas (she sang in New York in 1926, acted in Spanish and French films, sold perfumes and ties with her name, and married the well-known Guatemalan writer Enrique Gómez Carrillo), it seems likely that Retana took advantage of the title of her song, itself indebted to Baudelaire, to market his novel (Salaün 85-86, 90, 95). There is a broad parallel between the female protagonists of the song and novel, since both oscillate between a desire for “pure” love and a “fall” into disrepute. The song’s refrain is: “Y por mi eterna tristeza / y por mi sino fatal, / era una flor sin aroma, / ¡flor del mal!” (cited in Salaün 310-11) [Both because of my eternal sadness / and because of my dismal fate, / I was an odorless flower, / flower of evil!].

I have published a reading of A Sodoma en tren botijo with some points of contact with the present interpretation elsewhere (Zamostny 55-60). Mira discusses the novel in relation to camp aesthetics (De Sodoma 169-74; “After Wilde” 32-38).

Rivalan Guégo notes that in short novels from early twentieth-century Spain, it is common for characters to interrupt their reading at the beginning of the diegesis, at the very moment when extradiegetic readers begin their own reading (Lecturas gratas 112). An examination of intradiegetic readings within the short novel series confirms that characters are voracious consumers of literature by Wilde and the French Decadents (Rivalan Guégo Lecturas gratas 101-121; Frución 60-61).

Sergio Constán offers a book-length study of the reception, both positive and negative, of Oscar Wilde and his writings in Spain between 1882 and 1936.

Although he once claimed that he was turned off to Don Quijote after being forced to read it as a student (see the “Autobiografía” reproduced in Peláez Martín n.p.), Retana makes frequent allusions to the work and its author in his writings (El crepúsculo 1-3, 92; Fortuny 14). La carne de tablado begins: “En uno de los barrios más populares de Madrid, de cuyo nombre no hay para qué acordarse, no ha mucho tiempo que existía una frutería completamente viuda…” (cited in Villena El ángel 40) [In one of the most popular neighborhoods of Madrid, whose name there is no reason to remember, not long ago there existed an entirely widowed fruit seller...].

Cleminson and Vázquez García note historical precedents for the arrest of locas at public and private gatherings in Madrid from as early as the 1880s (‘Los Invisibles’ 246-47).
Chapter 4

Gretchen’s Place: Chaste Inverts between Tradition and Modernity in *La antorcha apagada* and *El ángel de Sodoma*

Mephistopheles: She has been waiting pitifully long;  
Stands by the window, sees the clouds, so free  
Across the city ramparts flee,  
Were I a little bird, thus goes her song.

—Goethe, *Faust* (ll. 3315-18)

Gretchen: What use is fleeing? Still they lie in wait for you.

—Goethe, *Faust* (l. 4545)

Marshall Berman’s reading of *Faust* would be incomplete without an analysis of Gretchen’s role in the play’s allegory of modern experience. If Mephistopheles represents the pleasures and dangers of modernization, and Faust stands for people who embrace innovation at any cost to become modern, then Gretchen embodies those who are torn between the desire for change and obligation to tradition. In this chapter, I compare two Spanish novels that construct the chaste invert as a character who occupies a similarly conflicted position. Like Gretchen, the protagonists of *El ángel de Sodoma* [The Angel of Sodom] (1928) by Alfonso Hernández-Catá (1885-1940) and *La antorcha apagada* [The Extinguished Torch] (1935) by Eduardo Zamacois (1873-1971) confront the tragic realization that neither time-honored nor progressive modes of life extend the possibility of personal and social well-being to inverts, defined in greater detail below as individuals deemed by the scientific discourses of the day to display a mismatch between their biological sex, gender, and sexual desire. The stories of these characters show that in the 1920s and early 30s, the chaste invert figured as a focal point for interactions between Spanish sex reformers and novelists as they sought to distinguish between
tradition and modernity and to define modern practices and attitudes regarding reproduction, child-rearing, and sexual variation. *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* reveal the complexity of these encounters while situating their protagonists alongside Gretchen at an impasse between the weight of tradition and longing for change.

Experts on Goethe’s *Faust* emphasize that Gretchen is a multifaceted character (Furst; Schweitzer). On the one hand, Faust believes that she is a model of “passivity, resignation, and silent acceptance,” “goodness and innocence,” and “modesty and purity,” a product of the patriarchal conventions of her provincial hometown (Furst 48). He fails to recognize that Gretchen feels entrapped by traditional norms even before his arrival. As Mephistopheles notes in the first epigraph, she has long sought to escape the limitations of what Faust calls her “little world” (l. 3355). Later on, it is only due to feelings of intense guilt induced by the town’s accusations concerning the death of her brother, mother, and illegitimate child that Gretchen capitulates to the community’s standards and commits suicide in prison. Her fear of the town’s inevitable retaliation is clear in the second epigraph, her response to Faust’s plea that she follow him to safety.

In spite of objections by one critic that Berman’s interpretation of *Faust* makes Gretchen represent a “closed, narrow world” and equates “femininity with tradition” (Felski 2), Berman strives to foreground Goethe’s portrayal of Gretchen as a richly-drawn character aligned with neither her community’s conservatism nor the Faustian will to growth. His central contention is that Gretchen is “a more dynamic, interesting and genuinely tragic figure than she is usually made out to be,” particularly by readers who notice only Faust’s idealizations of her “simple innocence and spotless purity” (Berman 51). One sign of Gretchen’s complexity is that upon falling in love with Faust,
she has to build up and maintain a double life against the surveillance of family, neighbors, priests, against all the suffocating pressures of the closed small-town world. She has to learn to defy her own guilty conscience, a conscience that has the power to terrorize her far more violently than any external force. As her feelings clash with her old social role, she comes to believe that her own needs are legitimate and important, and to feel a new kind of self-respect. (54)

In the long term, it is the difficulty of sustaining her concessions to her town and to Faust that leads Gretchen to choose death as a route out of both tradition and modernity.

The heroine’s double life and her truncated evolution towards self-acceptance resonate with many aspects of the life stories of the inverts in *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada*. Faced with the panoptical presence of their family and social milieu, they too respond by internalizing the call to meet heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality. While Zamacois’s protagonist is never able to contest these norms, Hernández-Catá’s character does eventually seek to “ser el José-María verdadero” [to be the true José María], or to live happily with what he perceives as his innate gender and sexual identities (199). For both characters, the impossibility of achieving fulfillment as an invert in either a traditional or a modern order leads to a kind of suicide. The death is figurative in *La antorcha apagada*, where the protagonist’s entrance into a suspiciously conservative modernity is contingent upon his effort to “correct” his inversion. It is literal in *El ángel de Sodoma*. In the scene used to introduce this project, the main character throws himself under a train after realizing that he cannot find contentment in his provincial birthplace or in Paris, a paradigmatic modern metropolis. Since the protagonists never manage to act upon their desire for men, I call them *chaste inverts*.

Given the antiquated and pejorative connotations of the English word *invert* and the Spanish *invertido* today, my use of the term requires some definition and justification
before I discuss this chapter’s novels at greater length. In the following pages, an invert is an individual who violates the heteronormative standards set forth by the majority of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexologists regarding the proper alignment of a person’s biological sex, gender, and sexual desire. According to these norms, a person with a male body should conform to prevailing ideals of masculinity and should desire a person with a female body who is also acceptably feminine by the measures of the time.¹

Not every departure from this model would have fit within the semantic range of the word *invertido* as it was used in Spain in the early 1900s. In their study of the term’s evolution in scientific texts and popular usage, historians Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García note that before the 1920s, *invertido* designated individuals whose biological sex did not match their gendered behavior, even when their libido was directed towards people of the opposite sex. The term expanded beyond gender deviance to encompass desire after World War I. By the time Hernández-Catá and Zamacois wrote the texts analyzed in this chapter, *invertido* was the term used for effeminate males who desired other males (*Hermaphroditism* 125-26; ‘*Los Invisibles*’ 10-12, 96).

This shift coincided with the increasing currency of other Spanish words such as *homosexual* and *intersexual*. Their relationship to *invertido* requires careful analysis if the terminological mélange of *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* is to make any sense. Cleminson and Vázquez García have found that early references to *homosexuales* in Spain make *homosexualismo* or *homosexualidad* a predominaently sexual category centered on same-sex desire. While a biologically male *invertido*’s desire for other males was always made visible by his troublesome gender, the sexual inclinations

²
of a *homosexual* were not necessarily recognizable on that basis (*Los Invisibles* 12, 107).

From a theoretical standpoint, this distinction would be expected to hold in Gregorio Marañón’s theories on *intersexualidad*, whose development in the 1920s culminated in the treatise *La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales* [*The Evolution of Sexuality and Intersexual States*] in 1930. In that work, Marañón treats *homosexualidad* as a particular type of *estado intersexual* (*La evolución* 607-32). As discussed in the previous chapter, Marañón posits that the ideal male and female are the result of evolutionary processes by which a sexually indeterminate fetus undergoes sexual differentiation (3.II.D.). Individuals who do not fully pass through these processes fall into distinct intersexual states depending on how traces of indifferentiation affect their physiological and psychological configurations. Within this scheme, male homosexuals are a class of intersexuals with male bodies and an ostensibly female sexual attraction to other males (Aresti *Médicos* 120-30; Vandebosch 84-106).

Nevertheless, Marañón tends to confuse his distinction between homosexuality and other intersexual states by finding signs of same-sex desire inscribed on the bodies and in the comportment of homosexuals. He observes that “[l]a piel del hombre homosexual suele ser delicada y feminoide” (612) [the skin of the homosexual man tends to be delicate and feminine] and that “[e]n cierto número de homosexuales, la apariencia invertida se acentúa por la adopción de vestidos, adornos y detalles, cosméticos correspondientes al sexo contrario” (613) [in a certain number of homosexuals, an inverted appearance is emphasized by the adoption of dresses, accessories, and cosmetics]
belonging to the opposite sex]. Homosexuality as an intersexual state marked by same-sex desire merges seamlessly into inversion as a category of gender and sexual deviance.

This terminological slippage also figures noticeably in this chapter’s novels, both of which draw upon Marañón’s theories of intersexuality and one of which (the 1929 second edition of El ángel de Sodoma) bears a prologue by the doctor himself, as well as an epilogue by the liberal criminologist and lawyer Luis Jiménez de Asúa. In the texts and paratexts, the terms intersexualidad, homosexualismo, and inversión appear alongside other vaguely scientific or moralizing terms—degeneración, desorientación sexual, perversión genital, inutilidad, contaminación andrógina, among others—in reference to the protagonists.

Consequently, my decision to call these characters chaste inverts is partially a matter of convenience and is not meant to obscure the terminological indecision of the novels themselves. At the same time, the expression does present advantages over others like chaste homosexual or chaste intersexual in relation to the characteristics attributed by Hernández-Catá and Zamacois to their protagonists. In both novels, the “ambiguous” physiology (delicate facial features, soft bodies) and stereotypically feminine (submissive, nurturing) psychology of the otherwise male characters is as important to their self-understanding and social definition as their desire for traditionally gendered males. In fact, this desire is presented not as homo- but heterosexual, since both characters often imagine themselves as females desiring males. Current English connotations of the word homosexual, as well as some early twentieth-century Spanish usages, do not adequately capture this notion of heterosexual desire between similarly sexed bodies. On the other hand, Marañón’s ideas on intersexuality encompass a wider-
ranging gamut of sexual and gender variations than the particularities presented by the characters of the novels at hand.

By naming these figures chaste inverts, I also hope to distinguish them from the locas and members of the tercer sexo who appear in the works by Álvaro Retana analyzed in Chapter 3. Popular terms like loca and medicalized words such as invertido are similar in that they refer to people who display comparable breaches of heteronormative models of sex, gender, and desire. They differ in the attitude they imply towards those infringements. In the previous chapter, I used the word queer in relation to Retana’s locas because they willfully accentuate their unconventional gender and sexual performances in order to join a sexual subculture and to contest the heteronormative impositions of doctors like Marañón. Queer seems out of place in a discussion of chaste inverts, since they generally uphold hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality by viewing their own variations from a medical standpoint as pathologies. While this chapter locates some queer subversions of heterosexist prejudice in El ángel de Sodoma and La antorcha apagada, it privileges contemporaneous Spanish terms over the word queer when naming the protagonists’ gender and sexual identifications.

The terminological difficulties surrounding the novels are common to other early twentieth-century works featuring invert protagonists. Examples include Spanish commercial writer Vicente Díez de Tejada’s short novel Tántalo [Tantalus] (La Novela Corta, 1919), Carmen de Burgos’s long novel Quiero vivir mi vida [I Want to Live My Life] (1931), and English novelist Radclyffe Hall’s classic The Well of Loneliness (1928), published in the same year as El ángel de Sodoma. Of these, I focus on the novels by Hernández-Catá and Zamacois because their plots, characters, and themes are sufficiently
similar so as to foreground divergences between the texts as significant measures of their varying conclusions regarding the nexus of chaste inverts, professional and literary discourses, and tradition and modernity.

On a general level, *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* have much in common. Both are long novels by commercially successful authors who founded their careers on works known for their depiction of physical and psychological “aberrations.” In keeping with that precedent, both texts draw upon scientific and legal perspectives on sexuality to narrate the life of a chaste invert while echoing or endorsing a nominally liberal call for conditional compassion for inverts on the ultimately homophobic ground that they are not sinners or criminals but errors of Nature deserving of pity so long as they seek to remedy their flaw (*Mira De Sodoma* 195-201). Finally, both novels situate the experiences of their protagonist in a context of transition between traditional and modern modes of life.

Beyond these broad similarities, there are important differences between how the novels conceptualize tradition and modernity and situate scientific sex reform *vis-à-vis* notions of the modern. Whereas *La antorcha apagada* frames the shift from tradition to modernity as the replacement of religious belief by scientific thought about sex, *El ángel de Sodoma* presents the transition as a movement between the productivist culture of a provincial Spanish city, with all its remnants of feudalism, and the consumerist culture of Paris. When scientific discourses appear in Hernández-Catá’s novel, they serve to safeguard traditional life in the province. In other words, what is presented as modern science in *La antorcha apagada* is shown to support tradition as it is conceived in *El ángel de Sodoma.*
The texts and their vision of sex reform thus vary as a function of the way they privilege distinct historical transformations as the measure of modern change: science’s encroachment on religion, the move from an ethic of production to one of consumption, or the increasing appeal of metropolitan over provincial life. These indices have also shaped the thought of scholars who have examined the social organization of sexuality in Europe from a diachronic perspective. Later on in this chapter, I turn to the work of intellectual historians Lawrence Birken and Michel Foucault, literary critic Michael Tratner, and sociologist Henning Bech to characterize the relationship between sexuality and a range of social and economic shifts in the novels.

Besides differences in the way they define modernity, the works also diverge in their evaluation of the relative merits of tradition and change. *La antorcha apagada* draws upon the conventions of the *roman à thèse* as described by Susan Rubin Suleiman in *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (1983) in order to argue for the supremacy of scientific rationality over outmoded religious and social customs in matters concerning sex and child-rearing. According to the prologue and epilogue by Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa, *El ángel de Sodoma* performs a similar operation and is best seen as a programmatic statement in favor of a scientific view of inversion promoting conditional compassion for chaste inverts. This reading does not acknowledge that the novel eschews the textual devices through which *La antorcha apagada* attempts to create a Manichean divide between triumphant modernity and antiquated tradition. *El ángel de Sodoma* instead mobilizes Aristotelian notions of tragedy to dramatize the impossibility of wagering for either change or stasis without irreparable loss.
Regardless of the significant variations between the novels, both suggest that the chaste invert is out of place in both tradition and modernity, however these are construed. In *La antorcha apagada*, the protagonist is a product of an obsolete sexual regime and can enter the modern order of science only by extinguishing his own sexual variation. In *El ángel de Sodoma*, he has a chance to live as an invert in Paris, but is ultimately unable to do so due to the pull of his home city. Unsatisfied with the little worlds into which they are born, but unable to escape them without eradicating their inversion, the protagonists occupy Gretchen’s place in the Faustian allegory of modernity.

I. Contexts

The complex publication history and content of this chapter’s texts frustrates efforts to set them in any one historical context or to link them through causal relationships. Although *La antorcha apagada* was published in Madrid by the Sociedad General Española de Librería in 1935, the work draws much of its material from two short novels published by Zamacois in the 1920s (Cordero Gómez 469, 474, 621). Nine of the nineteen chapters reproduce parts of *Una pobre vida [A Miserable Life]* (*La Novela de Noche*, 1924), from which the novel takes its characters and plot. A tenth chapter replicates passages from *La tragedia de un hombre que no sabía a dónde ir [The Tragedy of a Man who Didn’t Know Where to Go]* (*La Novela de Hoy*, 1926). Hence, much of *La antorcha apagada* appeared before *El ángel de Sodoma*, whose trajectory is equally eventful. Published in Madrid by Mundo Latino in 1928, Hernández-Catá’s novel was popular enough to merit a second edition with the same publisher one year later. The new edition included a 30-page prologue by Marañón and a 16-page epilogue by Jiménez de Asúa (the novel itself contains 188 pages). For reasons to be described below, this
updated text was reformatted by the publishing house El Collao (Valparaíso) for release in Chile in 1929.

This assemblage of texts and paratexts is closely intertwined with sexology and the sex reform movements of the 1920s and early 30s in Spain and abroad. In the prologue to La tragedia de un hombre, Zamacois explains that he wrote the novel “con un propósito moralizador, que los maestros Gregorio Marañón, César Juarros y otros han de aplaudir. Nuestra raza decae, y debemos curarla o señalar, al menos, los caminos que guían a la salud” (Precioso Prologue 9) [with a moralizing purpose that the masters Gregorio Marañón, César Juarros, and others ought to applaud. Our race is declining, and we should cure it, or, at least, point out the paths to health]. References to racial decadence connect the novel to a rapidly expanding interest in sex reform and eugenics throughout Europe in the early 1900s, intensified in Spain by fears about the country’s decline due to nineteenth-century political turmoil and the 1898 Spanish-American War.

Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa were major players in reform by the time they composed their pieces for the second edition of El ángel de Sodoma. By 1929, both Marañón’s Ensayos sobre la vida sexual [Essays on Sexual Life] (1926) and Jiménez de Asúa’s Libertad de amar y derecho a morir: Ensayos de un criminalista sobre eugenias, eutanasia, endocrinología [The Freedom to Love and the Right to Die: A Criminologist’s Essays on Eugenics, Euthanasia, Endocrinology] (1928) had gone through three editions. The protagonist of El ángel de Sodoma turns to books of this type when he visits a municipal library to read a scientific manual in search of a “cure” for his inversion (169).

These connections between the novels and professional discourses on sex call for multiple levels of contextualization when exploring how Zamacois and Hernández-Catá
situate chaste inverts and sex reform *vis-à-vis* varying notions of tradition and modernity. In this section, I examine *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* in relation to three contexts defined by progressively shorter time frames. I begin by locating the growth of the sexual sciences in the mid-1800s to a series of long-term shifts in European culture. These changes play themselves out on a reduced scale in the novels and form the basis for their portrayal of traditional and modern ways of life. They also influenced the politics of sex reform and eugenics across Europe after World War I, to which I turn my attention in order to clarify the liberal notion of conditional compassion for inverts championed more or less problematically by Marañón, Jiménez de Asúa, Zamacois, and Hernández-Catá. Finally, I discuss events in Spain in 1928 and 1933 that likely provided the immediate inspiration for the novels.

I.A. The Sexual Sciences in Historical Perspective

*La antorcha apagada* and *El ángel de Sodoma* are structured around historical transformations regarding sex experienced differently by their protagonists. In the text by Zamacois, the change is embodied by two generations of a bourgeois family in Madrid in the 1920s and 30s. Whereas the parents look to Catholicism for guidance on reproduction and child-rearing, their son adopts a scientific approach to sex when he discovers his inversion. In Hernández-Catá’s novel, the shift coincides with the protagonist’s mobility in space. After growing up as the eldest male in an aristocratic household zealously guarded by the inhabitants of an unidentified Spanish port city, the character moves to Paris and becomes an anonymous foreigner who need no longer sacrifice his personal happiness as an invert to the dictates of a heteronormative honor code.\textsuperscript{10}
These stories come into sharp focus in light of Lawrence Birken’s book *Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and the Emergence of a Culture of Abundance, 1871-1914* (1988). Birken’s purpose is to connect what Michel Foucault calls “a veritable discursive explosion” about sex in the nineteenth-century sexual sciences to wider cultural and economic trends in Europe (*History* 17). His panoramic vision, like that of Foucault, offers a general chronology of sweeping historical shifts. Undoubtedly, an empirical approach focused on particular countries or territories would reveal that such changes took place unevenly across time, space, and social class, and continue to occur today. By drawing on Birken’s theories to discuss Spanish novels, I do not mean to suggest that they suffice to explain the specificities of Spain’s historical development. My narrower purpose is to elaborate a working vocabulary to name the concrete trajectory of change in this chapter’s texts.

That said, *La antorcha apagada* and *El ángel de Sodoma* do support Birken’s thesis that sexology emerged at a late stage in the prolonged transition between holism and individualism in Europe. As defined by Birken, holist ideologies posit that there are essential differences between the members of a society and that these differences are determined by a transcendent divine law that divides the social body into clearly defined castes. Conversely, individualist ideologies assume that the members of a society are essentially similar and that they come to occupy varied social positions due to processes of differentiation governed by immanent natural laws (Birken 4-5).

Birken examines feudal, productivist, and consumerist social configurations as three phases in holism’s gradual erosion. In feudal thought, God ordered society into estates based on the social functions of war, prayer, and work (5). By the seventeenth
and eighteenth centuries, enlightened political economists such as John Locke began to recognize that divisions between the estates were actually the result of differentiation. A man could move between social classes (as opposed to castes) by using his labor power to accumulate property. This insight established the foundation for a bourgeois ideology of productivism that defined the (male) individual as a (re)producer with universal needs (5-6, 22). Drawing extensively on Birken’s work, literary critic Michael Tratner explains that the highest values of the productivist ethic include hard work, financial growth, and procreative sex within marriage (65).

While the new bourgeois order undermined holism by abolishing castes in the form of the estates, it reinstated a holist ideology in the sphere of the family by drawing a caste-like distinction between males and females. This division remained strong until the late nineteenth century, when evolutionary theories of human development posited a common origin for the sexes and extended natural laws of differentiation to the realm of sex. Seen in this light, Marañón’s theory of intersexuality belongs to a field of ideas including observations by Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud about the human embryo’s sexual indeterminacy and the child’s polymorphous libido (Birken 6-8).

These scientific critiques of sexual difference appeared around the same time that marginalist political economists such as Alfred Marshall and J.B. Clark began to question productivist thought on universal human needs with their concept of falling marginal utility, or the notion that an object’s value is relative to its availability. The marginalists laid the ground for a shift from productivism to consumerism in the last decades of the nineteenth century by reconceptualizing the individual as a consumer with idiosyncratic desires (Birken 22-31). Noting the parallel between scientific and economic notions
concerning the flexibility of sexual desire and the contingency of individual wants, Tratner explains that a consumerist ethic values relaxing, buying on credit, and having sex for pleasure over the productivist ideal of (re)production (65).

