

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

INVERTING (TRANS)MODERN SUBJECTS:  
TOWARD A (RE)VISION OF SEX, GENDER, AND RACE  
IN TWO NOVELS BY  
ALFONSO HERNÁNDEZ-CATÁ (1885-1940)

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I dedicate this dissertation to:

Amelio and Pura Díaz  
for planting the seed;

Mark T. DeStephano, Patricia Santoro, and Alex Trillo  
for giving it warmth;

and the late Alfonso Hernández-Catá  
and his living granddaughter, Uva de Aragón,  
for inspiring it to flourish.

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## ABSTRACT

“Inverting (Trans)Modern Subjects: Toward a (Re)Vision of Sex, Gender, and