Although Birken does not highlight the role of urban growth in the late 1800s as a stimulus for the spread of consumerism, he does mention in passing that cities promoted individualism and its emphasis on unique personal desire (131). Sociologist Henning Bech echoes this observation when he lists aspects of urban life that make cities a privileged space of economic and sexual consumption:

the crowd, the constant flux of new people, the mutual strangeness and indifference; the feeling of motion, options, sexual excitement, potential danger and surveillance; the possibilities for moving and following, for using gaze [sic], sending signals, disappearing in the crowd, etc. In addition, the presence of facilities—public urinals, cafés, display windows—for variation, recreation and a little more stationary contact. (159)

These urban phenomena figure prominently in El ángel de Sodoma’s depiction of Paris as a modern metropolis where consumerist individualism has exposed the mythic foundations of holism’s faith in divinely ordained difference (Birken 4).

It is precisely in the deterioration of holism in the shift from productivist to consumerist ethics in nineteenth-century Europe that Birken situates the emergence of sexology (40-56). In this context, the sexual sciences were a sort of double-edged sword. Sexologists did indeed acknowledge that differences between the sexes were relative and that the libido lacked any single object. But by classifying a wide range of practices, desires, and anatomical variations as normal or abnormal, they sought to construct a natural law of sex as a barrier against the triumph of “anarchic” sexual relativism (49, 52).
One goal of this chapter’s readings of *La antorcha apagada* and *El ángel de Sodoma* is to show that the novels isolate distinct aspects of the historical transition from holism to individualism in their examination of the relationship of scientific sex reform to tradition and modernity. In *La antorcha apagada*, a generational shift between Catholic and scientific worldviews represents the exchange of a transcendent divine law for immanent natural laws of sex. Within this framework, sexology forms part of modernity’s displacement of religious tradition. In *El ángel de Sodoma*, on the other hand, the protagonist’s movement from a provincial city to Paris is a journey between a productivist regime with strong remnants of feudalism and a consumerist urban culture. Early in the novel, the character’s scientific views on sex work to preserve the productivist culture of the Spanish port. By locating sexology differently with respect to varying definitions of tradition and modernity, the novels confirm Birken’s conclusion that it is a contradictory field, poised at the threshold between validating and condemning notions of the individual as an idiosyncratic sexual consumer.

I.B. **Sex Reform, Eugenics, and Conditional Compassion: Spain in the European Context**

The tensions faced by nineteenth-century sexologists as they grappled with early signs of a shift between productivist and consumerist cultures remained an active force in the 1920s and early 30s at the height of activity by Spanish and European sex reformers and eugenicists. The ideals of sex reform, including the call for conditional compassion for inverteds, comprise a significant intertext in *La antorcha apagada* and *El ángel de Sodoma*. 
Following World War I, sex reform referred to a range of initiatives in the sexual sciences, law, and pedagogy aimed at transforming social attitudes towards sex. The term’s semantic field often overlapped with that of eugenics, a word derived from the Greek eugenes [well-born] and defined by Francis Galton in 1883 as “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally” (cited in Sinclair 10). Following its inception in the late 1800s, eugenics developed in multiple directions that have since been classified by historians as “hard” or “Anglo-American” and “soft” or “Latin” varieties according to their varying prevalence in Great Britain, North America, and Germany, or France, Spain, and Latin America. While the hard-line approach sought to prevent the reproduction of the “unfit” through “negative” eugenic techniques such as sterilization, the Latin variation employed “positive” strategies to encourage the reproduction of the “fit.” In practice, Latin eugenicists displayed an interest in sexual hygiene and pedagogy that brought them into contact with sex reformers who did not narrowly associate themselves with eugenics (Cleminson Anarchism 42-56; Levine and Bashford).11

Although Spanish science and law witnessed an increasing interest in the sexual health of the territory’s population from the eighteenth century onwards, it was not until the early 1900s that large-scale sex reform projects were able to coalesce around efforts to reinvent the nation in the wake of nineteenth-century dynastic disputes, political deadlock between conservatives and liberals, and the loss of empire (Álvarez Peláez; Cleminson Anarchism 57-76). In his book Anarchism, Science and Sex: Eugenics in Eastern Spain, 1900-1937 (2000), Richard Cleminson outlines three phases in the consolidation of sex reform and eugenics in this period (77-81). Between 1900 and 1919,
Spanish doctors and lawyers wrote or translated a large number of sexological treatises for a specialized audience.\textsuperscript{12} During the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), these works were source material for a flood of popularizing magazines and hygiene manuals designed to merge expert discourses on sex with practical advice on family planning for middle-class readers.\textsuperscript{13} The spread of sexological knowledge to the general populace put sex on the agenda during the early years of the Second Republic (1931-1936), when the appointment of activists such as Marañón, Jiménez de Asúa, and Juarros to political posts in the Cortes provided institutional support for reform.

The foremost goal of the dissemination of sexology in Spain between 1900 and 1936 was to wrest attitudes about sex from the conservative grip of mainstream Spanish Catholicism and submit them to “rational” scientific thought. Sex reformers themselves often framed this process as a passage from backward tradition to modernity (Aresti, *Masculinidades* 192-202; Sinclair 5-6). Comparing different perspectives on homosexuality, for instance, Jiménez de Asúa writes in the epilogue to *El ángel de Sodoma* that the Catholic view that same-sex activity is a vice represents a fuerte anacronismo [strong anachronism] with respect to science’s interpretación moderna [modern interpretation] of homosexuality as a congenital defect (252, 242). In his prologue, Marañón also prides himself on the findings of *la ciencia moderna* (30) [modern science].

Given the frequent association of Europe with forward-looking change in the early twentieth-century writings of the *regeneracionistas*, one aspect of Spanish sex reform that bolstered its self-proclaimed modernity was its participation in a wider European and trans-Atlantic movement. The international scope of sex reform reached
its peak with the foundation of the Spanish chapter of the World League for Sex Reform under the Second Republic (Sinclair 85-100). Following Hispanist Alison Sinclair, I call the Spanish chapter the Liga and the wider organization the WLSR. The latter was founded in 1928 by the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, an advocate for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Germany. It attracted the participation of Spanish reformers for several years before the advent of the Republic made conditions ripe for the foundation of a full-fledged Spanish chapter. Convened in March of 1932, the Liga joined fifty-one scientists, lawyers, and educators under the presidency of Marañón.

Debate at the Liga’s first meeting centered on the WLSR’s ten planks of belief as published in the proceedings of a congress in Copenhagen in 1928 (Sinclair 16-17, 91-95). Several of these planks merit citation in full, as they articulate a set of ideals recognizable in La antorcha apagada and El ángel de Sodoma. The WLSR promoted:

3. Control of conception, so that procreation may be undertaken only deliberately, and with a due sense of responsibility.
4. Race betterment by the application of the knowledge of Eugenics. [...] 
6. A rational attitude towards sexually abnormal persons, and especially towards homosexuals, both male and female. [...] 
8. Disturbances of the sexual impulse to be regarded as more or less pathological phenomena, and not, as in the past, as crimes, vices or sins. 
9. Only those sexual acts to be considered criminal which infringe the sexual rights of another person. Sexual acts between responsible adults, undertaken by mutual consent, to be regarded as the private concern of those adults. 
10. Systematic sexual education. (cited in Sinclair 16-17)

Besides illustrating the relationship between sex reform and eugenics, these statements attest to the contradictory nature of European and Spanish sex reform, particularly with respect to inversion and homosexual practices. Whereas plank 9 could be read as a defense of private sexual acts between “responsible adults” of any sex and
gender, planks 6 and 8 insist that homosexual desire and its agents are “pathological” and “abnormal.” “Race betterment” in plank 4 could thus involve attempts to breed “disturbances of the sexual impulse” out of the species. Using Birken’s terminology, plank 9 accepts the idiosyncratic desires of individual sexual consumers (albeit within the confines implied by responsibility, adulthood, consent, and privacy), while the other planks circumscribe consumerist relativism within a natural law of sex that distinguishes between superior and inferior sexualities according to measures of health and normality.

Tensions between the planks came to a pitch in the Spanish Liga, where struggles over statements 6, 8, and 9 were intense. In general, the Spaniards considered the ninth plank’s implied tolerance for private homosexual relations between consenting adults too radical (Sinclair 73). They were more open to the eighth plank’s displacement of homosexuality and other “disturbances” from the realm of crime and vice into the domain of pathology (93). These opinions form the basis for comprensión condicional [conditional understanding] or exculpación estigmatizadora [a stigmatizing pardon] for inverts among early twentieth-century Spanish sex reformers (Mira De Sodoma 200; Aresti Masculinidades 218).

Marañón’s attitude towards inversion in his treatise La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales is a clear example of what I call conditional compassion. Following plank 8 of the WLSR, the physician emphasizes that inverts are not criminals or sinners, but victims of a pathology. As such, they are “tan responsable de su anormalidad como pudiera serlo el diabético de su glucosuria” (608) [as responsible for their abnormality as a diabetic for his blood sugar]. If this comparison frees inverts from responsibility for their initial gender and sexual “condition,” it does not absolve them
from certain obligations regarding the course of their “illness.” Instead, it implies that
inverts have the option to control the expression of their gender and sexuality in much the
same way that diabetics can choose to regulate their blood sugar.

Ways for adult inverts to combat their condition and for parents to lessen their
children’s sexual indeterminacy appear in a section entitled “¿Es posible favorecer el
auge de la diferenciación sexual?” [“Is it Possible to Maximize Sexual Differentiation?”].
While Marañón believes that hormone therapies require additional testing before being
made available for widespread prescription, he considers diet and exercise useful for
cultivating sexual differentiation and heterosexuality (700-06). Only those inverts who
make use of these strategies are deserving of Marañón’s praise. For the doctor, these
inverts are heroicos seres [heroic beings] who “conllevan a solas la tragedia de su
inclinación torcida, sin suscitar jamás la menor sospecha de nadie” [keep to themselves
the tragedy of their twisted inclination, without ever raising anyone’s slightest suspicion]
(626). Their chastity sets them apart from figures like Retana’s locas, whose eager
embrace of gender and sexual ambiguity disqualify them for conditional compassion.

Numerous parts of *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* recall
Marañón’s observations on inversion, as well as planks of the WLSR. The first novel’s
protagonist identifies himself as a blameless victim when he asks, “¿Qué culpa tengo yo?
¡Si fuera un vicioso, un vil caído por lujuria en la renegación del sexo, merecería que se
me escupiera! ¡Pero si dentro de mí, me siento blando, femenino!” (117) [How am I to
blame? If I were dissolute, a pervert driven by lust into the renunciation of my sex, I
would deserve being spit on! But inside of me, I feel soft, feminine!]. He follows
Marañón’s advice on sexual differentiation by submitting himself to a “[c]ura de fuego y
hierro” [cure of fire and brimstone] involving vigorous exercise, sunbathing, and stereotypically masculine activities such as smoking (102, 130-33).

La antorcha apagada features similar scenarios, as when the protagonist poses the question: “¿Pero tengo yo culpa de haber nacido imperfecto? Mi condición miserable yo no la elegí; me la dieron..., ¿y qué puedo hacer sino aceptar mi cruz?...Yo no soy un sinvergüenza ni un vicioso; soy un desdichado, un supliciado” (142) [But am I to blame for having been born with an imperfection? I did not choose my miserable condition; they gave it to me..., and what can I do but accept my cross?...I am neither shameless nor depraved; I am ill-fated, tortured]. This character’s suffering fits into a wider argument for sex education and scientifically-sound procreation reminiscent of planks 3, 4, and 10 listed above. He becomes a spokesperson for rational sexual pedagogy when he tells his sister, “si recibíésemos otra educación menos hipócrita, las enfermedades sexuales perderían su carácter secreto y muchas de ellas—congénitas o adquiridas—podrían remediarse o al menos corregirse” (171) [if we were to receive a less hypocritical education, the sexual ailments would lose their secret nature and many of them—congenital or acquired—would be able to be cured or at least corrected]. The sister’s later response makes her a mouthpiece for positive eugenics in the form of planned reproduction: “el matrimonio, según ahora se practica, es una institución inmoral. Cuidamos de seleccionar nuestros caballos, procuramos mejorar la raza de nuestros perros y la de nuestras aves de corral y no vigilamos la calidad de la sangre que ha de fusionarse con la nuestra en las entrañas de nuestros hijos. ¿Puede imaginarse absurdo mayor?” (188) [marriage, as it is practiced now, is an immoral institution. We take care selecting our horses, we try to improve the lineage of our dogs and our poultry, and we
do not keep an eye on the quality of the blood that must mix with our own in our children’s entrails. Can you think of anything more absurd?]. The disturbingly homophobic implication of their statements is that the protagonist’s parents mistakenly produced a defective child whom they were unable to educate in such a way as to evade the development of his congenital inversion. Presumably, his misery should encourage others to adopt a more scientific approach to procreation and child-rearing.

Taken alone, these passages appear to align *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* with the ideals of Spanish and European sex reform and eugenics in the 1920s and early 30s. It will be up to my readings later on to contrast the extent to which the novels actually coincide with reformist ideologies. My thesis is that their overarching plots and generic conventions inflect embedded allusions to sex reform with a variety of political valences. Whereas *La antorcha apagada* draws on techniques of the roman à thèse to assert the truth of scientific perspectives on sex as a modern antidote to religious tradition, *El ángel de Sodoma* recapitulates some of these views in the context of a tragic plot that questions whether they are modern and whether they reduce or intensify human suffering.

I.C. Conservative Backlash and Literary Rejoinders

Sex reform efforts to relegate religion to the sidelines in sexual matters did not go unchallenged by right-wing Spanish Catholics in the late 1920s.\(^\text{16}\) Two instances of conservative opposition to scientific reform in 1928, together with subsequent liberal rejoinders, appear to have provided the impetus for Zamacois and Hernández-Catá to publish their texts.
The first involved the modifications to the Penal Code discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 in relation to Jacinto Benavente’s play *De muy buena familia* [*Of Very Good Stock*] (1931) and Álvaro Retana’s queer pedagogy (2.I.A., 3.IV.A.). As mentioned previously, articles 601 and 616 of the 1928 Code distinguished between homo- and heterosexual variants of sexual abuse and public scandal and mandated considerably tougher punishments for the former. Although the statutes were to apply only to people involved in particular types of liaisons, the meanings of “abuse” and “scandal” were flexible enough for the legislation to amount to a criminalization of homosexuality (Aresti *Masculinidades* 223-28; Mira *De Sodoma* 183-84).

Liberal sex reformers vehemently protested this affront to their view of same-sex desire as a pathology, and there can be no doubt that Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa meant to condemn the 1928 Code when they penned their contributions to *El ángel de Sodoma* in 1929 (Cleminson “Medicine” 215-20; Mira *De Sodoma* 196). The latter equates the Spanish law with obsolete tradition when he states that it is a *torpeza anacrónica* (245) [anachronistic blunder] and that comparable Swiss, Italian, German, and Chilean statutes represent a “yerro [...] en algunos proyectos modernísimos” (244) [error...in certain extremely modern projects]. The allusion to homophobic legislation in Chile suggests that Jiménez de Asúa and other promoters of the novel’s second Spanish edition may have sponsored its publication in Valparaíso (El Collao, 1929) as a means of cultural resistance to the law.

Rafael Cansinos-Asséns confirms that Hernández-Catá also considered his work a defense of inverts against draconian legal measures. In his characteristically mocking tone, he quips that “Alfonso estaba ufano de haber hecho una obra maestra, al par que de
caridad, escribiendo esa historia patética de un homosexual” (La novela II: 360) [Alfonso was proud of having composed a charitable masterwork by writing that pathetic story of a homosexual]. Although Cansinos does not reveal exactly how the novelist envisioned his text as combating the criminalization of same-sex relations, the prologue and epilogue propose that El ángel de Sodoma supported the struggle against legalized homophobia by depicting inversion as a natural defect rather than a crime. But the novel itself follows the protagonist as he comes to believe that his gender and sexual identities are neither criminal nor pathological, but a part of himself deserving of affirmation. However fleeting, the character’s view of his inversion as a benign natural variation attacks the Penal Code from a more radical standpoint than Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa cared to admit.

A second example of conservative opposition to sex reform in 1928 involved the cancellation of the Jornadas Eugénicas [Eugenics Conference], a series of nine lectures planned by many of the reformers who would later join the Liga (Cleminson Anarchism 84-88; Sinclair 54-55). Designed to convey specialized scientific knowledge about heredity, physiology, pathology, and a host of related topics to a popular audience in Madrid, the Conference was put to an end by a decree of the Primo dictatorship after seven weeks of activity. The regime’s belated disapproval sought to appease critics of the event associated with the Catholic newspapers El Debate [The Debate] and El Siglo Futuro [The Coming Century] (Álvarez Peláez 197-99).

Ironically, Marañón later claimed that Spanish eugenics owed its birth to the ban on the 1928 Conference (Cleminson Anarchism 97). He was right that the following years saw the publication of numerous treatises in favor of a range of positive and
negative eugenic techniques in Spain (88-96). This trend reached its apex under the Republic when the aborted event was resuscitated on a larger scale in the Jornadas Eugénicas of 1933 (Cleminson Anarchism 97-107; Sinclair 116-20). Forty-five lectures on motherhood, birth control, divorce, disease prevention, and related themes published in the 1934 proceedings Genética, eugenésia y pedagogía sexual [Genetics, Eugenics, and Sex Education] attest to the Conference’s popularizing aim with respect to diverse concerns in sex reform (Noguera and Huerta).

The surge in interest surrounding eugenics between 1928 and 1934 set the stage for the publication of La antorcha apagada in 1935. Zamacois must have realized that the market was right for him to integrate his existing novels Una pobre vida (1924) and La tragedia de un hombre que no sabía a dónde ir (1926) into a longer work whose title would evoke eugenic ideas about vital exhaustion. La antorcha apagada narrates a chaste invert’s pitiful life in order to promote scientific attitudes towards sex, and conditional compassion for those who are not so “fortunate” as to have been born to enlightened parents. Paradoxically, the same literary strategies meant to accomplish these goals also render the novel’s treatment of its protagonist thoroughly unsympathetic. I turn now to the contradictions brought about by the text’s status as a roman à thèse in my reading of its portrayal of an invert caught between tradition and modernity.

II. Inversion Extinguished: The Limits of Compassion in La antorcha apagada

In her structuralist study Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre (1983), Susan Rubin Suleiman defines the roman à thèse as a class of realist novel designed to persuade readers to act upon a particular doctrine by placing all the elements of the text at the service of an unequivocal thesis (7, 10, 54). Three
components distinguish the genre from the wider set of texts characterized by realist claims to verisimilitude and representation: a *rule of action*, a *dualistic system of values*, and a *doctrinal intertext* (56). In more explicit terms, a *roman à thèse* or authoritarian fiction offers readers a set of guidelines about how to think or act in the hopes that they make correct decisions according to what the novel presents as good and bad approaches to an issue. The novel derives its notions of right and wrong from a pre-existing ideological system to which it refers more or less explicitly as the arbiter of truth.

Drawing on Suleiman’s terminology, I want to demonstrate that *La antorcha apagada* is a *roman à thèse* whose doctrinal intertext includes the demands of sex reform as expressed in the planks of the WLSR listed in section 4.I.B. 18 The novel uses the suffering of a chaste invert in an alarmingly homophobic fashion as an exemplary tale from which readers are urged to conclude that parents should either follow scientific parameters on reproduction and child-rearing or accept responsibility for the negative consequences should they instead adhere to Catholic conventions of family planning. A second rule of action is that people like the protagonist whose parents make unwise choices ought to be treated with compassion on the condition that they make amends for their forebears by championing the ends of sex reform. The text couches its thesis in a Manichean framework wherein religion and science come to represent tradition and modernity, or divine and natural laws of sex.

Although Suleiman dedicates most of her book to describing the narrative structures and stylistic strategies through which *romans à thèse* seek to transmit an unambiguous thesis, she acknowledges that the genre is not immune to slippages in meaning and that readers may resist the interpretations inscribed in the texts (199-238).
In what follows, I begin by showing that *La antorcha apagada* tries to strengthen its thesis by deploying several devices common to other authoritarian fictions: the *structure of confrontation*, the *structure of apprenticeship*, and *redundancy*. I then argue that these tools force a wedge between what the novel says and does with respect to the notion of conditional compassion. Whereas the narrator and characters appeal to readers to take pity on the protagonist, the novelistic structure subjects the chaste invert to such a dismal existence that the apparently redemptive ending does not seem convincing. In the final analysis, the same gestures meant to promote compassion as part of a modern attitude towards inverts lay bare its complicity with tradition as presented in the work itself.

**II.A. The Structure of Confrontation**

The structure of confrontation is at the root of every *roman à thèse*, a necessary function of the genre’s sharp distinction between correct and incorrect worldviews (Suleiman 133). In its simplest form, the structure involves the narration of one or more clashes between rivals, only some of whom are shown to be right or good (102). Most of the examples analyzed by Suleiman frame the struggle as a war in which a hero fights on behalf of the values of a collective (101-48). While political warfare is at first glance distant from the concerns of *La antorcha apagada* (an assumption to which I come back in this chapter’s conclusion), the novel does realize the structure of confrontation in a general way by repeatedly staging physical and verbal skirmishes pitting the invert and his apologists against a series of bullies. One debate in particular makes clear that the two sides of these conflicts represent traditional Catholic sexual morals and modern scientific perspectives on sex. The episode calls for considerable analysis, as it shall later serve to illuminate the novel’s broader architecture.
The debate occurs in the tenth of nineteen chapters, nearly mid-way through the text (161-71). It takes place around the table after lunch in the protagonist Mario Hidalgo Quijano’s middle-class apartment in Madrid. In attendance are Mario’s parents and sisters, a classmate from his Jesuit boarding school, and some family friends. After the meal, Mario strikes up a conversation with his childhood friend Teodoro about the latter’s crippled leg and the poor health of his sister, both of which are attributed to their father’s syphilis. Teodoro expresses that his parents are wrong to keep his bed-ridden sister alive out of fear of divine wrath, since several eminent doctors have already pronounced her incurable. When asked by his classmate Pablito about the topic of their conversation, Mario answers that he and Teodoro were talking about euthanasia. The response puts an end to the other discussions around the table and sets the stage for the ensuing polemic.

From the outset, the debate goes beyond euthanasia to touch upon eugenics and a range of scientific ideas about family planning. The lines of battle are drawn between the two generations present at the luncheon. Mario’s father sums up the stance of the parents in a speech whose eloquence is more characteristic of a formal debate than of table banter:

La eutanasia es un despropósito científico tan mayúsculo como el de la eugenesia, y además de un despropósito, una grave impiedad. ¿Cree usted que engendrar un niño es lo mismo que hacer un par de zapatos?...¡Amigo mío, está usted equivocado. La vida no se reduce a un fenómeno químico. Recuerde usted que somos un compuesto de materia y de espíritu. [...] En el momento de la concepción Dios está presente y Él, conforme a sus inexcrutables designios, nos otorga el hijo que merecemos: un hijo que, si es saludable, inteligente y bueno, nos hará felices; y si nace enfermo, criminal o tonto, acaso sirva, con el dolor que nos produce su desgracia, para lavarnos de nuestras culpas. En ambos casos, todo buen cristiano debe aceptar resignadamente la voluntad divina. (166)

[Euthanasia is a scientific absurdity as foolish as eugenics, and besides an absurdity, a grave impiety. Do you think that conceiving a child is the...
same as making a pair of shoes?...My friend, you are wrong! Life cannot be reduced to a matter of chemistry. Remember that we are a compound of matter and spirit... God is present in the moment of conception and He gives us the child we deserve according to His inscrutable plans: a child who, if he is healthy, intelligent, and good, will make us happy; and if he is born sick, criminal, or stupid, will perhaps serve, by the pain given us by his misfortune, to wash us of our faults. In either case, every good Christian must accept the divine will with resignation.

For the father, God’s will comprises a transcendent divine law of sex according to which parents receive the children they deserve based on their moral successes or failures.

Mario vehemently reverses this logic in a similarly programmatic rejoinder:

muchos hijos [...] no tienen los padres que merecerían. O, de otro modo: que ningún hombre podrá maldecir de su hijo, ya sea éste deforme, o criminal, o cretino, o leproso, porque obra suya es y la culpa corresponde a quien siembra el daño: mientras a los niños enfermos—especialmente a los contaminados de males hereditarios—les asiste el derecho a abominar de sus coautores. (167-68)

[many children...do not have the parents they deserve. Or, in other words: no man can speak ill of his child, whether he be deformed, or criminal, or cretinous, or leprous, since the child is his own creation and the guilt belongs to he who sows the damage: meanwhile, sick children—especially ones contaminated by hereditary illnesses—have the right to loathe their creators.]

He goes on to “celebrar la elevada categoría científica de la eugenésia” [celebrate the high scientific category of eugenics] and to “hacer la apología de ese «reconocimiento prematrimonial» que muchos higienistas propugnan para seleccionar la especie” (169) [defend that ‘prenuptial examination’ that many hygienists advocate to select the species]. From this point of view, God does not intervene in reproduction and parents must take responsibility for learning the natural laws through which they can promote the health of their offspring. Mario’s speech is a fine case of dramatic irony, since readers know better than his intradiegetic audience that his comments reflect his resentment that
his progenitors bequeathed him the sexual inversion which he implicitly—and disparagingly—compares with physical deformities, leprosy, and criminality.  

Although the arguments of Mario and his father are equally forceful from a rhetorical perspective, neither the omniscient third-person narrator nor the characters consider them of the same currency and validity. The narrator identifies the older generation’s opinions with tradition when he explains that Mario’s assertions are “contrarias al ambiente tradicionalista en que fueron pronunciadas” (168) [contrary to the traditionalist setting in which they were delivered]. By way of contrast, Pablito associates scientific knowledge about sex with progress when he contends that “el progreso no puede estacionarse; necesitamos renovarnos, mejorarnos, y al par que esclarecemos nuestro espíritu purifica [sic] nuestra carne para, en lo posible, alejar de ella el dolor. Yo soy partidario de la eugenesia” (165-66) [progress cannot be stopped; we need revitalization, to better ourselves, and as we enlighten our spirit, to purify our flesh so as to keep pain at bay as much as possible. I am a supporter of eugenics]. In the absence of the word modern, this is the strongest evidence of a bond between science and modernity in La antorcha apagada.

Far from placing tradition and progress on the same moral plane, a host of textual details reveals that the novel favors the younger people’s ideology over that of their progenitors. Teodoro’s crippled leg, for instance, could logically justify either the father’s belief that God punishes parents for their moral shortcomings with disabled children, or Mario’s affirmation that heredity controls a child’s physiology. The narrator tacitly dismisses the first possibility when he explains that the leg “parecía servir de trágica ilustración a cuanto Mario Hidalgo iba diciendo” (169) [seemed to serve as a tragic ilustración a cuanto Mario Hidalgo iba diciendo” (169) [seemed to serve as a tragic
illustration of everything Mario Hidalgo was saying]. In a private discussion later on, Mario’s sister assures him that his views on eugenics were correct: “¡qué diáfanas y justas fueron tus palabras!” (188) [your words were so clear and just!]. Finally, the novel’s entire plot hinges on the process by which scientific rationality wins out over Catholic morals in the private life of Mario’s family over two generations. In this sense, the confrontation in chapter 10 helps clarify the forces at play in the structure of apprenticeship that comprises the bulk of the text.

II.B. The Structure of Apprenticeship

Broadly speaking, the structure of apprenticeship characteristic of the roman à thèse involves a transformation of the protagonist through which he or she acquires some kind of knowledge or conviction (Suleiman 65). In Suleiman’s terms, the apprenticeship may be positive or negative depending on whether the character’s new worldview coincides with the ideology considered right or wrong within the novel’s dualistic system of values (67). In the former case, the character passes from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge about the text’s correct doctrine. Elaboration on this scheme allows for variations wherein the protagonist affirms the wrong ideology, recognizes and renounces his or her error, and finally espouses the correct beliefs (74). The life story of Mario Hidalgo follows this pattern in La antorcha apagada. The novel’s plot revolves around the character’s double apprenticeship, drawing a stark contrast between his early Catholic upbringing and his later decision to raise his own child according to scientific ideas about sex.

Chapters 1 through 4 describe Mario’s life through the age of twelve and reveal that his bourgeois parents are at fault for his association of sex with sin, vice, and shame.
The narrator’s comments about an episode at the end of chapter 3 clarify that Mario’s education is a negative apprenticeship within the novel’s Manichean framework (48-52). In this scene, nine-year-old Mario sees two of his mother’s canaries copulating in their cage. Perplexed by what he has witnessed, he tells doña Teresa that the male bird is killing his companion. To Mario’s surprise, his mother reprimands his curiosity and looks upward, saying: “¡Señor!...¡Cuánta razón asiste a los que aseguran que el Protervo no duerme!...” (49) [Lord!...How right are those who insist that the Evil One does not sleep!...].

Doña Teresa’s reaction substantiates Foucault’s argument that apparently repressive measures often constitute an incitement to discourse about sex (History 17-35). While her words are meant to prevent Mario from learning about reproduction, they encourage the child to think even more about sex by making it a burning secret: “El desplante airado de su genitora significaba que allí latía un misterio, un enigma proceloso, que él no debería conocer aún. ¿Acaso los animales, para tener hijitos, necesitaban pelearse?...Esta interrogación no le dejó dormir” (50) [His mother’s irate rebuff meant that a mystery was throbbing there, an obscure enigma that he still shouldn’t know. Perhaps animals, in order to have kids, needed to fight?...This question did not let him sleep]. Mario’s reflections on his mother’s anger cause him to believe that the birds were doing something “vituperable, repugnante, sucio” (50) [reprehensible, repugnant, dirty]. To drive home the fact that this conclusion is wrong from the novel’s ideological perspective, the narrator argues that reproduction is in reality an “acto sencillo, natural y limpio [...] sin otras basuras ni otras complicaciones morales que las que las religiones, haciendo de él granjería, le atribuyeron” (51) [simple, natural, and clean act...without any
more garbage or other moral complications than the ones attributed it by the religions, taking it to their advantage].

While Mario’s positive apprenticeship will soon lead him to adopt the stance conveyed by the narrator, he must first suffer the consequences of his conservative Catholic upbringing. The stigmatizing potential of his childhood education is most evident during his interment in a Jesuit boarding school for boys in chapters 5 through 8. Rejected by most of his classmates, Mario must confront for the first time the nature of his sexual inversion. It is at this point that Zamacois introduces one of his novel’s most noteworthy narrative forms: the internal monologue comprised of a mixture of free indirect discourse and first person narration. In a series of *soliloquios* (143) [soliloquies] and *autoinspecciones* (115, 126, 143) [self-examinations], Mario analyzes his identity, actions, and desires. He initially treats his difference from other boys with disdain and guilt, accusing himself of being weak, vain, and cowardly. When he finally attributes the source of his difference to sexual inversion and to his “female” desire for males, he calls himself “un degenerado, un monstruo” (134) [a degenerate, a monster].

Once again, the narrator’s glosses serve to discredit the religious morals upon which Mario bases his harsh self-critiques. In the novel’s first internal monologue, the narrator explains Mario’s inclination to blame himself for his inversion by stating that the character “[i]gnoraba que nadie es como quisiera ser, sino como la herencia y las circunstancias que acompañaron su existencia le permitieron ser” (76) [was unaware that nobody is what they would like to be, but what heredity and the circumstances that accompanied their existence allowed them to be]. Assertions of this type are common in the *roman à thèse*. As Suleiman points out, the genre “has a predilection for indirect
embedded statements like ‘He finally understood that $p$’ or ‘He now knew that $p$,’ where the proposition $p$ is the truth discovered by the hero” (75). By presupposing the truth of $p$, these formulations are a useful way of stating a thesis without furnishing proof of its validity. In the example from *La antorcha apagada*, the narrator takes Naturalist doctrines for granted and implies that Mario does not recognize their truth because he was raised in a religious household.

Even though Mario attends a Jesuit boarding school, it is during his years away from home that he embarks on the positive apprenticeship through which he comes to embrace the narrator’s scientific worldview. Rather than focusing on the religious aspect of his secondary education, the novel emphasizes Mario’s exposure to science at school. Following his alienation from his classmates, the character prefers to wander alone through the halls, where he stops to contemplate posters on topics such as prehistoric wildlife, frog metamorphoses, and the evolution of the egg (91-92).

Not surprisingly, one of Mario’s subsequent internal monologues signals a change in his understanding of sexual inversion informed by a new understanding of evolutionary biology. Abandoning his earlier belief in his own guilt, he now affirms that he is “un descarriado, un inferior, digno de misericordia, pero no desprecio” (141-42) [lost, inferior, deserving of compassion, but not of disdain]. His self-compassion is a result of his investigation into the etiology of his condition, as a result of which he blames his father for conceiving him in a state of physical exhaustion and his mother for educating him with excessive severity.24 Mario’s new belief that “Dios es un cuadro colgado en el espacio” [God is a painting hung in the sky] provides ample evidence of his break with his upbringing (143). With its mixture of humor and metaphor, the image
recalls the avant-garde *greguerías* of Ramón Gómez de la Serna and mocks religion at the very moment when the protagonist eschews his Catholic morals for faith in science.

Mario defends his new ideology shortly after his transformative self-analysis, in the debate described in section 4.II.A. It takes longer for him to put his scientific views of sex into practice by founding a family. In Chapters 12 through 19, the protagonist hopes to flee painful memories of his childhood by accepting diplomatic posts in Brussels and Buenos Aires. In both cities, he comes under pressure to conform to heteronormative regulatory scripts by finding a girlfriend, marrying, and having children. Eventually, he dispels rumors about his suspect masculinity by wedding Silvina Valle, a wealthy Argentine woman with whom he is unable to have sex. Fearful of an impending divorce, Mario permits Silvina to take a clandestine lover in order to fulfill her longing for a child. She has a son with Sancho Ercilla, a colleague of Mario’s to whom he always felt attracted during his school years. Silvina and her husband make the baby pass for Mario’s biological son and Sancho’s godson. In the end, the three adults are able to live contentedly together, albeit with the stipulations that the unconventional aspects of their relationship remain a secret and that Sancho reject Mario’s amorous advances.

This complex denouement lends itself to several interpretations. On the one hand, it represents a putting-into-practice of the ideology acquired by Mario in his positive apprenticeship. The protagonist promotes a eugenic approach to reproduction when he urges Silvina to choose her mate carefully with the knowledge that her child will inherit its parents’ *inclinaciones* (342) [inclinations]. Silvina follows Mario’s advice to select a father with “clean” body and has a healthy baby (342). Later on, Mario takes charge of the infant’s education with a statement that contrasts his pedagogical method with that of
his parents: “A mi [...] me guionaron mal, y no consentiré que el pobrecito sufra los dolores que yo padecí. Disponiendo de un poco de ternura, educar a un niño es tarea fácil” (358) [They guided me badly, and I will not allow the little tyke to bear the pains I suffered. With a little tenderness, educating a child is an easy task].

On the other hand, the final disjuncture between Mario’s private and public lives raises doubts about whether his ostensibly modern arrangement with Silvina and Sancho is truly as distinct from his biological family as he would have it. Contrary to his claim to have repudiated the ways of his parents, the protagonist’s effort to engineer a scientifically sound union between Sancho and Silvina allows him to conform to the norms of a conservative milieu identical to that of his childhood. By having a son, Mario believes that he can mask his innate “deviancy” under a veneer of heteronormative masculinity. In the novel’s final paragraphs, the narrator suggests that he is correct. Following the birth of Silvina’s child, “[n]adie sospechaba las relaciones con Silvina con Sancho; de la tan discutida virilidad del diplomático no se volvió a hablar [...] Las apariencias, de consiguiente, estaban salvadas; el inútil se había rehabilitado; el drama de su vida sexual, vestido de felicidad, parecía un idilio” (362) [nobody suspected Silvina’s relations with Sancho; not another word was uttered about the diplomat’s heavily contested virility... Consequently, they kept up appearances; the impotent man was rehabilitated; the drama of his sexual life, robed in happiness, seemed idyllic].

A queer interpretation of this passage inspired by Judith Butler might emphasize that Mario’s simulacrum of masculinity exposes gender as a “performative accomplishment” (192). While this is in fact the case, it is equally clear that his performance lacks the self-conscious parody of hegemonic gender norms through which
cross-dressers are able to subversively reveal “the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency” (187). Instead, Mario’s marriage and surrogate fatherhood uphold patriarchal and Catholic social structures. Paradoxically, the triumph of “modern” science in his private life helps perpetuate heterosexist tradition in the public sphere.

The final alliance of modernity and tradition as they are conceived in La antorcha apagada anticipates the complicity of sex reform with the values of a provincial city in El ángel de Sodoma. But where the conflation of science with tradition is integral to Hernández-Catá’s work, it represents an anomaly in the novel by Zamacois, a moment when the text’s binary logic cedes to a deconstructive reading. Later on, I examine ways in which La antorcha apagada attempts to contain the queer potential of its conclusion. One of them involves a device used throughout the novel to strengthen its thesis: redundancy.

II.C. Redundancy and the Interpretive Line

For linguists and information theorists, redundancy is a strategy whereby participants in a speech act produce more language than is necessary to convey their message in order to ensure that their interlocutors interpret their point correctly. Redundancy strives to make intentions obvious, to transmit a single meaning “in capital letters” (Suleiman 10, 55). It is for this reason that it is prevalent in the roman à thèse, where curtailing ambiguity is a first order of business. Suleiman hypothesizes that the genre contains both a copious quantity and particular varieties of redundancy (171). She distinguishes between classes of redundancy possible in the realist novel in general, and privileged types more specific to the roman à thèse (159-70, 183-88). Both sorts work to
solidify the thesis of *La antorcha apagada*, even if they also have the potential to turn readers against the novel’s ideology.

Of the varieties of redundancy characteristic of realist fiction, *La antorcha apagada* features cases where several characters have comparable qualities, analogous events happen to multiple characters, and similar events happen to a single character on multiple occasions (Suleiman 159). These instances of narrative multiplication contribute to the impression that everything in the novel appears at least twice. Hence, a host of characters with congenital disabilities reinforce the idea that Mario’s inversion is another inherited condition and that parents must adopt a new approach to family planning if they mean to have healthy children. The characters include a maid with a limp (9), a neighbor with a hearing impediment (40), a crippled friend (41), a classmate with smelly feet (84-85), and an impotent brother-in-law. Related at length in chapter 11, the life story of the last figure is a *mise en abyme* of Mario’s biography, complete with a disastrous education at the hands of an overbearing parent, fear of sex with women, and the search for a remedy in a deceitful marriage (173-86). Like the impotent character, Mario feels pressured to comply with heteronormative standards of masculinity, particularly when he falls victim to acts of violence through which people seek proof of his manhood. To mention two episodes from a veritable litany of scuffles, several boys in the boarding school forcibly strip the protagonist to see his reproductive organs in chapter 6 (97-101). As though this were not traumatic enough, his sisters repeat the procedure in the following chapter and comment that Mario’s chest seems excessively womanly (106-09).
Such blatant examples of redundancy do not arise casually in *La antorcha apagada*; rather, the novel highlights the recurrence of situations and character traits by means of comments on the part of the narrator and characters. After listening to the grievances of his crippled friend Teodoro, Mario thinks that “él también era un inconcluído, un desarraigado de la especie, y las quejas de Teodoro le conmovieron” (162-63) [he too was incomplete, uprooted from the species, and Teodoro’s complaints moved him]. Likewise, he reflects that his impotent brother-in-law’s story “era copia del suyo” (190) [was a copy of his own]. Finally, the character links his disrobing with episodes in his adult life when he concludes that “[e]n el mundo, lo mismo que en el colegio, la opinión pública le avizoraba, le agarrotaba” (286) [in the world, as in the school, public opinion threatened him, put him to the garrote]. In each case, Mario’s thoughts, relayed through the narrator by free indirect speech, perform a task normally assigned to readers, drawing connections between different parts of the text. The novel’s tendency to inscribe its own preferred readings within the work itself makes it a fertile ground for the privileged types of redundancy described by Suleiman.

In the first of these varieties, the narrator or a trustworthy character in a *roman à thèse* (i.e., a character who espouses the right values within the novel’s ideological system) offers interpretive comments on some aspect of the diegesis in order to secure its meaning (Suleiman 184-85). A crucial example in *La antorcha apagada* involves the object that gives the novel its title, an engraving on a wall of Mario’s bedroom entitled “La carrera de las antorchas” [The Torch Race]. When it first turns up during the character’s childhood, the narrator provides the following description:

> En primer término aparecía, escozado, un adolescente desnudo que corría portando en la diestra una antorcha encendida. Más allá, un segundo
efebo le miraba acercarse y puesto en actitud de espera impaciente alargaba hacia él un brazo, para recoger la antorcha. Servía de escenario a las figuras un camino, a la hila del cual se escalonaban, esfumados y reducidos por la lejanía, varios corredores. (54-55)

[Foreshortened in the foreground was a nude adolescent who ran carrying a lighted torch in his right hand. Further away, a second ephebe watched him approaching and, impatiently waiting on his mark, extended his arm to receive the torch. Serving as background for the figures was a path, along which various runners were staggered, blurry and small in the distance.]

The ekphrasis constructs the engraving as an object for subsequent interpretive remarks.

The pretext for the explication is that young Mario does not understand the image. To satisfy his curiosity about “la exégesis de aquella antorcha” [the exegesis of that torch], he asks his grandfather for el significado (55) [the meaning]. Don Ruperto’s response proceeds in various stages. First, he offers an allegorical reading in which each component of the artwork corresponds to a “universal” truth about human life:

—Esa antorcha—dijo—expresa la vida. Por eso el artista la pintó encendida, porque la vida es fuego, calor, luz, acción...; y esos muchachos que ves ahí representan las distintas generaciones que, semejante a los eslabones de una cadena, van formando la historia de la Humanidad. ¿Comprendes? (55)

[‘That torch,’ he said, ‘represents life. That’s why the artist shows it lighted, because life is fire, heat, light, action...; and those boys that you see there represent the different generations that keep forming Humanity’s history, like links on a chain. Do you understand?’]

Unconvinced that his grandson has captured his meaning, he then reframes the allegory on a more concrete level:

—A mí—te pondré este ejemplo para que me entiendas mejor—me dio la vida tu bisabuelo. ¿Estamos?...Yo, cuándo me case [sic], se la di a tu padre. Éste te la transmiitió a tí...; tú, más adelante, cuando seas hombre, se la darás a tus hijos...¡Y así siempre!... (55)

[‘I’ll give you this example so you understand me better: Your great grandfather gave me life. Follow me?...When I got married, I gave it to
your father. He transmitted it to you...; later on, when you are a man, you will give it to your children...And so on forever!]

Finally, in response to Mario’s question about what would happen if the torch were to go out, he replies that it “[n]o puede apagarse [...] o, mejor dicho, no debe apagarse, porque la especie humana desaparecería” (55-56) [can’t go out...or rather, it shouldn’t go out, because the human race would disappear].

It is significant that Don Ruperto frames the second phase of his interpretation as an ejemplo [example/exemplum], for doing so links his remarks to several genres of exemplary narrative analyzed by Suleiman as relatives of the roman à thèse (25-61). In the parable and the fable, a concluding moral interprets the foregoing story and offers a rule of action to be put into practice outside the fictional diegesis. This is also the case in Don Ruperto’s commentary. It transforms the visual narrative of the engraving into a patriarchal parable wherein men pass humanity’s life force from generation to generation, apparently with little aid from women. The story culminates in an apocalyptic heteronormative imperative for Mario: he will replicate the procreative sexuality of his forefathers, or else put the human race at risk for extinction.

The heterosexist force of Don Ruperto’s reading is a function of its need to foreclose more transgressive interpretations. Before Mario asks for an explanation of the engraving, he admires “los jóvenes atletas, finos y elásticos. Hubiera querido tomar parte en sus ejercicios y andar, como ellos, desnudo” (55) [the young athletes, slender and lithe. He would have liked to take part in their exercises and to go around nude like them]. The character’s first inclination is to see the scene as an erotic celebration of the beauty of the male physique, not as a paean to reproduction and homosociality. But Mario dismisses this interpretation, forgetting the hermosura sexual [sexual beauty] of
the runners in order to “reflexionar en la exégesis de aquella antorcha” (55) [reflect on the exegesis of that torch]. This passage implies that the engraving’s homoeroticism is exterior to its “true” import, as supplied by the grandfather. Don Ruperto has the final say on the image, and his reading marginalizes, but is unable to erase, its queer inflections.

The slippage between homoeroticism and homosociality in the interpretation of “La carrera de las antorchas” recalls Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s argument that relationships between men exist on a continuum from the explicitly sexual to the ostensibly non-sexual. Homophobia tries to render the continuities invisible by denying that desire forms part of homosocial bonds (Between Men 1-5). In his book Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe (1985), cultural historian George L. Mosse notes that this operation was particularly urgent in early twentieth-century nationalist ideologies in Europe that made the athletic male body a symbol for the healthy nation (23-89, 114-32, 153-80). The idealization of nude youths meant that “male eros tended to haunt modern nationalism” and to require constant disavowal (64). Don Ruperto’s denial of the homoerotic dimension of the engraving echoes right-wing approaches to similar nationalist iconography.

Leaving aside for the moment the relationship between La antorcha apagada and nationalist politics in Spain in the 1930s, it is enough to note that the episode with the engraving resonates with the rest of the text by illustrating on a reduced scale the purpose of the redundant interpretive comments scattered throughout the novel. To draw once again on the vocabulary of narratologist Lucien Dällenbach defined in Chapter 2, the treatment of “La carrera de las antorchas” can be read as a mise en abyme of the
enunciation of Zamacois’s roman à thèse. Just as Don Ruperto authoritatively interprets the engraving, the narrator and characters formulate readings of the events whose narration comprises the story. Their remarks, like those of the grandfather, seek to exclude interpretations not acceptably aligned with the novel’s ideology.

They also form part of another privileged type of generic redundancy in the roman à thèse. Suleiman notes that programmatic commentaries about particular diegetic elements of authoritarian fictions are rarely unique; instead, they belong to series of statements that span the length of the narrative in an interpretive line, or a string of reiterations of the central thesis (185-86). One way to perceive the existence of such a line in La antorcha apagada is to compare the quotations in Table 4.1. In each passage, the reflections of the narrator or a character about a previously described situation voice a variation of the novel’s call for sex reform, scientific attitudes towards sex, and conditional compassion for chaste inverts.

Table 4.1: La antorcha apagada’s Interpretive Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Quotation</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Context in Novel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 La inferioridad moral que le legó su genitor, la acrecentó y empeoró su madre, que reducía la educación a la obediencia ciega; criterio torpe, muy parecido al de esos gobernantes que limitan los más graves problemas sociales a una cuestión de «orden público». (40)</td>
<td>The moral inferiority bequeathed him by his father was expanded and worsened by his mother, for whom education came down to blind obedience; a foolish criterion, similar to that of those rulers who limit the most serious social problems to a question of ‘public order.’</td>
<td>The narrator describes the etiology of Mario’s sexual inversion to prove that he is not responsible for his “short-coming.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 si su experiencia hubiese poseído la madurez necesaria para alambicar la labor ominosa de descoyuntamiento, de castración moral, perpetrada en él por la herencia, primero, y luego por el más absurdo de los sistemas educativos […], no se habría preguntado: «¿Por qué soy así?», sino: «¿Por qué me hicieron como soy?»... (77)</td>
<td>if his experience were to have possessed the maturity necessary to understand the ominous labor of dislocation, of moral castration, perpetrated in him by heredity, first, and then by the most absurd of educational systems […], he would not have asked himself, ‘Why am I this way?’, but ‘Why did they make me this way?’...</td>
<td>The narrator contradicts Mario’s harsh self-critiques and implies that he is not to blame for his sexual inversion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A los aquejados de mi lacra, la humanidad debía mirarles indulgentemente, como mira a los leprosos, a los cancerosos, a los tísicos, a los locos, a los jorobados, a los enanos, a los mudos, a los ciegos... a todos los «sin remedio» que llenan el mundo de fealdad y de dolor. (142)</td>
<td>Humanity should look indulgently upon those who suffer from my defect, as it looks upon lepers, cancer patients, consumptives, madmen, hunchbacks, midgets, mutes, and blindmen... upon all the ‘incurables’ who fill the world with ugliness and pain.</td>
<td>In an interior monologue, Mario renounces responsibility for his inversion and compares it to other congenital health issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Él no necesitaba que le perdonasen, sino que le curasen; un clérigo no le habría comprendido; un médico, sí. (144)</td>
<td>He did not need to be forgiven, but cured; a priest would not have understood him; a doctor, yes.</td>
<td>Through free indirect discourse, the narrator communicates Mario’s conclusion that he is not a voluntary sinner, but the victim of an illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>—¡Los hijos—exclamó—no deshonran a sus padres; son éstos los que a sí mismos se deshonran en los hijos que procrearon impuros!... (169-70)</td>
<td>‘Children,’ he exclaimed, ‘do not dishonor their parents; it’s the parents who dishonor themselves with the children they made impure!’...</td>
<td>In a debate with his parents, Mario implicitly accuses them for his sexual inversion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>—El matrimonio, digan lo que gusten los moralistas, tiene más de físico que de metafísico, y tanto como la Religión debe intervenir en él la Higiene. A la labor del cura necesitamos añadir la del médico. [...] engendrar un niño enfermo es mayor crimen que asesinar a un hombre. (188)</td>
<td>‘Say what they will the moralists, marriage is more physical than metaphysical, and just as much as Religion, Hygiene should play a role in it. We need to add the labor of the doctor to that of the priest. [...] engendering a sick child is a graver crime than killing a man.’</td>
<td>In a conversation with Mario, his sister expresses her view on the role of science in marriage and reproduction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even with the information presented in the third column above, there can be no doubt that uprooting the quotations from their context in the novel is a form of critical violence. If I have done so here, it is because the work itself performs the same operation at the start of its interpretive line. Quotations 1 and 5, together with the last phrase in quotation 6, stand alone as epigraphs to La antorcha apagada before appearing in the text. From the outset, they specify the novel’s thesis and predisposition readers to peruse the work in search of proof for its argument. Together with the remaining passages in Table 1, they also impose a particular reading of characters and situations in the novel.
Like Don Ruperto’s heterosexist explanation of the engraving, the interpretative line aims to contain readings counter to the work’s ideological stances. In particular, calls for pity for inverts and other “flawed” offspring attempt to foreclose the possibility that some readers will find the novel’s handling of its protagonist devoid of compassion, whether conditional or otherwise.

II.D. The Unmerciful Text

For Suleiman, the “supreme irony” of any roman à thèse is that the very devices used to consolidate its thesis and inscribe a singular interpretation also have the potential to disenchant readers, leading them to rebel against the text (180, 199-238). This is especially true of redundancy, since overstating a point, whether in a novel or another speech act, is likely to generate resistance. As André Gide once told Maurice Barrès about the latter’s novel Les Déracinés [The Uprooted] (1897), “[y]our too constant affirmation makes us want to contradict you” (cited in Suleiman 180).

One type of redundancy in La antorcha apagada may elicit a similar reaction. As mentioned above, the text subjects Mario to a series of situations where people around him police his behavior in acts of surveillance that range from outright physical abuse to verbal admonitions. A reading of these episodes in line with the novel’s thesis would posit that the protagonist’s foes adhere to a “wrong” ideology and ignore the scientific “truth” that chaste inverts should be treated with benevolence. Mario’s victimization would thus serve to arouse the sympathy of readers. This interpretation overlooks the equally convincing possibility that the text’s insistence on placing Mario in disagreeable situations is evidence of its unspoken complicity with his opponents. In my view, Lou Charnon-Deutsch’s observation on an earlier work by Zamacois also applies to La
antorcha apagada: the novel’s “fascination with the stages of victimization plays to [its] narrative voyeurism” (69). This obsessive spying upon Mario’s suffering has the same effect as the insidious presence of the character’s antagonists: it guarantees that he will never be able to attain fulfillment as a self-accepting invert.

The novel situates Mario in a Foucauldian panopticon from the outset with a striking comparison in its opening sentence: the mirrors of a barbershop are “como pupilas en la verticalidad de los muros” [like pupils in the verticality of its walls] (7). Later on, the eleven-year-old protagonist falls victim to the scrutiny of the barber, who taunts him with questions about whether he has a girlfriend (10-13). Both the ocular simile and the invasive inquiries lay the ground for the subsequent appearance of the most important emblem of surveillance in the novel, the appropriately labeled impertinentes of Mario’s mother Doña Teresa (25).

According to the dictionary of the Real Academia Española, the word impertinente can be an adjective used to describe something annoying or out of place—like the English word impertinent—or a plural noun referring to a pair of spectacles with a handle used by women, especially at the opera—the French and English lorgnette. In effect, Doña Teresa’s impertinentes, with their “implacable luz exploradora” (45) [implacable exploratory light], are a constant annoyance to Mario, and a source of fear: “Su madre ejercía sobre él una sugestión omnímoda, mezcla de amor y de pánico. A no usar impertinentes, la hubiese temido menos; pero tras aquellos cristales la imaginaba capaz de verlo y escudriñarlo todo” (25) [His mother exercised on him an absolute influence, a mixture of love and terror. Had she not used impertinentes, he would have
feared her less; but he imagined her capable of seeing and examining everything from behind those lenses.

Doña Teresa appears with her *impertinentes* at least ten times throughout the novel. They literally magnify her vision, and serve as a metaphor for the strategies by which she extends her vigilance of Mario to the child himself and to other individuals. Even when he is away at the boarding school, Mario remembers “aquellos impertinentes que todo lo veían” [those *impertinentes* that saw everything] and tries to comply with his mother’s expectations for masculine behavior (76). When he departs for Brussels, Doña Teresa travels along vicariously through Plácida, a maid to whom she entreats: “Yo necesito que le atiendas, que le vigiles..., que no le dejes solo un momento...” (195) [I need you to pay attention to him, to keep watch over him...don’t leave him alone for a moment].

This extra surveillance is superfluous, for there are already “thousands of eyes” to spy upon Mario wherever he goes (Foucault *Discipline* 214). References to “las arañas insaciables de la Murmuración” (240) [the insatiable spiders of Gossip] and the “fuerza extraordinaria” of the “salpicaduras de la murmuración” (286) [extraordinary force of the waves of Gossip] in widely separated passages foreground the monotony of his plight in Brussels and Buenos Aires. In both cities, Mario’s fellow diplomats test his manhood by setting him up with women or enjoining him to find a wife (228-35, 278-83). Not only do these episodes mirror each other in another example of redundancy, they are also sequels to the more obviously violent tactics used by the protagonist’s childhood peers to verify his biological sex. As noted previously, other children undress young Mario on two occasions to examine his genitalia (97-101, 106-09). Not coincidentally, the text
returns to the image of stripping much later when Mario’s inversion comes to the
attention of other adults: “La Verdad maldita le asfixiaba, le desnudaba” (288) [The
cursed Truth was suffocating him, stripping him bare].

Of course, “Truth” does not render Mario vulnerable to the rumors of other
characters, but the decisions made by Zamacois about how to structure his narrative.
From this perspective, La antorcha apagada is an aggressive disrobing of its protagonist,
a shameless exposé of his most intimate doubts and desires for a paying readership.31 In
the same way that the surveillance of Mario’s enemies forces him to conform to a
heteronormative code of masculinity, the novel ensures that he is unable to act upon his
inversion in same-sex relations. Viewed against contemporaneous works by Álvaro
Retana, its treatment of eroticism in the boarding school, modern modes of
transportation, and urban space supplies proof that it seeks to nullify any chance that its
protagonist will find sexual gratification.

Chapter 3 noted that Retana’s novel Los extravíos de Tony [Tony’s Deviance]
(1919) recounts the initiation of an adolescent into queer desire in an all-male secondary
school in Madrid where students plan circle jerks and teachers regularly seduce their
pupils (3.IV.). The text’s hyperbolic sexual content parodies medical and pedagogical
treatises from early twentieth-century Spain that identify the school, and particularly the
boarding school, as a hothouse for sterile sexual pleasures (Cleminson and Vázquez
García ‘Los Invisibles’ 137-59).32 In La antorcha apagada, Zamacois does not deny that
the school breeds desire; in fact, the Jesuit institution is “lleno de pasiones sensuales en
fermentación” (118) [full of fermenting passions of the flesh], among which is Mario’s
apetencia sexual [sexual inclination] for his classmate Sancho Ercilla (126).
Where the novel departs from other texts is in its foreclosure of the possibility that the protagonist will be able to satisfy his desire. The narrative curtails Mario’s advances towards Sancho in a dialogue where the protagonist thanks his colleague for protecting him from their other classmates (127-29). While the conversation allows for a mutual expression of affection between the two students, both of whom claim to querer [to love/to want] the other, it also establishes that Sancho has sex with women. The narrator interrupts Sancho’s effusions to announce: “Aunque Ercilla no tenía cumplidos los quince años, ya conocía el amor físico. [...] fue su iniciadora una rústica de carnazas rollizas y tensas” (128) [Although Ercilla had not yet turned fifteen years old, he had already experienced physical love. ...his initiatior was a country woman with plump, tight rolls of flesh]. Sancho’s subsequent celebration of procreative sex signals a desire on the part of the narrative to “save” the boy’s heterosexuality at the very moment when his homosocial friendship threatens to yield to erotic desire. There shall be cause later on to discuss a comparable conversation in the denouement that confirms the supposition that Sancho never accedes to sex with Mario.

This disavowal of same-sex relations recurs elsewhere, in the protagonist’s journeys by train from Madrid to Brussels and by ocean liner from Europe to Argentina (201-10, 255-77). As argued previously, modern modes of transportation are a potent aphrodisiac in novels by Retana. They function similarly for other popular writers of the time, including Zamacois (Rivalan Guégo Fruición 201-02). The protagonist of his short novel Memorias de un vagón de ferrocarril [Memories of a Rail Car] (La Novela Semanal, 1921) is a rail car that describes the amorous trysts of its passengers (Catena 263-64).
The train and the boat are also sexualized spaces in *La antorcha apagada*. As the maid who accompanies Mario to Brussels observes when they are mistaken for newlyweds, “Se conoce que los novios, en los viajes, aprovechan el tiempo...” (206) [It’s common knowledge that the bride and groom make good use of time on trips...]. Unlike in texts by Retana, however, the venues offer no opportunity for the expression of queer desire in Zamacois’s novel. On the contrary, Mario comes to shame on both trips because he does not display a normatively masculine attraction to women. When he rejects the propositions of a diplomat’s wife on the ship, she spreads the rumor that he does not seem *muy hombre* (277) [very manly]. As a matter of course in this fictional world, no man makes analogous advances towards Mario.

The impression that the protagonist is utterly alone in his desire for men is born out by the novel’s portrayal of urban space. In works by Retana like *Las «locas» de postín* [*The Posh Fairies*] (1919) and *A Sodoma en tren botijo* [*To Sodom by Slow Train*] (1933), Madrid is home to a lively queer subculture, a genuine *moderna Sodoma* [modern Sodom] (*A Sodoma* 169). This is equally true of Paris in *El ángel de Sodoma*. As discussed below, Hernández-Catá’s novel offers perceptive descriptions of sites in the city associated with cruising and queer desire: theaters, streets, stations, and shops (4.III.E-F.).

Although the action of *La antorcha apagada* also takes place in large cities, the narrative does not acknowledge the erotic potential of the urban montage of “closeness and distance, crowd and flickering, surface and gaze, freedom and danger” (Bech 118). The characters rarely pause to contemplate their surroundings, and city streets and locales appear in passing, a mere accessory to the action and its interpretive line.33 Even when
Mario reflects on his situation in space, it is only to note that he cannot escape the policing of those who would punish him for acting upon his desire: “Madrid le oprimía. Siempre que en la calle saludaba a alguno de sus antiguos condiscípulos le asaetaba un malestar” (191) [Madrid opressed him. Whenever he greeted one of his former classmates on the street, he was overtaken by unease]. Needless to say, the novel provides no evidence of a queer subculture in Madrid, Brussels, or Buenos Aires, though it does attest to the availability of female prostitutes as an outlet for men in the Belgian capital (253-54). The text’s minoritizing logic leaves Mario alone, afloat in a sea of heteronormativity.\textsuperscript{34} It relentlessly isolates and abandons him, without mercy.

II.E. Happiness and Death

The denouement is only an apparent challenge to the argument that \textit{La antorcha apagada} does not treat its protagonist with compassion. In the end, Mario’s arrangement with Sancho and Silvina allows him to ward off the attacks of his opponents by presenting himself in public as a successful husband and father by heteronormative standards. The character feels content, and everyone else considers him a \textit{triunfador} (362) [winner]. In comparison to the protagonist’s final suicide in \textit{El ángel de Sodoma}, the ending \textit{seems} appealingly benevolent.

It also poses numerous interpretive obstacles. Section 4.II.B. contended that the conclusion deconstructs the novel’s binary distinction between scientific modernity and religious tradition, since Mario’s family planning, guided by the objectives of sex reform, perpetuates a conservative sexual regime. Contradictory readings by previous scholars point to a second potential ambiguity centering on the interpretation of the text’s final sentence. Referring to Mario, it states: “Sancho Ercilla había hecho de él un hombre”
(362) [Sancho Ercilla had made a man of him]. The question is whether this conclusion could imply that Mario has covert sexual relations with Sancho as part of their trio with Silvina.

In a short plot summary, Carmen de Urioste states that this is not the case: “a *menage à trois* is not contemplated by Zamacois” (188). There is extensive textual evidence to support this reading. In particular, a final conversation between Mario and Sancho repeats the foreclosure of same-sex contact already observed in their dialogue at the boarding school. With its use of the verb *conocer* [to know] in the Biblical sense of *to lie with,* Mario’s declaration to Sancho is a barely veiled sexual invitation: “Yo quisiera [...] que me conocieses...” (360) [I would like...you to know me]. He proceeds to confess that Silvina, who believes that he is simply impotent, does not know the truth about why he cannot have sex with her. Readers can infer that he is about to reveal his desire for Sancho in unequivocal terms. Before he can do so, the narrator and Sancho interrupt:

La confesión torpe iba a surgir. Afortunadamente, Sancho Ercilla la rechazó a tiempo.
—No me cuentes nada, hermano—exclamó—; guarda tu secreto. Lo que sé de ti basta para que ni mi estimación ni mi cariño te falten jamás. Hasta luego.
La peligrosa explicación se detuvo ahí. (361)

The awkward confession was about to arise. Fortunately, Sancho Ercilla rejected it in time.

‘Don’t tell me anything, brother,’ he exclaimed, ‘keep your secret. What I know about you is enough for you never to lack my respect and affection. Good bye.’

The dangerous explanation stopped there.]

The narrative proceeds without pause to a description of Mario’s triumph as father.
Once again, the text is at pains to show that Sancho does not reciprocate Mario’s sexual desire, alluded to pejoratively as an “awkward confession” and a “dangerous explanation.” For the narrator, it is “fortunate” that this is the case. Based on this conversation, it would appear that Sancho makes Mario a man not by sleeping with him, but by providing him a child and allowing him to perform heteronormative masculinity in public.

Nevertheless, Alberto Mira concludes that La antorcha apagada has “una suerte de final feliz, un ménage à trois, que sugiere que el homosexual tiene su lugar en las relaciones” (De Sodoma 201) [a sort of happy ending, a ménage à trois that suggests that the homosexual has his place in the relations]. On the one hand, the critic’s assertion may simply be a misreading in an otherwise well-argued discussion. The novel seems clear: Mario does not “have his place in the relations” in any sexual sense. But it is less productive to attribute Mira’s interpretation to an error than to a desire to resist against the text’s homophobia, to see a queer bond between Mario and Sancho that the work itself wants to deny. As Suleiman might put it, Mira shows that the novel “overflows” its ideology: “the meaning of an event”—i.e., the secretly unconventional relationship between Mario, Sancho, and Silvina—“is not exhausted by the ‘right’ interpretation according to the thesis of the novel. The event reveals itself more fraught with meaning, and this surplus of meaning can even contradict the ‘right’ interpretation” (216).

Without denying the appeal of Mira’s queer (mis)reading, my own interpretation of the denouement acknowledges the text’s insistence that Mario never has sexual relations with Sancho and that he accepts his lot as a man in public and a motherly guardian to Silvina’s child in private. What concerns me is that this “happy” ending is
entirely unpersuasive on the novel’s own terms. First, the conclusion asks readers to believe that Mario can renounce sexual satisfaction and any expression of his “true” identity in public, and still live in bliss. Whether they do so depends on their own ideological positions, but I, for one, do not. More importantly, the denouement also presumes that the people around Silvina, Sancho, and Mario will not recognize their ruse, or that the trio will be able to face the consequences if their secret does come to light. In Silvina’s words, “¿Qué nos importa la opinión del vulgacho?” (355) [What does the opinion of the masses matter to us?]. The narrator confirms that she is right to disdain public opinion, for in the end, “[n]adie sospechaba las relaciones de Silvina con Sancho; de la tan discutida virilidad del diplomático no se volvió a hablar” (362) [nobody suspected Silvina’s relations with Sancho; not another word was uttered about the diplomat’s heavily contested virility].

The problem here is that the novel’s previous redundancy has taught readers to expect that Mario can never escape hostile public scrutiny. When he is single, his colleagues demand that he get married (278-83). After he has been married for a year without having children, they insist that he produce an heir (335-38). Logically, the suspicious proximity between Mario, Sancho, Silvina, and the baby—Sanchito, no less—will also raise suspicions. If Silvina is right that such gossip should not matter, then it is unclear why Mario needed to hide his inversion in the first place.

In conclusion, *La antorcha apagada* emphasizes the homophobia of a traditional religious society to such an extent that it makes it difficult to believe that there could be any escape, even through publicly conforming to the prevailing norm. The novel’s ending is not convincingly compassionate: it portraits Mario as an invert who must
sacrifice sexual fulfillment to enter a “modern” order of scientific family planning that is finally complicit with tradition, and that may still fall prey to public opinion. The denouement subjects the chaste invert to a figurative death that is arguably as somber as the suicide in *El ángel de Sodoma*.

### III. Locating the Tragic in *El ángel de Sodoma*: Inversion and the Unchanged Name

The previous section showed that *La antorcha apagada* deploys strategies typical of the *roman à thèse* in an effort to limit its own interpretation. Alberto Mira’s analysis exceeds the work’s favored reading by presenting a hypothetical situation (the *ménage à trois* between Mario, Sancho, and Silvina) that is not so much absent as disavowed by the narrative. The opposite occurs in the case of *El ángel de Sodoma* (1928): with few exceptions, critical commentaries try to contain the novel’s meaning by overlooking events whose patent presence in the diegesis requires further examination.

Beginning with Gregorio Marañón and Luis Jiménez de Asúa in their prologue and epilogue to the second edition (1929), most commentators have performed a double reading of the work by Hernández-Catá. First, they posit that it is a *roman à thèse* in support of liberal resistance to the 1928 criminalization of homosexuality in Spain. From this point of view, the novel argues that the modern attitude towards inversion is to treat inverts with compassion on the condition that they remain chaste, since they are not sinners or criminals, but aberrations of Nature. Additionally, the novel is tragic, for the protagonist's inversion is an inherited defect that predestines him to a life of suffering in a futile struggle to overcome his innate identity. Based on the heterosexist supposition that the novel necessarily presents inversion as an abnormality, this second reading
upholds the first: the main character’s tragedy should elicit compassion on the part of readers.

My own analysis seeks to build on the insights of prior interpretations in order to dismantle them with evidence from the text and Aristotelian ideas on tragedy. I do not contest that *El ángel de Sodoma* coincides with scientific discourses of its day by presenting the protagonist’s inversion as a constitutive component of his character, determined by his birth and upbringing. Nor do I disagree that the novel is tragic. Where I differ from most previous critics is in my appraisal of what causes the protagonist’s tragedy. Whereas they believe that he falls into misfortune due to his inversion, a tragic flaw, I find that the character eventually comes to understand his identity as a benign natural variation, and that his suicide is due to a tragic error that prevents him from escaping the traditional social milieu of his provincial hometown during his residency in Paris. Specifically, he fails to follow through on his decision to change his name upon arriving in France.

In essence, I am arguing that the text presents a greater understanding of Aristotle’s theory of tragedy than has generally been admitted. First, it stages a tragedy of character that would not be considered tragic from the Aristotelian perspective explored below (King 5). After challenging the necessity of this tragedy of inversion, it sets into motion a tragedy of situation that does coincide with the conclusions about tragedy in the *Poetics* (King 5). By shifting critical attention to this tragedy of the unchanged name, I aim to disprove that *El ángel de Sodoma* is a roman à thèse in favor of scientific arguments for conditional compassion for chaste inverts. *Pace* Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa, the novel shows that the “modern” scientific view of inversion as a
natural abnormality upholds tradition in the form of the productivist, semi-feudal regime
of the provincial city that propels the protagonist to suicide.

III.A. The Novel and its Critics

Over the course of ten unnumbered chapters, the third-person omniscient narrator
of El ángel de Sodoma recounts the life story of the chaste invert José-María Vélez-
Gomara, the first-born son of an aristocratic household whose coat-of-arms is a source of
pride for an unidentified port city in southern or eastern Spain. Following the death of
his parents, the eighteen-year-old protagonist seeks to preserve his family honor by
grooming his younger sisters Amparo and Isabel-Luisa for marriage and covering up his
brother Jaime’s dissolute life as a sailor. His efforts flounder when he visits a circus and
realizes that he is attracted to a male trapeze artist. In a subsequent internal monologue,
the character concludes that his name is symbolic of a congenital mismatch between his
basically male body and female psychology. José-María vows to maintain his family’s
reputation by disowning the feminine component of his name. It is only when he
receives a letter from his brother that he desists from fruitless attempts to eliminate his
inversion. After learning that Jaime has changed his last name to begin working as a
pirate, the protagonist decides that he can go to Paris, renounce his family name, and live
as a sexually-active invert. He does not put this plan into action in the final chapter, for
his confidence in his anonymity in France prevents him from giving a false name at his
hotel. Consequently, a letter from his hometown is able to reach him around the same
time that he arranges for a meeting with a younger man. In the scene used to open this
dissertation, the missive’s reminder about his familial obligations leads him to throw
himself in front of a train minutes before his rendezvous was to have taken place at the
same metro station.

Placing varying emphasis on different events, most previous readings of José-
María’s story see it as a tragic roman à thèse. This interpretation attained a privileged
standing in 1929, when Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa appended it to the novel in their
prologue and epilogue. In an effort to appropriate the work as evidence of their views on
inversion and intersexuality, the doctor and lawyer contend that it is “profundamente
educativa” (Jiménez de Asúa 246) [profoundly educational] and a “limpia lección de
moral” (Marañón 38) [clean moral lesson] because it conveys the “modern” scientific
thesis that chaste inverters are deserving of pity as victims of a natural error beyond their
control. Their “extravío evolutivo” (30) [evolutionary aberration] is also a tragic flaw: a
“fuerza inexorable” [inexorable force] that leads José-María “paso a paso hacia la
muerte” (39) [step by step towards death]. From this homophobic perspective, the
protagonist’s tragedy is the result of a clash between his admirable attempts to remedy his
defect and the harsh reality that there is no way for him to do so short of suicide. The
dilemma, seen in tragic terms as “el drama íntimo de un homosexual heroico que se
entregó a la muerte sin claudicar” (Jiménez de Asúa 255) [the intimate drama of a heroic
homosexual who surrendered to death without giving in], is supposed to reinforce the
novel’s thesis by making readers feel compassion for José-María.35

Noting that Hernández-Catá dedicated the second edition of El ángel de Sodoma
to Marañón, many critics assume that he agreed with the doctor’s interpretation. They
repeat and strengthen claims that the novel is a roman à thèse composed in a tragic
mode.36 Gastón Fernández de la Torriente exemplifies this trend in comments from
1976: “El Doctor Gregorio Marañón—al tratar el problema de la sexualidad desde un punto de vista científico—llega a la conclusión de que lo que no puede ser evitado no debe ser castigado. Hernández-Catá se adscribe incondicionalmente a esta tesis” [Treating the problem of sexuality from a scientific viewpoint, Dr. Gregorio Marañón reaches the conclusion that what cannot be avoided should not be punished. Hernández-Catá adheres unconditionally to this thesis]. He observes of José-María that “[p]ocas veces se ha logrado en la ficción hispánica un carácter que infunda mayor simpatía y tanta conmiseración como este héroe trágico de Hernández-Catá” (my emphasis, 64) [Hispanic fiction has rarely achieved a character who arouses greater sympathy and as much commiseration as Hernández-Catá’s tragic hero].

Interpretations of this sort are to be expected from critics who affirm the “truth” of Marañón’s views on inversion and consider it positive that the novel espouses his “progressive” ideology (Balseiro 61-62; Gutiérrez de la Solana 95-96). It is more surprising that scholars who treat early twentieth-century science as a historically contingent discourse have not been more suspicious of the readings proposed by the paratexts. Nevertheless, such writers often accept the premises of the prologue and epilogue, whether they deem the novel’s thesis and tragic plot progressive (Cleminson “Medicine” 215-20; Cleminson and Vázquez García ‘Los Invisibles’ 232-34) or homophobic (Bejel 66-77; Fowler 50-65; Galdo; Mira De Sodoma 196-200).37

In the non-paginated article “Reframing Sodom: Sexuality, Nation, and Difference in Hernández Catá’s El ángel de Sodoma,” literary critic Alejandro Mejías-López cites some of these interpretations to prove that the paratexts have met with success in their attempt to impose a single meaning on the novel (par. 2-4). A desire to
contain readings at odds with their own ideological stances is evident in the observations of Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa, both of whom complain that their conservative opponents have misinterpreted their previous writings on intersexuality and conditional compassion (Marañón 26-27; Jiménez de Asúa 246-52). Marañón in particular seems anxious about potential misunderstandings of scientific works about sex, although he concludes that authors who write with high-minded intentions (i.e., intentions in line with his own views) can rest assured that their texts will receive the proper interpretation. In developing this argument, he draws upon two tropes for writing that have already been discussed at length in this dissertation (2.III.B. and 3.II.).

First, he contends that texts are the *criaturas* [children] of their authors (12). As such, they are liable to develop a “personalidad casi autónoma” [almost autonomous personality] following their publication, when readers interpret them in ways that may not correspond to authorial intention (12). It is significant that this personality is *almost* autonomous, as though an author’s works could never completely escape his or her objectives. Later on, Marañón returns to this disclaimer and affirms that writers need not take heed of incorrect or immoral readings of their texts, provided that “los alumbraba una recta intención” (21) [an honest intention gave birth to them]. The physician opens writing to multiple interpretations only to conclude that it is ultimately subject to the aims of its author. In the context of the prologue to *El ángel de Sodoma*, his use of the author/parent and work/child metaphors seems calculated to distance him from José-María and to display his procreative heterosexuality, presumably a guarantee of the *recta* [honest/upright/straight] intention of his own works.
Marañón’s paratext also echoes the Derridean image of writing as a *pharmakon* [drug] open to a play of contradictory meanings. Referring to scientific manuals with practical advice about sex, the doctor claims that “[u]n libro es siempre un remedio [...] tan general, que se corre el peligro de que no ajuste [...] sino a las medidas de un corto número de dolientes” (16) [a book is always such a general remedy that it runs the risk of fitting the needs of only a small number of sufferers]. The medicine can easily become a *veneno* [venom] for those who do not know how to use it or who treat anatomical diagrams like pornography (34, 36). Investigators can put aside their concerns, however, since “[l]a llaga del error se combate sólo con el bálsamo de la verdad” (40) [the wound of error is countered only by the balm of truth]. Once again, Marañón “saves” stable meaning by arguing that the healing qualities of scientific texts overwhelm any noxious side effects.

This operation allows him to imply that *El ángel de Sodoma* is closed to queer interpretations outside the meaning prescribed by his own reading. In his words, the novel “propicia al recto sentir” (40) [brings about honest feelings]. While the word *recto* can mean *honest, upright, or straight* as an adjective, as a noun it carries traces of a thoroughly queer part of the body, the *rectum*. With its polyvalence, it creates ambiguity in the very passage where Marañón argues for a single, heterosexist interpretation of the novel. The physician’s desire for textual control in the face of linguistic indeterminacy of this nature indicates that there is something transgressive about Hernández-Catá’s work that requires containment. The novelist’s dedication to Marañón does not signal an alliance between his text and medical views on inversion, but a conflictive relationship between the literary and scientific discourses.38
In his article, Mejías-López foregrounds this tension so as to open *El ángel de Sodoma* to meanings besides those inscribed in the prologue and epilogue (par. 5). One way the critic is able to accomplish this goal is by reinterpreting the title, which for Jiménez de Asúa refers to a contradiction between José-María’s angelic desire to preserve his family honor, and the Sodomitic temptations brought about by his inversion (255). While Mejías-López agrees that this reading is relevant to part of the novel, he finds that it does not take into account the final chapters, where the protagonist realizes that his desire for men need not be dishonorable. By the denouement, José-María is a “queer angel” who falls victim not to inversion, but to the close-minded mentality of his birthplace, a “straight Sodom” (par. 19-21). Mejías-López supports his argument with a brilliant analysis of the novel’s Biblical intertext to which I refer interested readers.

My own interpretation of *El ángel de Sodoma* continues the project of wresting the work from the interpretive strictures of its frame by examining a second source of allusions: Greek tragedy and the Aristotelian theory to which it gave rise. Read in conjunction with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the novel calls into question the critical commonplace that José-María’s inversion is an inevitably tragic flaw, and offers an alternate tragic action more amenable to the thesis that the protagonist commits suicide to evade making an unsatisfying choice between tradition and modernity.39

**III.B. Tragedy in the Poetics**

Derived from an inductive analysis of Greek tragedies composed fifty to a hundred years earlier, Aristotle’s observations on tragedy in the *Poetics* (360-320 BCE) have influenced later writers working outside the dramatic genre (Eden 41). As Jeannette King notes in her book *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel* (1978), late nineteenth and early
twentieth-century novelists such as George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James referred to Aristotle as they sought to merge classical concepts of tragedy with novelistic convention (3, 12, 39). Passages from _El ángel de Sodoma_ cited below indicate that Hernández-Catá was also familiar with the _Poetics_. In my reading, I resist calling the novel a tragedy in the modal sense of an action “represented by people acting and not by narration” (Aristotle 1449b). The novel does not deploy the “manner” of representation characteristic of dramatic tragedies; rather, elements of José-María’s story comprise “objects” of representation that can be considered more or less tragic from an Aristotelian perspective (1447a-1448b).

For Aristotle, the most effective tragedies have as their object an action wherein a character who is “better than we are” (1448a) passes “from fortune to misfortune” as a result of a “great error” (1453a), generally followed by scenes of _anagnorisis_ [recognition] and _peripeteia_ [reversal] (1452a). The purpose of the representation is to effect an emotional catharsis in an audience, usually one of “pity and terror” (1449b). While several parts of this definition have provoked controversy among later commentators (Eden 41), one of the most persistent debates involves the causes of the hero’s fall into adversity (Bushnell 55). Critics have understood the Greek word _hamartia_—used by Aristotle in lieu of _error_ in the quotation above—in several ways, two of which help evaluate the tragic action in _El ángel de Sodoma_.

Since the Middle Ages in Europe, many scholars have considered _hamartia_ a tragic flaw, a fault or shortcoming innate to a character (Bushnell 86). In this context, _anagnorisis_ is an experience through which the character comes to “inner awareness or
inner knowledge” of him or herself (69). King calls tragedies written following this model *tragedies of character* (5).

Generally, they do not fit Aristotle’s ideas on successful tragic plots, since the most accurate translation of *hamartia* is actually “‘missing the mark,’ a phrase which answers more directly than the concept of a tragic flaw the Aristotelian insistence that *hamartia* is an action, something protagonists do and not something inherent in their ‘characters’” (Drakakis and Liebler 8). More than an essential defect in a character, *hamartia* is an erroneous action. Aristotle further specifies that the action cannot be tragic if it is fully intended by a villainous character, or completely beyond the control of a decent one (1452b-1453a). Instead, tragic errors are committed unintentionally by characters who must retrospectively claim responsibility for the incidents that bring about their fall (1453a-1454a). Such characters become conscious of their mistake as the result of events linked by necessary or probable relations of cause and effect (1451a), one of which may be *anagnorisis*, defined not as a moment of self-knowledge, but as a recognition of the true relations between various agents, “a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity, among people” (1452a). The best recognitions occur alongside “a change of the actions to their opposite,” or a reversal from good fortune to disaster (1452a). In King’s lexicon, tragedies that function according to these definitions are *tragedies of situation* (5).

The distinction between *hamartia* as a flaw or an error has a bearing on *El ángel de Sodoma*, since the story passes through two phases that can be read as a tragedy of character and a tragedy of situation. In the first, José-María believes that his inversion is a tragic flaw brought into being against his will by the forces of Nature. Although
previous critics have turned to this part when arguing that the novel is a tragedy, it is not truly tragic in Aristotelian terms. Within the novel’s logic, inversion is not an action, but an involuntary trait. The narrative itself acknowledges that the tragedy of its earlier chapters is only apparent when it shows that the protagonist is able to overcome his belief that inversion is a defect and move to Paris in order to live freely as an invert. It is there that a situational tragedy occurs: he makes the mistake of not changing his name at his hotel and must face the consequences in the form of a letter from his home city. Closer to Aristotle’s theory than the previous events, the actions of the final chapter frame José-María’s fall as the result of an impossible choice between personal happiness and social obligations, Paris and the province, modernity and tradition. The following sections trace the development of this dilemma from its inception amidst allusion to the *Poetics* in chapter 1, via the increasingly dubious *tragedy of inversion* in chapters 2-9, to the *tragedy of the unchanged name* in the denouement.

### III.C. Setting the Stage

The opening chapter of *El ángel de Sodoma* introduces the setting and characters, and explains how José-María becomes head of the Vélez-Gomara household. Its references to Greek tragedy and Aristotle place the aristocratic family’s experience of modernization in a tragic framework. Although José-María eventually comes to question whether modern change represents a misfortune, the first chapter constructs a distinction between tradition and modernity that remains relevant later on. Likewise, its tragic intertext reverberates throughout the novel.

The connections between Greek tragedy and José-María’s story are evident from the outset: “La caída de cualquier construcción material o espiritual mantenida en alto
varios siglos constituye siempre un espectáculo patético” (47) [The fall of any material or spiritual edifice kept on high for several centuries is always a pathetic spectacle]. This philosophical abstraction implies that the fall of the Vélez-Gomara family discussed in the following sentence, together with José-Maria’s fall beneath the train in the denouement, are instantiations of a universal human tragedy. The adjective *patético* used to describe this spectacle comes from the Greek word *pathos* [suffering, feeling, emotion] and recalls Aristotle’s conclusion on the centrality of suffering in tragic plots, where “deaths in full view, agonies, woundings” arouse strong emotions in viewers (1452a, 1449b).

Later in chapter 1, the narrator continues to recount his story as a classical tragedy, complete with protagonists and chorus. When José-Maria’s father commits suicide out of financial despair, “[t]oda la ciudad participó del drama” (55) [the whole city participated in the drama]. Following the funeral, the main character and his sisters, “hasta entonces coro doloroso e inerme a espaldas de los protagonistas” [until then, an agonizing, helpless chorus behind the protagonists], must “avanzar hasta el primer plano” [come to center stage] to take control of their estate (57). Later descriptions of their *ventura* or *desventura* (60, 64, 108, 140, 159) echo the words in José Goya y Muniaín’s well-known Spanish translation of the *Poetics* (1798) for *fortune* and *misfortune* (25, 32). Aristotelian terms also appear in José-Maria’s initial feelings of *lástima* [pity, compassion] and *piedad* [mercy] towards his inversion (96, 101, 149), and his later sensation “de lástima y de admiración” [of pity and wonder] when he realizes he can be anonymous in Paris (204). *Lástima* and *admiración* are among the emotions proper to tragedy in the Spanish *Poetics* (30-31, 33, 36).
The narrator of *El ángel de Sodoma* affirms that his story should cause readers to experience these feelings. In the first paragraph’s final sentence, he explains that the tale of the Vélez-Gomara family, and particularly of José-María’s heroism, ought to be “lo bastante rico en rasgos dolorosos para sacar de su egolatría o de su indiferencia, durante un par de horas, a algunos lectores sensibles” (48) [rich enough in painful traits to shake some sensitive readers out of their egoism or indifference for a couple of hours]. The statement coincides with Butcher’s definition of Aristotelian catharsis as a “transport of feeling, which carries a man beyond his individual self” (cited in Drakakis and Liebler 4). One reason why José-María’s life is able to produce a comparable sensation is because his noble origins make him a “better” character like the protagonists of Greek tragedy (Aristotle 1448a). The plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides feature members of ruling families from a legendary past when humans were in contact with the gods.

The passing of a heroic age also spells tragedy for the Vélez-Gomara family in the novel by Hernández-Catá. Following the opening statement cited above, the narrative continues with several sentences vital to its depiction of tradition and modernity in terms of a shift from holism to individualism:

La casa de los Vélez-Gomara era muy antigua y había sido varias veces ilustre por el ímpetu de sus hombres y por la riqueza atesorada bajo su blasón. Pero con el desgaste causado por la lima de los años, los ánimos esforzados debilitáronse y el caudal volvió a pulverizarse en el anónimo, merced a garras de usureros y a manos de mujeres acariciadoras y cautas. La democracia alumbró aquí y allá, sin consagraciones regias, cien cabezas de estirpe, mientras la casa de los Vélez-Gomara languidecía. (47-48)

[The Vélez-Gomara household was very old and had been illustrious on several occasions for the vigor of its men and the riches amassed under the auspices of its crest. But with the wear caused by the file of time, the strong spirits got weaker, and, due to the clutches of usurers and the hands of caressing and astute women, the riches flowed back to the masses.

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Here and there, without royal decree, democracy gave birth to a hundred heads of household while the Vélez-Gomara family grew feeble.]

This passage delineates a sharp distinction between differing social structures. In the past, holist ideologies of essential difference between social castes defined by a divinely ordained king placed the Vélez-Gomara family near the pinnacle of a feudal hierarchy. But with the spread of individualist notions of class differentiation through labor and property, the household lost much of its standing in a bourgeois productivist regime. The narrator construes the household’s fall in terms of a parallel between its evolving economic situation and sexual behavior: financial hardship under the pressure of middle-class “usurers” corresponds to “emascula
tion” and sexual “excess,” possibly with female prostitutes. This correlation of capital, sex, and gender persists throughout the novel, particularly as José-María eschews the productivist ethic of his home city for a consumerist worldview in Paris.40

Among other reasons, the protagonist travels to France because the triumph of bourgeois productivism in the provincial port does not significantly undermine the honor code that demanded the absolute virility of male aristocrats in the older feudal system. In fact, the city’s middle-class inhabitants attribute renewed symbolic weight to the Vélez-Gomara family at the very moment when their business activities deprive the household of its inherited economic capital. Although the bourgeois citizens consider the aristocratic coat-of-arms the timbre óptimo (49) [greatest seal] of their ciudad prí
cer (48) [heroic city], their investment in the family’s symbolism does not give them cause to help José-María’s father when he faces bankruptcy: he is not as cheap to maintain as “la leyenda del barrio fenicio o del estandarte secular del Ayuntamiento” (55) [the legends of the Phoenician quarter or the age-old banner on town hall].
This middle-class hypocrisy forces the Vélez-Gomara men into a dilemma about how to handle their obsolete aristocratic privilege. While the father is unsuccessful in his efforts “de echar a un lado [sus] pergaminos y de doblar la estatura sobre el trabajo” (52) [to push aside his titles of nobility and get down to work], José-María does not hesitate to accept a job as a banker following the death of his parents (67-68). His meticulous penmanship in his accounts later becomes symbolic of his adherence to a productivist ethic of hard work and saving. The protagonist puts this ethic to work in support of his family honor when he and his sisters labor for hours to clean their home after their father’s suicide (58).

If José-María’s need to enter the workforce indicates the strength of a productivist culture with a symbolic allegiance to feudalism in his hometown, it does not mean that the city is entirely closed to other modes of social organization. Trains, automobiles, and boats promise to revolutionize urban space in the port, while sailors in search of release after chastity at sea demand a loosening of middle-class sexual norms (48-49). Upon arriving in Paris, José-María embraces modern modes of transportation and economic and sexual consumerism as a means of finding happiness as an invert. Beforehand, he sees them as a threat to his efforts to extinguish his inversion and protect his family’s reputation. In the tragedy of inversion, the protagonist comes closest to ceding to his supposed flaw whenever he deviates from his productivist ethic to visit the city’s margins, where consumerist individualism reigns supreme.

III.D. The Tragedy of Inversion

The first extensive tragic plot in El ángel de Sodoma begins when life has acquired “un ritmo venturoso” [a happy rhythm] for José-María (60). As happens
elsewhere in the novel, the narrative forges a link between his attitudes concerning money, work, and sex during this time of good fortune: his careful account keeping at the bank and exacting tidiness at home go hand in hand with his desire to protect the virginity of his sisters before marriage (68-69). All form part of a productivist ethic whereby he seeks to integrate his household into the city’s predominately bourgeois, patriarchal order. The only threat to José-María’s contentment consists of the constant reminder of his neighbors that he is not middle-class, but an aristocrat with obligations to his family name (59-60, 72).

Initially, the character is able to ward off this threat by means of his dedication to the cornerstones of his project to restore his lineage to its former glory, “el orden, la limpieza [y] el ahorro” (116) [order, cleanliness, and savings]. But he is unable to prolong his strict regime indefinitely. The first signs of his impending fall into misfortune correspond to the forced relaxation of his productivist ethic when his brother Jaime returns home from his first stint at sea. Having experienced life outside his birthplace, the sailor disdains José-María’s moral rigidity and does not hesitate to insult the bourgeoisie (80). Jaime’s drinking and sexual remarks upset his brother’s routine, even causing his handwriting to falter at the bank (82).

This disturbance reaches a climax when José-María accompanies Jaime to a traveling circus, an ephemeral and marginal space in the city (82-91). Previous critics have noted the carnavalesque and nomadic nature of the show and have identified it as a “bearer of change” in the otherwise static port (Mejías-López note 12), and an opportunity to violate bourgeois social norms (Galdo 27; Menéndez 140-43). In effect, middle-class sexual restraint is far from the concerns of the audience. When two trapeze
artists of the opposite sex perform an act with a lion and a tiger, the crowd produces “alaridos de voluptuosa angustia” (87) [shrieks of voluptuous anguish]. José-María is not exempt from this sexual excitement. After Jaime introduces him to the acrobats and asks if he likes the woman, he realizes that “sólo una figura perduraba en su retina y en sus nervios: la del hombre...¡La del hombre joven y fornido nada más!” (91) [one figure alone remained in his sight and upon his touch: that of the man...Only that of the young, well-built man!].

José-María identifies this revelación [revelation] as a recognition leading to a reversal of fortune when he deems his newfound inversion a tragic flaw (75). Upon returning home from the circus, he spends the night thinking about his attraction to the man. In an internal monologue stylistically reminiscent of Mario’s self-examinations in La antorcha apagada, he asks: “¿Por qué la Naturaleza había ido a equivocarse en él, en él que hubiera querido conservar y aun abrillantar, de ser posible, el nombre del padre heroico aureolado por la distancia y por la muerte?” (99-100) [Why had Nature made an error with him, he who would have liked to preserve and even improve, if possible, the name of the heroic father consecrated by time and death?]. If the character’s subsequent feelings of lástima (96, 101) over his inversion reveal that he considers it a tragic defect, his conclusion that it is also a caprice of fate shows that it cannot be cause for a tragedy from an Aristotelian perspective (122). According to the Poetics, such a phenomenon is not truly tragic, since representations of suffering without a previous error on the part of a character are “neither terrifying nor pitiable, but shocking” (1452b). José-María’s belief that his “condition” is a desventura beyond his control lays the foundation for his eventual realization that it need not necessarily be tragic (108, 140, 159).
It takes some time for him to reach this conclusion, for his initial thoughts on inverts reflect the homophobia of pathologizing medical discourses of his day. As Mira notes, the protagonist “ventriloquizzes” scientific texts when he contemplates the etiology of his “flaw,” as well as possible “cures” (*De Sodoma* 196). Echoing the ideas of Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa, and the planks of the WLSR (4.I.B.), he finds that he is not a criminal or sinner, since inversion “[n]o se trata de una cosa que puedes adquirir o dejar, sino de algo que «eres» porque naciste así, porque te engendraron así” (134) [is not something you can acquire or abandon, but something you ‘are’ because you were born that way, because your parents conceived you that way]. Even so, he believes that he has the obligation to deny himself any kind of sexual contact with men. Given “la alternativa del sacrificio y del vicio sin perdón” [the choice between sacrifice and unforgiveable vice], José-María opts for the former and tries to “remedy” his condition (128). The phrasing of his decision recalls Mario’s comparison of inverts to others with congenital disabilities in *La antorcha apagada* (Table 1, quote 3): “Lo mismo que al jorobado se le pone un aparato ortopédico, pondría él duro corsé [...] que no permitiera torcerse a ninguno de sus instintos” (102) [In the same way that a hunchback wears an orthopedic device, he would put on a stiff corset that would not allow any of his instincts to be twisted].

The narrator does not provide evidence until many pages after this resolution that José-María has first-hand knowledge of scientific views on inversion. When he finally mentions that the character once read a medical treatise in the municipal library (169), readers must reconsider previous passages describing a “[c]ura de fuego y hierro” (102) [cure of fire and brimstone]. It turns out that scientific advice about how to promote
sexual differentiation led José-María to exercise and sunbathe, smoke and grow a beard, modify his gestures and stride, and attempt relations with women (130-33, 159-65). Since he intends for these measures to help him honor his family crest, he uses “modern” science to perpetuate aristocratic tradition. For José-María, this science is not the balm touted by Marañón in his prologue, but a source of intense, useless suffering. The character’s “cure” gives him migraines and a cough, but it does not eliminate his desire for men (130-31). Contravening the thesis of Zamacois’s novel, El ángel de Sodoma insinuates that scientific knowledge about sex is not a modern cure for religious conservatism, but a source of pain for an invert who uses it to uphold a traditional honor code.

III.E. Tragedy Vanquished

After much anguish, José-María finally realizes that attempts to cure his inversion are in vain and that it would be better to treat it as a positive part of his identity rather than a tragic flaw. His eventual decision to change his name and visit Paris in search of relations with men constitutes a second reversal in the narrative, not from fortune to misfortune, but vice versa. The process by which this change of events overcomes the tragedy of inversion is gradual and involves the deterioration of José-María’s productivist ethic in the wake of his increasing contact with individualist consumerism on the fringes of the provincial city’s bourgeois culture.

The protagonist views his first deviations from his work routine as dangerous concessions to his tragic defect. His attitude is clearest when he visits the docks by night (124-26). In a gloss on this episode, Richard Cleminson notes that descriptions of electricity in nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts often associate it with sexual
energy (“Medicine” 212). The sexualization of modern illumination is also evident in the novel, where “una orgía de luces” (124) [an orgy of lights] at the docks “fingían en el agua el arco iris inexistente en el negro cielo de tormenta, y prestaba hasta a los sitios más familiares novedad de aventura” (125) [created the illusion in the water of a nonexistent rainbow in the black, stormy sky, and lent even the most familiar sites a novel air of adventure]. By opening possibilities for furtive nocturnal contacts, the lights make the docks a space of sexual consumerism, removed from the imperatives of domesticity and procreation. From his hiding spot in the shadows, José-María glimpses three sailors who take advantage of the site to unleash their libido in “una canción alcohólica y lúbrica” (126) [a drunken and lubricious song]. Fascinated and terrified by their physicality, the protagonist interrupts his voyeurism and rushes home to avoid “dangerous” male sexuality.

In later scenes, his responses to similar behavior are less punitive and signal a growing attraction to individualist ideologies of spending and sex. On one occasion, José-María enters a café near the docks and reads a letter sent from abroad by Jaime (136-44). Meanwhile, he observes a group of boisterous soldiers, apparently free from any obligations to family and work. Between the news of his brother’s overseas adventures and the merriness of the soldiers, he begins to think that he would be happier alone: “¡Ah, de haber estado en la vida solo, de no tener la responsabilidad de tres destinos sobre el suyo, él también se habría ido a la guerra!” (143) [Ah, had he been alone in life, had he not been responsible for three destinies besides his own, he too would have gone to war!]. For the time being, José-María interrupts his individualist reverie by recalling his family ties: “Pero no... Imposible: Jaime, Isabel-Luisa y Amparo
también llevaban el nombre paterno” (144) [But no... Impossible: Jaime, Isabel-Luisa, and Amparo also possessed his father’s name]. Nevertheless, his increasingly awkward penmanship at the bank suggests that his productivist ethic has been permanently weakened (149-50).

A second letter from Jaime deals José-María’s traditional values another strong blow. After reading that his brother has rebaptized himself Nicolás Smith to become a pirate, the protagonist reflects:

Cambiar de nombre: ¡qué cosa tan turbadora y, por lo visto, tan fácil!!...Cambiar de nombre, bautizarse a sí mismo, cortar el cordón umbilical del alma y reconocerse solo, único eslabón irresponsable desligado de toda cadena...Dejar a un lado la funda estrecha de los apellidos y ser otro, más verdadero tal vez, sin pasado, sin cargas...¡Qué maravilla! (175)

To change one’s name: What a very disturbing thing, and, it would seem, so easy!...To change one’s name, to baptize oneself, to cut the soul’s umbilical cord and to recognize that one is alone, a single, irresponsible link separated from any chain...To leave aside the tight slip of one’s family names and to become another, perhaps someone more authentic, without a past, without burdens...How wonderful!

José-María’s joyous exclamations confirm Mejías-López’s observation that this episode marks a “drastic reversal” in his situation (par. 15), a renunciation of the tragedy of inversion, and a revolution of his ethical stances towards sex and money. Following his decision to change his name, the character recovers his initial good fortune and looks forward to the day in Paris when he will be able to say, “¡Así soy! ¡Fuera falsa virtud, fuera vergüenza de mostrarme según me hicieron!” (178) [This is the way I am! Be gone, false virtue; be gone, shame to show myself the way I was made!]. Although José-María clings to the scientific “truth” that his inversion is a congenital condition, he now refuses to see it as a shameful pathology. His new self-acceptance is accompanied by
hopes for a dramatically different life, “una existencia libre, sin entelequias a que sacrificarse, ya sin responsabilidad, sin posibilidades de gastar la plétera de energía juvenil en meros trabajos de avaricia” (204) [a free existence, without chimeras demanding of sacrifice, without responsibilities, without the possibility of wasting his store of youthful energy on petty jobs full of greed].

The protagonist redefines his previous dedication to work and family as a waste of his youth and sets out to release his savings, both monetary and sexual, through consumerism. During his last days in his hometown, he acquires credit cards and becomes well-known for handing out money to beggars (205, 211). His spending increases during his train ride to Paris, when he finally becomes an anonymous individual in a crowd of strangers (212-15). Thrilled by the pleasure of being alone, he treats himself to coffee and liquor and dares to stare at a young man in a station. His experience of modern transportation resonates more with the seductive encounter on a train in Retana’s novel Mi novia y mi novio [My Girlfriend and My Boyfriend] (1923) than with Mario’s embarrassing journeys in La antorcha apagada (3.II.C. and 4.II.D.). For José-María, the locomotive is a space for the liberation of same-sex desire and a vehicle into Paris’s modern order of consumerist individualism (Cleminson “Medicine” 214-15). From station to station, he eagerly abandons his allegiance to his aristocratic distinction as he comes to the conclusion that time and space make all people equal: “Cien leguas, cien años, y el magnate era polvo y el reverenciado desconocido...” (214) [A hundred leagues, a hundred years, and the high would be dust, the revered unknown...].
Although José-Maria’s happiness on the train presages his initial period of good fortune in Paris, there are other signs that his contentment is not to last. Several incidents prior to his departure from home set the stage for his tragic death. Following the wedding of his sisters, he drives around his city to say goodbye to his favorite places. He becomes nostalgic and reconsiders his decision to leave: “Creía detestar a la ciudad, y ahora comprobaba que algo melancólico enturbiaba la alegría de dejarla” (201) [He thought he detested the city, and now he was realizing that something melancholy marred the joy of leaving it]. The doubt is fleeting, but it is enough to suggest that José-María has not fully renounced his origins and may have to resist his city’s pull later on. The town certainly does not intend to let him escape its grasp, for one of his new brothers-in-law wants to partner with him at the bank upon his return (210). The man’s shouts reach José-María as his train departs from the station: “Déjate de tontunas y ve a ver a nuestros corresponsales en seguida. Yo les escribo” (212) [Stop being silly and go see our correspondents at once. I’ll write to them]. The protagonist’s subsequent failure to prevent his family from reaching him in France leads to his downfall in the tragedy of the unchanged name.

III.F. The Tragedy of the Unchanged Name

Several previous readings of El ángel de Sodoma conclude that Paris appears in the final chapter as a “capital of sin” where José-María can avoid capitulating to his “tragic flaw” only through suicide (Bejel 75; Galdo 27). While this interpretation seems plausible in light of representations of the French capital as a source of imported vice in Spain from the eighteenth century onwards, it distorts the narrative’s close identification with its protagonist’s perspective upon his arrival in the city (Mejías-López par. 16).
Ecstatic exclamations scattered throughout the prose reveal that José-María does not initially experience Paris as a dangerous center of corruption, but as a liberatory space where he can feel “el júbilo de estrenar la vida” (220) [the jubilation of starting life anew].

The word life in this formulation refers to a vital experience in which the character can achieve his dream of living as an individual consumer, an anonymous stranger in a crowd of seductive bodies and commodities. The financial and sexual restraint typical of his productivist ethic in his home city cedes in Paris to a new nexus of spending and erotic release in a consumerist culture. During his first day in the city, José-María changes his wardrobe and buys soaps and perfumes to give himself a sumptuous bath (218-20). A “language of pleasure” imbues his purchases with an unmistakably erotic texture (Menéndez 154): “En la tienda su diestra palpaba con delite [sic] los hilos frescos, las batistas traslúcidas, los crespones de lujosa granulación, el raso elástico de las ligas” (218) [In the store, his right hand touched with delight the fresh linens, the translucent cambrics, the luxuriously grained crepes, the elastic satin of the garters]. A momentary threat to the sensuality of shopping appears in the form of a clerk who offers to have José-María’s purchases embroidered with his initials. Eager to abandon his aristocratic distinction, he declines (219).

For a while, the spatial layout of Paris helps the character forget his origins and enjoy the erotic pulsations of an urban multitude. Whereas the sparsely-described cities in La antorcha apagada do not appear to have queer subcultures, the French metropolis emerges in El ángel de Sodoma as a collection of cruising grounds where “un gesto en cualquier espectáculo, en cualquier bulevar” [a gesture at any show, in any boulevard]
would allow José-María to pick up a man (223). While waiting to find an appropriate lover, the protagonist visits theaters and shops, cafés and terraces, tea houses and dance halls, always attuned to passing bodies in “el río humano” (223-24) [the human river]. Eventually, his gaze falls upon a younger man with whom he enters a bookstore in order to schedule a rendezvous in a metro station the following day (225-27). As in the meeting between a dandy and a prostitute in a boutique in El Caballero Audaz’s novel Bestezuela de placer [Little Beast of Pleasure] (1922), a space of commodity exchange doubles as a site of sexual consumerism in the shop (2.III.D.). José-María’s happiness in Paris peaks as he leaves the bookstore.

Ironically, a sequence of events beginning at precisely this point in the narrative leads to a reversal of the protagonist’s fortune. Upon returning to his hotel, the doorman informs him that he missed a visit from two unidentified men. Distracted by his euphoria, he thinks that there must have been a mistake and disregards the message (227-28). In the process, he forgets that he chose not give a false name at his hotel after witnessing “[l]a indiferencia con que fue escuchado el verdadero” (217-18) [the indifference with which the real one was received]. While Mejías-López is right to call the unchanged name a “mistake” (par. 17), it is also possible to frame it in stronger terms as a tragic error. Like the Aristotelian hamartia, the slip triggers a series of consequences unforeseen by José-María, but within the realm of probability and necessity in the diegesis (Aristotle 1451a-1451b).

Aristotle explains what he means by these terms when he writes that the finest tragic actions “happen contrary to expectation but because of one another.” Such events are “more amazing” than “random” or unmotivated incidents (1452a). The tragedy of the
unchanged name in *El ángel de Sodoma* conforms perfectly to the philosopher’s call for carefully calculated patterns of cause and effect in tragic plots. While it is *coincidental* that José-María receives visitors at the very time he is arranging a date with the man at the bookstore, it is not *random*: readers will recall that the protagonist’s brother-in-law promised to call their associates in Paris on the day of his departure. Since José-María did not change his name, it is not difficult to believe that the bankers were able to locate him.

Nor is it surprising that a letter from home reaches the character. After dressing for his date, he finds the missive in his mailbox at the hotel. Certain that it is not for him, he slips it into his jacket without further investigation and hurries to the metro, where the shoving of the crowd in the train crushes the paper in his pocket. As he casually opens the envelope, “un efluvio de su ciudad, de su vida anterior, escapó de él y entró imperativo en el alma” (230) [a draft of his city, of his former life, escaped from it and entered his soul like a command]. The letter reminds José-María of his brother-in-law’s plans at the bank and concludes by exhorting him not to forget his family name (231).

All the weight of aristocratic tradition falls upon the protagonist in the tragic recognition and reversal set into motion by this message. Unlike the realization of his own identity in the dubious tragedy of inversion, José-María’s recognition of his hometown’s stubborn demands is a case of *anagnorisis* in Aristotle’s sense of the word, a revelation of “friendship or enmity” among multiple people (1452a). The character now understands that the port is an intractable opponent unwilling to let him pursue personal fulfillment. His new knowledge transforms his ride on the metro from a joyous prelude to his date to a funereal journey towards death.
Readers of El ángel de Sodoma have proposed widely varying interpretations of José-María’s suicide in the subway. Depending on their own political needs and their attention to different textual details, they see the character’s death as a final effort to protect his angelic innocence from Sodomitic temptation (Jiménez de Asúa 255), a homophobic punishment for his decision to meet another man (Mira de Sodoma 200), a homophilic denunciation of the provincial city’s fatal intolerance (Mejías-López par. 22-24; Menéndez 157), or a refusal to renounce his desire for men by returning home (Jambrina 2). Although the first and last of these readings seem antithetical, I want to suggest that they are both correct: unable to find a way to conciliate his familial obligations and personal longings, José-María kills himself because he cannot choose between them without making an unacceptable sacrifice.

Once he steps off the train at the station where he is to meet the man, the character faces a dilemma of the type described by literary critic Lucien Goldmann as a tragic impasse, “a choice among a number of different possibilities which are all mutually incompatible but none of which is wholly satisfying” (57). While José-María could proceed with his date without worrying about the future, he now believes that if he were to surrender to “corruption” in Paris, “ya no podría volver jamás a la ciudad fundada por las suyas” (232) [he would never be able to return to the city founded by his own]. His reinterpretation of the French capital as a den of vice is a last-minute reversal brought about by the letter. It is not drastic enough to prevent him from feeling that capitulating to the port and breaking his appointment would be a form of self-betrayal. José-María cringes at the idea of relinquishing his personal well-being for social impositions: “la idea de regresar al hotel, de recibir la visita del corresponsal de la banca de su cuñado—sin
duda el visitante del día anterior—también le horripilaba” (232) [the idea of returning to the hotel, of receiving the visit of the correspondent from his brother-in-law’s bank—doubtlessly the previous day’s visitor—also horrified him].

Forced to choose, the protagonist finds none of his options satisfactory: neither society nor self, province nor metropolis, tradition nor modernity. Like Gretchen in Goethe’s Faust, he concludes that death is his only way out: “[l]a muerte lo evitaba todo, lo borraba todo” (233) [death evaded everything, erased all of it]. In order to save his family from the shame of a more obvious suicide, he fakes an accident by falling on the rails in front of a train (233-35). Once a vehicle for his entrance into a modern culture of individualist consumerism and same-sex desire, the locomotive crushes José-María and seals the triumph of bourgeois homophobia in his birthplace (Cleminson “Medicine” 214-15). The train’s metamorphosis from a means of liberation to an instrument of death constitutes the novel’s final tragic reversal, a result not of the character’s inversion, but of an error that prevents him from severing ties with tradition.

**Conclusion: Prophetic Texts**

In hindsight, the victory of a traditional sexual regime at the end of El ángel de Sodoma and La antorcha apagada can be read as a harrowing prophecy of the Nationalist triumph in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975). Catholic Nationalism in mid-twentieth-century Spain disrupted the sexual politics of the Second Republic by stigmatizing queer sexualities and making the heteronormative family the bastion of the nation. Consequences of this project include the murder, imprisonment, or exile of writers known for their queer desire and leftist politics before the Civil War: Federico García Lorca, Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent, Álvaro
Retana, and Luis Cernuda, among others. For the large number of Spaniards who evaded such drastic fates, police violence, censorship, and legal coercion placed grave restrictions on affirmative expressions of queerness in most public spaces and cultural forms.\(^{44}\) While queer urban subcultures were able to survive in marginal bars and neighborhoods by using Hollywood films and *coplas* as camp icons, most participants became adept at performing heteronormative masculinity for family members, co-workers, and State institutions.\(^{45}\) They acted like Mario at the end of *La antorcha apagada* to avoid the retaliation leading to José-María’s death in *El ángel de Sodoma*.

One reason they needed to take this measure was to circumvent threats posed by the Nationalist medical establishment. The collusion of Spanish doctors and psychiatrists with the regime’s official homophobia reveals how easily they were able to harness progressive scientific knowledge from the 1920s and 30s to their own reactionary ends. As historian Arturo Arnalte notes, sexological texts by Marañón from before the Civil War were well-cited by doctors and jurists complicit with the regime (32).\(^{46}\) Although Marañón considered his findings on inversion a modern improvement on religious thought, Francoist physicians were able to merge his conclusions with the dictatorship’s Catholic ideology to argue that inversion was an illness leading to corruption and crime.\(^{47}\) As late as 1978, three years after Franco’s death, electroshock therapy and confinement in “rehabilitation centers” in Huelva and Badajoz were still considered acceptable “cures.”\(^{48}\)

These centers recall concentration camps elsewhere in Europe and suggest that the conservative turn in Spanish science following 1939 paralleled similar changes on the continent, especially with respect to eugenics. Between the 1880s and 1930s, there were
a variety of eugenic programs in Europe, not all of which put negative techniques at the service of right-wing political ideologies (Cleminson *Anarchism* 21-29; Levine and Bashford 13). After 1945, however, many scientists outside of Germany sought to distance themselves from the word *eugenics* as they came to recognize that “racial improvement” could lead to the devastatingly racist and homophobic politics of Nazi Germany (Levine and Bashford 17; Moses and Stone).49

*El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* presage the reactionary uses of science by the Third Reich and the Franco regime in varying ways. In the first novel, José-María draws on scientific advice about sexual differentiation in an attempt to “remedy” his inversion and to comply with a traditional honor code. In the second, Mario uses eugenics to ensure that Silvina’s child will not be an invert and to engineer a family situation conducive to his acceptance in a heteronormative society. This is not to say that the novels necessarily support conservative politics. On the contrary, the tragedies of inversion and the unchanged name in *El ángel de Sodoma* condemn the provincial city whose heterosexism pushes José-María to suicide.

The political leanings of *La antorcha apagada* are harder to identify. While its interpretive line argues that modern science is an antidote to religious tradition, its conclusion deconstructs Manichean binaries to expose an alliance between Mario’s eugenic family planning and his patriarchal social milieu. Two passages reveal that the character’s scientific worldview verges dangerously close to fascist politics, particularly in light of events following quickly upon the novel’s publication.

The first appears in the generational debate analyzed in section 4.II.A., where Mario’s classmate Pablito approvingly refers to a recent eugenics conference held in
Berlin as evidence of the growing acceptance of scientific attitudes towards sex across Europe (166). Without further details, it is difficult to determine which event the character has in mind. Two important scientific conferences took place in Berlin in the 1920s and 30s. The fifth meeting of the International Congress of Genetics in 1927 attracted 900 geneticists and coincided with the opening of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics (Weiss 55-56). It was followed by the International Congress for Population Science in August of 1935. Although the second event featured presentations by scientists with a range of political views, 59 of the 126 presentations were given by German racial hygienists (Kühl 32-35). According to sociologist Stefan Kühl, the conference “represented a great success for the Nazi race propaganda machine” (32).

Since Pablito’s remark was added to La antorcha apagada after the publication of Una pobre vida and La tragedia de un hombre que no sabía a dónde ir (it does not appear in the 1924 and 1926 texts), it could refer to the 1927 Genetics Congress, held before the dawn of the Third Reich. It seems less likely that Zamacois meant for it to allude to the 1935 Population Science Congress, since the event took place four months after the author claims to have finished the novel (La antorcha 362). But by late 1935, readers could have easily interpreted the comment as a reference to the conference in Nazi Germany, regardless of authorial intention. From a contemporary perspective, praise for an unidentified eugenics congress in Berlin in a novel from 1935 seems all too much like an endorsement of Nazi racial politics.50

An equally disturbing passage describes Mario’s life goals before his departure for Buenos Aires: “perseveraría en su carrera, llegaría a embajador y luego de recorrer las
principales ciudades del mundo se restituiría a España y aspiraría a ser ministro, a ser jefe
de Gobierno..., a ser dictador quizás..., puesto que todo lo podía ambicionar y a todo tenía
derecho..., ¡menos a ser amado!” (255) [he would persevere in his career, become an
ambassador, and, after traveling around all the world’s major cities, go back to Spain and
aspire to become a minister, the chief of Government..., a dictator perhaps..., since he
could aspire to anything and had a right to everything...except to being loved!]. In the
last lines of the novel, Mario’s “redemption” of his manhood puts him well on his way to
accomplishing his objectives, for he receives a promotion in Argentina and intends to
return to Spain to become a minister (362).

In *Una pobre vida*, Mario’s plan to become a dictator likely caused readers to
recall the contemporaneous dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (66, 124). They
would have been less inclined to do so in 1935. In that year, the Primo era was five years
in the past and there were already signs that the Second Republic was under siege by the
Nationalist forces that would put Franco into power following the Civil War. Zamacois
cannot have known that Spain would soon have a dictator when he reproduced parts of
his 1924 novel in *La antorcha apagada*. In retrospect, however, Mario’s ambitions are a
bloodcurdling precursor to the Franco regime. Just as the character wants his political
career to vanquish his inversion, the dictatorship severely curtailed the expression of
queer desire in Spain. In the process, it relegated early twentieth-century commercial
literature dealing with male prostitutes, queer seducers, and chaste inverts to the margins
of the country’s literary and cultural historiography.

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Chapter Four Notes

1 For an exemplary heteronormative definition of male and female sex, gender, and sexuality in early twentieth-century Spain, see Gregorio Marañón’s description of the anatomical and functional characteristics of idealized “Woman” and “Man” in *La evolución de la sexualidad y los estados intersexuales* (511-58).

2 Vicente Díez de Tejada (1872-1940) published melodramatic and pornographic novels in Spain’s short novel collections prior to the Civil War. Inversion and homoeroticism figure in novels entitled *Tántalo* (*La Novela Corta*, 1919) and *El amuleto* [*The Charm*] (*Flirt*, 1922) (Cruz Casado “La homosexualidad” 195-96). The former deals with an elderly male invert who competes with a female prostitute for the attention of a young man (*Mira De Sodoma* 91-94). *Quiero vivir mi vida* and *The Well of Loneliness* both feature a female invert. They contain prefatory comments by Gregorio Marañón and Havelock Ellis, respectively. For discussions of their relation to the scientific discourses of their day, see Isabel Chúa Ginés (55-59), Helena Establíer Pérez (122-37), and Susan Larson (Introduction vii-xii) on Carmen de Burgos, and Susan Watkins, Heike Bauer, Laura Doan, and Ed Madden on Radclyffe Hall. I have been unable to find evidence that *The Well of Loneliness* was published in Spain before 1989, although a Spanish translation appeared in Buenos Aires in 1944.

3 Both Eduardo Zamacois (1873-1971) and Alfonso Hernández-Catá (1885-1940) were born in Cuba to a Spanish father and a Cuban mother. Zamacois lived primarily in Spain before going into exile in Latin America following the Civil War. Today he is remembered as the founder of the country’s first short novel collection, *El Cuento Semanal* [*The Weekly Story*] (1907-1912), and as an early cultivator of erotic fiction, particularly in his magazine *Vida galante* [*Gallant Life*] (1898-1903). His corpus of twenty novels and over forty short novels written between 1896 and 1938 received ample popular acclaim in pre-Civil War Spain. The works fall into three broad phases: novels from 1896 to 1905 with strong erotic overtones, texts from 1910 to 1923 that reflect the author’s interest in spiritualism and the occult, and novels from 1923 to 1938 that respond to contemporaneous social unrest in Spain by advocating liberal reform in a realist aesthetic (Soler). Initially trained as a doctor, works from all three periods are informed by the evolving medical theories of the day. For broad overviews of Zamacois’s life and literature, see Luis S. Granjel (Eduardo Zamacois 11-44) and José Ignacio Cordero Gómez in Spanish, and Janice J. Soler in English.

Studies of Hernández-Catá often vacillate between naming him a Cuban, Spanish, or “universal” writer. Having spent several years of his adolescence in Spain, he returned to the country as a diplomat for Cuba various times between 1907 and 1933. Married to Spanish author Alberto Insúa’s sister, Hernández-Catá published many of his own short and long novels in commercial collections in Madrid. His works include six novels, seven collections of short novels, and nine collections of stories published between 1907 and 1940. Critics emphasize his obsession with suffering and death, his penetrating psychological portraits of physically or mentally ill characters, and his polished aesthetic with resonances of both *modernismo* and *Naturalismo*. Uva de Aragón, Salvador Bueno, and Alberto Gutiérrez de la Solana provide general surveys of his life and works in Spanish; see Pedro N. Trakas for an English account. Anisia Meruelo González describes his short novels in greater depth, while Gastón Fernández de la Torriente examines the notion of pathology in his long novels without critiquing the medical theories with which the works come into dialogue.

4 The premise of Alberto Mira’s brief comparison of *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La antorcha apagada* is that they are aligned with the liberal scientific and legal discourses of their time (*De Sodoma* 195-201). Mira considers the novels homophobic insofar as they promote a narrow *comprensión condicional* [conditional understanding] for inverts provided that they remain chaste (200). By shifting attention to anecdotal and formal differences between the novels, and by introducing tradition and modernity as important analytical categories, my readings complicate the notion that they simply espouse liberal modes of homophobia based on medicine and the law.
The following pages of the 1935 edition of *La antorcha apagada* are reproduced with some changes from *Una pobre vida*: 68-76 (corresponds to pages 5-16 of the 1924 novel), 77-84 (18-24), 118-36 (25-45), 138-46 (48-57), 241-50 (58-65), 299-343 (74-112). In other words, the 1935 novel includes almost the entire 1924 text, which provides just less than one-third of its total material.

The first half of chapter 11 of *La antorcha apagada* (173-186) is a rehash, with slight revisions, of the following pages from *La tragedia de un hombre que no sabia a dónde ir*: 43-51, 58-60, and 71-83. The short novel relates how a father comes to his ruin by unknowingly marrying his daughter to man with “incomplete” sexual organs (*La tragedia* 48). *La antorcha apagada* preserves the story of the son-in-law’s childhood, as well as of his impotence on his wedding night.

Other editions of *La antorcha apagada* have been produced in Mexico City (Coli, 1935), Buenos Aires (Santiago Rueda, 1955), and Barcelona (Linosa, 1968).

Rafael Cansinos-Asséns recalls that Hernández-Catá himself was director of Mundo Latino at the time of *El ángel de Sodoma*’s publication (*La novela* II: 358). This may explain the evident care invested in the second edition’s high quality paper and attractive typesetting.

César Juarros (1879-1942) was a professor at the Instituto Español Criminológico whose work helped introduce French psychiatric thought and psychoanalysis into Spain. He contributed to sex reform efforts in the 1920s with titles such as *Educación de niños anormales* [The Education of Abnormal Children] (1925) and *El amor en España: Características masculinas* [Love in Spain: Masculine Characteristics] (1927) (Cleminson and Vázquez García ‘Los Invisibles’ 77, 293).

Previous critics have called the unnamed city in *El ángel de Sodoma* a “Spanish village” (Bejel 75) or a “localidad mediterránea” (Galdo 30) [Mediterranean town]. Others see allusions to the Andalusian port city Cádiz (Balderston 115; Cleminson “Medicine” 202). References in the novel to a legendary Phoenician neighborhood confirm that the city is in southern or eastern Spain (55).

For an extensive, transnational history of eugenics, see the edited volume by Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford. In their introduction, the editors elaborate on the distinction between “negative” and “positive” eugenic techniques: “The aim of eugenics movements was to affect reproductive practice through the application of theories of heredity. Eugenic practice sometimes aimed to prevent life (sterilization, contraception, segregation, abortion in some instances); it aimed to bring about fitter life (environmental reforms, puériculture focused on the training and rearing of children, public health); it aimed to generate more life (pronatalist interventions, treatment of infertility, ‘eutelegenesis’)” (3).

Examples include translations of the works of Havelock Ellis and Marañón’s original text *La doctrina de las secreciones internas* [Doctrine of the Internal Secretions] (1915).

One prominent example is the psychiatrist Antonio Navarro Fernández’s journal *Sexualidad* [Sexuality] (160 numbers, 1925-1928) (Sinclair 44-48). According to Richard Cleminson, the publication’s goal “was to fight disease and degeneration from a social hygienic and moralist point of view. Making explicit references to the ‘truth of sexuality’, and the need for racial and familial regeneration, the medium adopted by *Sexualidad* to achieve these aims was a combination of scientific knowledge on sex and a pronounced moral but not necessarily Catholic standpoint on sexuality and family” (Anarchism 79). For an analysis of the journal’s references to homosexuality, see Cleminson (“The Review”).

Previously, eighty percent of the items included in the bibliography and reviews of the 1925 issue of the journal *Archivos de Higiene y Sanidad Pública* [Archives of Hygiene and Public Health] were of non-Spanish origin (Sinclair 44).

The remaining planks of the WLSR are:

1. Political, economic and sexual equality of men and women.
2. The liberation of marriage (and especially divorce) from the present Church and State tyranny. […]

5. Protection of the unmarried mother and the illegitimate child. […]

7. Prevention of prostitution and venereal disease. (cited in Sinclair 16-17)

16 Two noteworthy titles in the Catholic opposition to liberal sex reform include Antonio San de Velilla’s 1932 treatise Sodoma y Lesbos modernas: Pederastas y sáfilas estudiados en la clínica, en los libros y en la Historia [Modern Sodom and Lesbos: Pederasts and Sapphists Studied in the Clinic, in Books, and in History] (Aresti Masculinidades 237-39; Mira De Sodoma 181-83) and father Francisco Sureda Blanes’s 1929 book Crisis del pensamiento moderno en sus relaciones con las bases criteriológicas de mi fe [The Crisis of Modern Thought in Relation to the Criteriological Foundations of My Faith]. Jiménez de Asúa harshly criticizes the latter work in his epilogue to El ángel de Sodoma, where he mistakenly refers to the author as Francisco Sureda Blanco (249-51).


18 Cleminson notes a similarity between the titles of La antorcha apagada and Radclyffe Hall’s 1924 novel The Unlit Lamp, which has been translated into Spanish as La lámpara que no ardió (Barcelona, 1950) and El candil no encendido (Barcelona, 1982) (“La antorcha” 56). Although Hall’s text was less well-received than her subsequent novel The Well of Loneliness (1928), it does not seem impossible that Zamacois knew it when writing his own work. The Unlit Lamp tells the story of a “mannish” woman who becomes infatuated with her childhood governess, but who is unable to move with her friend to London because of obligations to her mother. Its portrayal of the obstacles faced by its protagonist recalls that of La antorcha apagada. Unlike The Well, however, Hall’s 1924 text does not present a medicalized view of inversion, nor does it promote secular sex reform.

19 The names of several characters in La antorcha apagada—Mario Hidalgo Quijano and his friend Sancho Ercilla—allude to the protagonists of Don Quijote (1605-1615). For Mario, the references reinforce his tall, lanky figure; his “noble” or “good” self-abnegation as a chaste invert; and his victimization at the hands of an unsympathetic social milieu. Like his namesake in the novel by Cervantes, Sancho is an eminently practical character whose defense of Mario against hostile classmates also echoes the heroism in Alonso Ercilla’s epic poem La araucana (1569-1589). The allusions to the Quijote do not extend beyond these names.

20 Levine and Bashford describe the relationship between eugenics and euthanasia: “At its most radical, eugenics manifested as both passive withholding of treatment from, and active killing of, disabled people. The German Darwinist Ernst Haeckel had advocated eugenic euthanasia as early as 1868 […] Active ‘euthanasia’ of disabled people on a large scale was authorized by a 1939 Reich Ministry of Interior decree in Germany, first targeting neonates and children, and subsequently expanding to adult asylum populations” (9). Connections between La antorcha apagada and Nazi politics are discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

21 Spanish sex reformers and eugenicists heatedly debated whether the State should limit marriages to couples who had passed a medical examination. Jiménez de Asúa and Marañón were against this type of intervention, while Madrazo and de Haro supported the medical documentation (Álvarez Peláez 186; Cleminson Anarchism 87-96; Vandeboch 191-209).

22 Mario’s comparison of sexual inversion with crime seems contradictory in light of my thesis that La antorcha apagada supports a medicalized view of inversion as sickness rather than sin, vice, or delinquency. Nevertheless, both narrator and characters oscillate between scientific and moral terms when describing Mario’s gender and sexuality. In one internal monologue, for instance, Mario concludes that he
is not sinvergüenza [shameless] or vicioso [dissolute], but incurable [incurable]. Moments later, however, he alludes to lo torcido [the twisted], lo repugnante [the repugnant], and lo inconfesable [the unmentionable] within himself (142-43). On the persistence of moral language in ostensibly scientific writings on homosexuality in early twentieth-century Spain, see Nerea Aresti (Masculinidades 180, 202, 249-50) and Cleminson and Vázquez García (‘Los Invisibles’ 7-8, 266-68). In Zamacois’s novel, indecisive language of this nature signals the ultimate collusion between modern science and religious tradition.

23 Mario’s self-analyses recall Michel Foucault’s observation that modern Western sexual regimes are characterized by “the nearly infinite task of telling—telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations, and thoughts which, through the body and the soul, had some affinity with sex” (History 20).

24 Before Mario himself reflects on the origins of his inversion, the narrator explains its etiology. He relates that the protagonist’s father conceived him while drunk and that his mother subjected him to a strict education equivalent to a castración moral [moral castration] (39-40, 77). A reference to Mario’s estado intersexual [intersexual state] suggests that these ideas have a source in the writings of Marañón (239). In effect, the physician finds an interaction of genetic and environmental factors at the base of inversion and emphasizes the excessive maternal influence on male inverts (La evolución 621-22). The narrator also alludes to Freud when he affirms that Mario is going through the Oedipus complex and suffers from madrefalía [mother worship] (27). On the dissemination of Freudian psychoanalysis in Spain, see Thomas F. Glick.

25 Judith Butler’s thesis regarding gender performativity is that “[g]ender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body” (italics in original, 191).

26 The story of the impotent man in chapter 11 is the part of La antorcha apagada derived from the earlier novel La tragedia de un hombre que no sabía a dónde ir.

27 A comparison of the two scenes of disrobing in La antorcha apagada with an analogous episode in the short novel Una pobre vida shows how Zamacois consciously modified his earlier text to increase the redundancy of his longer work. In Una pobre vida, the narrator mentions in passing that the boys at the boarding school once undressed Mario to examine his genitals: “Una tarde sorprendiéndole descuidado, le arrastraron entre varios a un lugar obscuro, donde intentaron desnudarle para cerciorarse de si era o no varón...” (24) [One afternoon, taking him by surprise, several of them dragged him to a dark place, where they tried to disrobe him to verify whether or not he was a male]. La antorcha apagada extends the episode with dialogue and further details (97-101). Moreover, Zamacois inserts an original chapter immediately afterwards where Mario’s sisters undress him at the beach during summer break (106-09).

28 Lou Charnon-Deutsch examines the interplay of medical theories and literary technique in Zamacois’s first novel, La enferma [The Sick Woman] (1896). It is an excruciating portrayal of the symptoms of female hysteria as described by Charcot and Freud.

29 For Foucault, Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon illustrates the disciplinary strategies of power (Discipline 195-228). The Panopticon was a circular prison with a central tower from which observers could watch over the prisoners at any time without the captives knowing exactly when they were under surveillance. The effect was “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” and to create a form of surveillance “permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (Discipline 201). Mario’s internalization of the heteronormative dictates of his social milieu in La antorcha apagada is a good example of panopticism.

30 For allusions to the impertinentes, see pages 25, 35, 42, 45, 49, 76, 137, 158, 164, and 167.

Marañón warns parents to avoid placing boys in boarding schools, where homosexuality develops “por brotes epidémicos” [in epidemic outbreaks], as in prisons and barracks (La evolución 624, 706).

For fleeting references to urban spaces, see pages 19, 147, 210, 212, 234, and 294. In every case, the novel presents streets, stations, and cafés as neutral containers through which characters move, rather than as human constructions in a process of becoming, imbued with erotic inflections (Bech 118, 159).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines minoritizing views of homosexuality as those that see it “as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority” (Epistemology 1).

Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa’s insistence on the tragic nature of El ángel de Sodoma coincides with the conclusion of other critics that Hernández-Catá’s entire oeuvre is characterized by a tragic vision wherein meaningless human suffering leads inevitably to death. See, for instance, Meruelo González (159-68).

Hernández-Catá drew upon Marañón’s ideas on sex in other works besides El ángel de Sodoma. See Jorge Febles’s article “Don Luis Mejía a la luz de la teoría marañoniana sobre el tipo donjuanesco.” A critical reading of the 1925 play is in order to determine if it echoes Marañón’s findings about the intersexuality of Don Juan as unproblematically as argued by Febles (56) (see 3.II.D. on Don Juan).

One of the most surprising critical commentaries on El ángel de Sodoma is that of Álvaro Retana, writing under the name of Carlos Fortuny (La ola verde 296-97). Retana condemns Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa’s praise for what he sees as the novel’s poor psychological portrait of a invert. He argues that Spanish representatives of the third sex agreed with his opinion. Whether Retana actually read the novel is a matter of speculation, since he mistakenly claims that the protagonist throws himself into the sea after discovering his inversion.

Marañón’s desire to contain potentially subversive readings of literary works is also evident in his prologues to Quiero vivir mi vida and Antonio de Hoyos y Vincent’s collection of short novels Sangre sobre el barro: Paisajes patológicos [Blood on the Earth: Pathological Landscapes] (1932). The former announces that Burgos’s story of a female invert is aligned with “[e]l sentido profundo, biológico, equivoco, de la pasión de los celos” (8) [the profound, biological, equivocal meaning of the passion of jealousy]. The latter identifies a moral dimension to the pathologies described by Hoyos, whose contemplation “nos sirve de penitencia; y nos ayudará a extirparlos del espíritu nacional” (19) [serves us as a penance, and will help us to eliminate them from the national spirit]. Marañón enlists Hoyos’s Decadent texts in a project of national regeneration from which they generally seem distant (3.II.B.).

A few other critics have offered readings of El ángel de Sodoma counter to the interpretations proposed by the framing paratexts. Uva de Aragón argues briefly that José-María is not victim to inversion, but to an intolerant society (83-85). Jesús Jambrina believes that the protagonist commits suicide because he does not want to give up living as an invert in Paris to return to his home city (2). Nina R. Menéndez (137-57) draws on Bakhtin to argue that the novel “is able to neutralize—through dialogic engagement—many of the various negativizing modes of social discourse [i.e., the pathologizing views of Marañón] related to the subject of homosexuality” (139).

The nexus of money, work, and sex throughout El ángel de Sodoma supports literary critic Michael Tratner’s thesis that these phenomena become “mutually representable” in certain nineteenth and twentieth-century novels that trace parallels between evolving attitudes towards economics and sexuality.
In such works, there is a correlation between saving money and storing libido for procreation in wedlock, and buying on credit and having sex for pleasure (1-15, 65-66).

According to the dictionary of the Real Academia Española, entelequia [entelechy] is a technical term used by Aristotle to designate the principle that guides an activity or object to its complete or perfect realization. I have translated it as chimera because it also means “una cosa irreal” [an unreal thing].

Christine Rivalan-Guégo notes that commercial novels from early twentieth-century Spain tend to either perpetuate longstanding stereotypes about Paris as the origin of imported vice, or portray the city as a space of freedom opposed to Madrid’s moral strictures (Fruición 77-78).

For historical overviews of homosexuality under the Franco dictatorship, see Arturo Arnalte, Fernando Olmeda, Mira (De Sodoma 287-413), and Gema Pérez-Sánchez (Queer Transitions 11-33). Arnalte and Olmeda construct their fascinating book-length studies around interviews with individuals who were imprisoned for their sexual and gender identities during the regime.

The Franco regime modified its laws several times to strengthen their explicit homophobic. While the 1933 Ley de Vagos y Maleantes [Law of Vagrants and Thugs] did not include overt measures against homosexuality, a 1954 amendment and the 1970 Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social [Law of Social Danger and Rehabilitation] stipulated specific punishments for homosexuals or individuals who engaged in homosexual acts (Arnalte 65-69, 151-65; Olmeda 99-101, 169-81). On the margins of the law, police raids or redadas lasting well into the final years of the dictatorship threatened meetings in public places like bars and beaches (Arnalte). Similarly, Francoist censorship established by laws in 1939 and 1963 required that all representations of queer sexualities mark them as perverse, evil, and undesirable (Mira De Sodoma 318-20).

Life writings by Juan Goytisolo, Terenci Moix, and Jaime Gil de Biedma reveal that marginal urban neighborhoods like the Barrio Chino [red-light district] of Barcelona served as cruising grounds during the Franco years. They also show that queer subcultures turned to Hollywood film and popular Spanish singers such as Conchita Piquer as ciphers of subversive desire (Ellis Hispanic Homograph; Mira De Sodoma 309-11, 338-49; Smith 31-52).

Following his voluntary exile in Paris in 1936, Marañón resumed scientific investigations in Spain between 1943 and his death in 1960. During this period, he avoided writing explicitly about politics, particularly against the Franco regime, and he was silent on the controversial sexual topics of his pre-Civil War writings (Sosa-Velasco 104-05; Vandebosch 33, 144, 159).

See Arnalte on medical theories of homosexuality under the Franco dictatorship, many of which conflate pathology and criminality (90-102).

The 1954 Ley de Vagos y Maleantes and the 1970 Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social made provisions for homosexuals to be confined in work camps or agricultural colonies for six months to five years. The most notorious points of detention for homosexuals were the work camp in Tefía, Fuerteventura (1954-1966), and the prisons in Nanclares de Oca, Álava; Miranda de Ebro, Burgos; Huelva (1968-1978); and Badajoz (1958-1978). See Arnalte (72-79, 143-206) and Olmeda (75-79, 187-96) for testimonies about life in these sites.

In an analysis of the relationship between eugenics and genocide, A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone underline the involvement of German eugenicists with Nazi racial politics: “German scientists and physicians participated in the sterilization and euthanasia programs, carried out human experiments in concentration camps, and assessed the ‘racial value’ of central and eastern European populations under German occupation. Notoriously, German doctors were the largest professional group in the Nazi party—45 percent of doctors joined up” (192).
I have not found biographical evidence that Zamacois supported Nazism or fascism more generally. On the contrary, he went into exile in Latin America following the Spanish Civil War after having supported the Republic with the novel *El asedio de Madrid [The Assault on Madrid]* (1938). According to Soler, the text shows “unswerving loyalty to the defense of Madrid against Franquist attack, and invariably praises leaders in the Republican cause” (309).

Right-wing forces in the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas [Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right-Wing Groups] gained a majority of seats in the Republican government in the fall of 1933. Their leader was the Catholic lawyer José María Gil Robles, whose tenure as Minister of War starting in May of 1935 facilitated Franco’s rise to power in the army in Morocco (Balfour “Spain” 248-49).
Chapter Five

Conclusion with Ghosts

Once more you near me, wavering apparitions
That early showed before the turbid gaze.
Will now I seek to grant you definition,
My heart essay again the former daze?

—Goethe, Faust (l. 1-4)

Writing about modernity and male (homo)sexualities in commercial literature from early twentieth-century Spain sometimes feels like conjuring ghosts. Perhaps it could not be otherwise, since modern Spanish culture in general has been called “one big ghost story” (Labanyi 1). Jo Labanyi gives it this name in the introduction to a founding volume of Spanish Cultural Studies. Her purpose is to draw attention to processes over the past century by which large sectors of the country’s cultural production came to occupy a phantasmatic space between memory and oblivion, visibility and invisibility, in academic Hispanism. Most importantly, the Franco regime elaborated a national history and a mass culture amenable to its vision of a single Spanish identity.¹ The project eliminated or marginalized inassimilable elements and made anti-Franco intellectuals wary of Spanish mass culture. One of the legacies is a continuing tendency for literary studies in Spain to focus on “high” art and to set aside a narrow canon of works for academic analysis. Another is the relatively marginal place of queer theory and feminism in the Spanish academy.²

It is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate Labanyi’s claim that “the whole of modern Spanish culture” has been rendered phantasmatic by Francoism and its aftermath (1). Nevertheless, I agree with other researchers when they speak of ghosts to characterize particular aspects of culture in Spain prior to the Civil War. Maite Zubiaurre
identifies erotica from the early 1900s as a specter of Spanish modernity, “una sombra apenas recordada” (“Velocipedismo” 217) [a barely remembered shade]. Likewise, Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García call homosexual men of the time invisibles [the invisible] to emphasize their haunting (non)presence in the historical record (‘Los Invisibles’ 20-21). The work of these scholars and the present study examine different time periods, documents, and types of sexuality. Where the projects converge is in their desire to revive or “grant definition” to history’s ghosts in order to contest Francoist historiography and envision a dynamic past with transformative possibilities for the future.\(^3\)

Despite the long silence on commercial literature from the early 1900s in Hispanism through the 1980s, more recent work opens opportunities to focus an increasingly potent lens on sexuality in this area of Spanish culture. This dissertation draws on studies aimed at cataloging Spanish mass culture in the first third of the twentieth century; surveying its themes, political implications, artistic qualities, and material characteristics; and investigating its production and reception. It also turns to research concerning medical and legal discourses on sexuality, fin-de-siècle erotic cultures, the history of homosexuality, and its treatment in particular literary works, all with reference to Spain. Finally, the project relies on inquiries into the historical conditions of the country’s modernization in order to contextualize its arguments. Building upon existing scholarship, Faustian Figures has solid ground upon which to trace its own methodological course and stake its own claims about modernity and male (homo)sexualities in commercial literature between 1900 and 1936.
From a methodological standpoint, a central premise of the foregoing chapters is that close, literary readings of commercial works are worthwhile for what they reveal about the discursive framing of modernity and sexuality during this period. Major statements in Spanish Cultural Studies convincingly argue that culture is best understood not as a collection of self-contained works, but as a complex network of discourses and practices (Graham and Labanyi; Labanyi). However, I am unable to agree with Labanyi’s conclusion that “popular and mass culture by definition cannot be studied as individual texts” since “they are so obviously part of a commercial culture industry that requires sociological analysis of modes of production and consumption” (Labanyi 11). This dissertation shows that it is possible to interpret individual commercial plays and novels in great detail, and that some of them beg for literary readings on the margins of sociological study. The short novels of Álvaro Retana, for instance, feature humor, intertextuality, and self-reflexive games reminiscent of canonical works by Miguel de Unamuno or Luigi Pirandello.

By focusing at length on the linguistic, structural, and generic qualities of my primary texts, I do not wish to suggest that all commercial literature from the period in question possesses the same degree of literary sophistication as that of Retana. On the contrary, some of this material is fascinating for features liable to be seen by some readers as flaws or weaknesses. My interpretations of texts by El Caballero Audaz, Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent, and Eduardo Zamacois focus on their repetitive plots, monotonous language, and propagandistic theses. I will be the first to admit that it can be difficult to enjoy these works on aesthetic grounds. At the same time, I acknowledge that measures of literary quality are subjective and conventional, and I shall leave it to readers
to form their own judgments of the texts included in this project. My point is that they will be unable to do so unless scholarship on commercial literature balances panoramic overviews of cultural trends with careful attention to the literary qualities of specific works.

While I disagree that mass culture is impervious to close readings, I do recognize the urgency of integrating such analyses into broad historical and cultural frameworks, a practice defended elsewhere by Labanyi (Graham and Labanyi vi-vii). A second methodological move of the preceding chapters is to interpret novels and plays alongside an eclectic collection of contemporaneous essays and memoirs, as well as more recent historical studies, literary readings, and literary and social theories. Certain authors appear in every chapter and lend coherence to the whole dissertation: Gregorio Marañón, Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, Álvaro Retana/Carlos Fortuny, Alberto Mira, and Marshall Berman, to name a few. Other writers figure only in particular sections, each of which draws on intellectual trends ranging from structuralism to poststructuralism, narratology to feminism and queer theory. This methodological mélange responds to the heterogeneity of commercial literature and male (homo)sexualities in Spain before the Civil War. With respect to the latter, terms such as *homosexual* or *queer* in English and *degenerado, loca, tercer sexo, invertido,* or *intersexual* in Spanish reveal the difficulty of considering homosexuality a singular object of study. I go to great lengths to position these words historically and to clarify their use in literary works and in my own arguments. One of the conclusions of this dissertation is that the diversity of sexuality in the texts under analysis calls for an equally pluralistic scholarly approach and a non-linear narrative.
With these methodological imperatives in mind, *Faustian Figures* argues that commercial novels and plays consistently position male (homo)sexualities in fraught relationships with technological and socioeconomic modernization, especially in Madrid and Barcelona. Modern responses to vertiginous change include fear and desire regarding sexual relationships between men. In the texts singled out for analysis, these conflicted anxieties converge upon hustlers and blackmailers, queer seducers, and chaste inverts. The plays and novels by Jacinto Benavente, Josep Maria de Sagarra, and El Caballero Audaz included in Chapter 2 project disgust and enthusiasm onto prostitutes and extortionists as they mobilize them to comment on shifting class hierarchies, consumer capitalism, and mass-produced literature. Whereas narratives by Hoyos y Vinent and Carmen de Burgos examined in the subsequent chapter construct similarly ambivalent visions of Decadent literature and queer desire, the short novels by Retana at the chapter’s core emphasize the pleasurable existence of queer Don Juans and *locas* in order to combat homophobia and consolidate queer subcultures. By way of contrast, novels by Zamacois and Alfonso Hernández-Catá discussed in Chapter 4 foreground the misery of chaste inverts caught between traditional and modern ways of life with minimal hope of personal fulfillment as inverts. The characters studied throughout occupy positions akin to those of Faust, Mephistopheles, or Gretchen in Berman’s reading of *Faust* as an allegory of modern experience. They either sell themselves to prosper under consumer capitalism, seduce others into savoring urban pleasures, or yield to the conflicting pressures of tradition and change.

Although these faustian figures have received scant attention in Hispanism until recent years, similar characters play a more visible role in Spanish literature from the
1970s onwards. This conclusion is not the place to survey representations of male (homo)sexualities in late or post-Franco Spain, a task performed elsewhere by other scholars.\(^4\) Rather, reference to a few prominent novels from the 1980s and 90s shall suffice to show that character types from earlier decades continue to serve as points of constellation for concerns about historical change in more recent works.

*El gladiador de Chueca [The Gladiator of Chueca]* (1992) by Carlos Sanrunue transcribes a fictional interview between a hustler and his prospective trick in Madrid in the 1980s. The brief novel was a bestseller in the gay and lesbian bookstore Berkana during the following decade. It portrays the protagonist’s shame over his desire for other men, his inability to satisfy that longing except through prostitution, and his contact with poverty and racial diversity in Chueca prior to the area’s transformation into Madrid’s gay enclave in the 1990s. For literary critic Gabriel Giorgi, the narrative both reminds contemporary readers that proudly self-identified gays have taken important steps towards renouncing the homophobia of the Franco years, and unveils racism and classism involved in Chueca’s gentrification (69-72).\(^5\)

Hustling also raises questions of inequality in *Los novios búlgaros [The Bulgarian Lovers]* (1993), a novel by Eduardo Mendicutti with a film adaptation by Eloy de la Iglesia (2003). As a *loca*, the first-person narrator displays the same wit, sarcasm, and self-conscious gender-bending as characters in texts by Retana. He recalls his interaction with a Bulgarian prostitute in Madrid after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The relationship complicates notions of sexual and economic exploitation in a humorous yet nuanced meditation on changing relationships between capitalism and socialism across Europe. While the narrator seduces the immigrant by granting him access to a form of
consumerism inconceivable in Bulgaria in the early 1990s, the hustler takes advantage of him by accepting money and gifts without satisfying his emotional or erotic needs. Following his abandonment, the loca takes recourse to a strong Bulgarian liquor to drown out a sense of personal failure.  

The protagonists of Los delitos insignificantes [Trivial Offenses] (1986) by Álvaro Pombo and Mi querido Sebastián [My Dear Sebastian] (1992) by Olga Guirao come to share this emotion when they find themselves unable to act on their same-sex desire. Having grown up under the Franco dictatorship, by the 1970s and 80s, they face the dilemma of either living with deeply engrained feelings of shame and inferiority, or undergoing a difficult process of self-affirmation. Pombo’s protagonist chooses suicide as a tragic way out, while Guirao’s narrator tries desperately to justify his decision to marry and have consensual romantic relations with his long-estranged daughter after his wife’s premature death. Like chaste invertes torn between tradition and modernity, the characters are unable to establish satisfying bonds with other men under the dictatorship or the ensuing democracy.  

If I recall the novels by Guirao, Pombo, Mendicutti, and Sanrune here, it is not to imply that their protagonists or literary strategies are identical to those of earlier texts. These works require careful temporal contextualization if comparisons between early and late twentieth-century literature are to respect the particularities of either era. Numerous scholars have laid the foundation for studying (homo)sexualities in recent Spanish literature, and I will leave it to others to follow in their footsteps. I can only hope that the present study will provide useful historical perspective for future work.
Awareness of the past is politically significant for contemporary Spanish Literary and Cultural Studies, for it furnishes a framework for evaluating the most internationally known aspect of the country’s present-day gay culture, the Madrilenian neighborhood Chueca. Since the mid-1990s, self-proclaimed gay men and lesbians have transformed an area north of the Gran Vía into a site of intense, albeit uneven, public visibility for homosexual identities. This has often meant establishing bars, clubs, saunas, gyms, boutiques, and bookstores whose offerings both reflect and shape attempts to construct affirmative identities through consumption. It has also meant marketing the district itself as a consumable good in advertisements for foreign tourists. Giorgi notes that English-language promotional materials frequently frame Chueca as an emblem of post-Franco Spain. Within the propaganda, the country has made a “historical leapfrog” virtually “overnight” between the dictatorship, “one of the most conservative and repressive societies in Europe,” and the democracy, “among the most progressive societies on the planet” (cited in Giorgi 57-63). Giorgi sums up the prevailing rhetoric: “Madrid, aspiring metropolis, jumps forward, getting close to the global present by embracing gayness as a marker of history. Chueca becomes one of the privileged scenarios of that movement toward modernity” (62). In other words, the neighborhood forms part of a teleological narrative wherein it supplies a felicitous conclusion to a rapid line of development culminating in modernity, an experience of liberation, equality, and cosmopolitanism.

This discourse also exercises a strong appeal in texts designed primarily for Spaniards, including inhabitants and visitors of Chueca. In Rosa sobre negro: Breve historia de la homosexualidad en la España del siglo XX [Pink on Black: A Brief History
of Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Spain] (2010), a popularizing study dedicated exclusively to male homosexuality available in the barrio bookstore Berkana, Albert Ferrarons describes a continuous march toward equality from the Franco period to the present. He treats the former in a chapter entitled “Y, de repente, anocheció” [“And Suddenly, Night Fell”], saving democracy and Chueca for “Los pasos definitivos hacia la igualdad” [“The Definitive Steps towards Equality”]. Although the word towards could suggest that equality requires unending struggle, Ferrarons optimistically concludes that the goal was achieved by a 2005 law legalizing gay marriage in Spain: “Esta ley consumaba la plena igualdad legal para los homosexuales y, sobre todo, otorgaba la libertad y el derecho a escoger, que es al fin y al cabo de lo que ha tratado toda esta Historia” (127) [This law marked full equality for homosexuals, and, in general, it offered liberty and the right to choose, which is in the long run the point of this whole History]. These final words are devastatingly short-sighted in light of ongoing attempts on the part of the conservative Partido Popular [Popular Party] to declare gay marriage unconstitutional.11

Alberto Mira’s more extensive and scholarly history De Sodoma a Chueca [From Sodom to Chueca] (2004), another bestseller in Berkana and a major source for this dissertation, eludes much of the simplifying teleology of Ferraron’s text by highlighting debates among gay Spaniards about the pros and cons of Chueca and by concluding that the historiography of homosexuality in Spain must be “[u]n diálogo que nunca podemos permitirnos dar por cerrado” (615) [a dialogue which we must never allow ourselves to close]. Nevertheless, Mira devotes most of his discussion of Chueca to disputing the argument that it is an exclusionary space of consumption and to touting it as a site of
personal liberty and expression (604-09). The very title *De Sodoma a Chueca* implies once again that the neighborhood marks the end of a century-long journey away from Biblically legitimated homophobia.

The purpose of signaling the teleological thrust of contemporary discourses about Chueca is not to deny that the district has witnessed enormous, often positive, change since the 1970s. Activism and consumerism alike have produced a powerful public space for contesting heteronormativity and displaying self-determined identities.\(^\text{12}\) But it is also important to recognize that stories of unabated progress mask disturbing aspects of gay enclaves, including Chueca, Soho in London, or the Castro in San Francisco. Giorgi captures the ambivalent potential of gay culture in these spaces: “It places a visibility, of bodies, desires, and styles, that negotiates alternatives to heterosexism and conservatism in different societies but at the same time freezes tensions raised by the current landscape of neocolonial domination and intensified mobility” (59).

In the case of Chueca, scholars emphasize that the visibility of middle-class, white, gay men, including Spaniards and North American or European tourists, corresponds to the relative invisibility, discursive and material, of other groups such as lesbians and North African immigrants (Giorgi 65-73; Robbins 9-14). Critiques of the district from within gay and lesbian activism in Spain add that the ubiquitous use of young, white, muscular, male physiques for advertising purposes stigmatizes those who are unable to attain that ideal. By obscuring the relations of production, widespread commodity fetishism has the potential to prevent some consumers from recognizing enduring injustice within and beyond the neighborhood.\(^\text{13}\) The loss of the past in the
spectacle of the commodity may also perpetuate the Franco dictatorship’s erasure of the early twentieth-century culture at stake in this study.

It is within this context that commercial literature on male (homo)sexualities from before the Civil War attains political meaning for today’s readers. This literature offers a wealth of material to create dialectical images by which to contest some of the more objectionable effects of Chueca, or comparable neighborhoods abroad. Dianne Chisholm explains that dialectical imaging, a key technique in The Arcades Project (1927-1940) by Walter Benjamin, “entails juxtaposing city images in montage assemblies so as to foreground contradictions that capitalism’s panoramas of expanse and narratives of progress ignore” (11). By coupling images of the city from different phases of urbanization, dialectical images “hold a broken mirror to the capitals of commodity culture” and urge spectators to “awaken’ to history with a politicized presence of mind” (31, ix-x). Given Chueca’s role in a tale of liberation often blind to abiding inequalities, it could benefit from alternate discourses of this nature. Hence, I conclude with a dialectical image of my own invention, a montage of a lived experience in Chueca and a scene from Bestezuela de placer by El Caballero Audaz (2.III.D-E.).

July 2, 2011 marked the height of the annual LGTB Pride celebration in Madrid, an event estimated to draw 700,000 visitors to the city in recent years and to generate 110 million euros in revenue. Strolling through Chueca on that day, I found myself caught in a crowd of people gathered at Calle Hortaleza, 38. Men and women speaking Castilian, English, German, and French were staring into a shop window. Teenaged girls, burly older men, and a host of others were posing for photographs in front of the glass. Laughter and excitement filled the air. Standing inside where four models for Lenita &
XTG, a newcomer to Chueca’s extensive collection of underwear and swimsuit boutiques. Although the store sells clothing for men and women and usually has two male and two female mannequins in its display, all four models substituted for this event were men, probably in their early 30s. Judging from the way they smiled and teasingly caressed their smooth, tanned skin, and toned, nearly naked bodies, they did not mind exposing themselves to the crowd. Behind them, photographic displays revealed that they must have posed previously for the store’s advertisements. The images completed the mass reproduction of an Adonis-like body already set into motion by the spectator’s cameras and the four models themselves, physically identical apart from their faces and body art.

It is impossible to know how many people standing there, surrounded by signs of health and prosperity, were thinking about the thirtieth anniversary of the appearance of AIDS in Spain or the Partido Popular’s threats to gay marriage, two of the issues encompassed by the theme of Pride 2011, “Salud e Igualdad por Derecho” [Health and Equality by Right]. What is clear is that, at the time, no uninformed spectator would have been able to guess that Spain currently has the highest rate of unemployment in the European Union, verging on twenty one percent; that over forty percent of Spaniards between twenty and twenty four years of age are out of work; or that the country’s twin deficit is second only to that of Iceland (just to mention a few problems in Spain, let alone elsewhere).

For all its trappings of capitalist bliss, however, the episode in Chueca is uncannily reminiscent of a scene of crisis examined earlier in this dissertation. In one passage of Bestezuela de placer, the impoverished Andalusian migrant Benjamín sees his
image in the window of a men’s clothing store on the Calle del Príncipe, across the Puerta del Sol from Chueca (2.III.D.). He admires his “cuerpo fino, esbelto y bien proporcionado” [slender, lithe, and well-proportioned body] and looks beyond to the analogous mannequin within (42). Inside, a dandified fashion designer examines him like a piece of cloth, “de arriba abajo, como midiéndolo” (51) [from head to toe, as though he were measuring him]. Having entered the store to ask for work as a clerk, Benjamín leaves as a hustler with the dandy in hopes of escaping the city streets.

Numerous differences between the two scenes hinge on the distance between a hot July day in 2011 and a rainy November afternoon described in a novel published ninety years earlier. While it would be futile to speculate on the sexual identities of the models at Lenita & XTG or their spectators, some of them would undoubtedly have called themselves gay. Neither that label nor the politicized identity it has stood for since the late 1960s existed in Spain in the 1920s. Poverty compels Benjamín to engage in homosexual acts on the margin of his personal identity, and his story makes clear that he is eager to replace the dandy with female lovers. In contrast, there was no sign that modeling was a last-ditch option for the men in Chueca; rather, their performance gave the impression that they enjoyed the attention from both women and men. Clearly, the scenes point to historical change over the past century, often for the better. It is not my intention to disavow the pleasurable dimension of the Pride festivities or consumerism’s potential for identity formation and public visibility.

But I do want to insist that striking similarities between the underwear models and the fictional hustler prevent their stories from being assimilated into a linear narrative of progress. Benjamín’s experience at the shop window haunts that of the present-day
revelers and provides several potent reminders. It signals the persistence of the sexual commodification of the body and the objectification of the individual as means of survival under consumer capitalism. It poses questions of poverty, exploitation, and migration unanswered in many current representations of Chueca. Finally, if my interpretation is correct, the scene’s narrative frame constructs a complex response to modernization, understood here as the mass reproduction of literature. In spite of El Caballero Audaz’s eager advocacy for short novel collections, Bestezuela de placer also allegorizes their dangers: uneven literary quality, transient shelf-life, subordination to a volatile market. In other words, the novel envisions modernity as longing and fear towards technological and cultural change. In the process, it offers an antidote to celebratory accounts of Chueca’s recent history focusing exclusively on liberation and equality, however limited these may be on either side of the neighborhood’s borders.

This is the double promise of the ghostly texts and characters made to speak in Faustian Figures: they illuminate crucial debates on modernity and male (homo)sexualities in the under-studied commercial literature of Spain’s pre-Franco past, and they approach historical change with a sense of gain and loss necessary for countering triumphalist visions of modernity liable to veil social injustice in the present and future.

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Chapter Five Notes

1 Hispanist David K. Herzberger emphasizes that Francoist historiography forged a “usable past” at the service of legitimating the regime by framing it as the culmination of Spain’s historical development (16). The narrative posited a single Spanish identity unified around the central region of Castile and a socially conservative brand of Catholicism (15-38). Nationalist intellectuals promoted mass forms of entertainment including folklore, song, sport, and cinema in line with this identity (Graham and Labanyi 3; Labanyi 7).

2 Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi examine historical reasons for the Spanish academy’s weak tradition in Cultural Studies vis-à-vis Great Britain or the United States (Graham and Labanyi 1-5; Labanyi 1-14). According to Alberto Mira, contemporary Spanish literary studies also marginalize work on homosexuality (Forward). Nevertheless, there are signs that Spanish scholars are appropriating academic feminism, queer theory, and Cultural Studies for their own ends. Works by Nerea Aresti, Isabel Clúa Ginés, and Pura Fernández cited elsewhere in this dissertation are valuable examples of research in these areas produced within the Spanish academy.

3 Herzberger finds that novels by Juan and Luis Goytisolo, Juan Benet, and Carmen Martín-Gaite, among others, also strive to contest Francoist historiography on Spain’s past and to conceive of history as “naturally dynamic rather than sterile” (153).

4 For brief surveys of character types in Spanish novels dealing with male (homo)sexualities since the 1970s, see Dieter Ingenschay (54-62) and Alfredo Martínez Expósito (Los escribas 29-56).

5 Chris Perriam offers an alternate reading of El gladiador de Chueca centered on the extent to which it evinces a queer understanding of sexuality (157-58). He mentions that the novel was a bestseller in Berkana in the 1990s (154).

6 Gema Pérez-Sánchez examines questions of race, class, nationality, and sexuality in the film adaptation of Los novios búlgaros (“One Big” 78-85).

7 For analyses of the novel by Olga Guirao, see Kathleen Glenn and Nina Molinaro. Martínez-Expósito studies guilt and homophobia in the works of Álvaro Pombo, including Los delitos insignificantes (Escrituras torcidas 115-92).

8 Book-length studies focusing variously on female and/or male sexualities in Spanish writing and culture primarily from the late Franco period to the present include works by Enrique Álvarez, Robert Richmond Ellis (Hispanic Homograph), Josep-Anton Fernández, Patrick Paul Garlinger, Martínez Expósito (Los escribas and Escrituras torcidas), Alberto Mira (De Sodoma 287-615), Pérez-Sánchez (Queer Transitions), Inmaculada Pertusa Seva, Raquel Platero, Jill Robbins, Paul Julian Smith, and Nancy Vosburg and Jacky Collins. Álvarez also discusses the canonical early twentieth-century poets Federico García Lorca and Luis Cernuda (33-126), while Garlinger dedicates a chapter to Miguel de Unamuno (3-29).

9 The gentrification of Chueca by gays and lesbians began around 1989, and intensified dramatically between 1997 and 1999, when the number of gay-owned premises doubled (Enguix 17). For histories of the neighborhood, see Brian L. Adams-Thies (51-138) and Robbins (1-14).


11 On June 28, 2011, the second day of LGBT Pride in Madrid, the Partido Popular [Popular Party] demanded that the opposing Partido Socialista del Obrero Español [Socialist Party of the Spanish Worker]
modify a State declaration in support of the 2005 legalization of gay marriage. The PP took recourse to the Supreme Court in October, 2005 to have the law declared unconstitutional. During the 2011 Pride celebration, activists chanted the slogan “Ni un paso atrás” [Not one step backwards] to protest continuing legal opposition to marriage equality. See Pilar Marcos and “El PP presenta.”

12 Adams-Thies (151-65), Begonya Enguix (29-31), and Mira (De Sodoma 604-609) summarize debates about the political potential of consumerism in Chueca and for gay and lesbian neighborhoods more generally. Gay and lesbian activism in Spain, a second force behind recent transformations in Chueca, emerged around 1970 in Barcelona and was first associated with Marxism and Catalan nationalism. For overviews of activism’s history in Spain, see Ricardo Llamas and Fefa Vela, as well as Mira (De Sodoma 473-94, 578-89).

13 For objections to Chueca from within gay and lesbian activist groups in Spain, see Adams-Thies (260-66), Mira (De Sodoma 604-15), and Robbins (9-14).

14 Figures for attendance and revenue in connection with the LGTB Pride celebration in Madrid are from an article on the 2011 event (“El Orgullo 2011”). Enguix provides historical and anthropological analyses of Pride parades in Spain. She notes that the term Gay Pride, in use since the first parade in Barcelona in 1977, became Gay and Lesbian Pride in 2000, and Lesbian, Gay, Transsexual, and Bisexual (LGTB) Pride in 2001 (19).

15 Lenita & XTG is under the ownership of Burmen, a company based in the Canary Islands. Its first store on the Iberian Peninsula opened in Madrid at Hortaleza, 38 in May, 2010. See “Lenita & XTG.”

16 New York Times reporter Suzanne Daley provides statistics regarding Spain’s current economic crisis. She also discusses a grassroots movement that began on May 15, 2011 and that at its height filled Madrid’s Puerta del Sol with 28,000 protestors demanding political and economic reform. Several indignados remained in the square during the Pride celebrations over a month later.
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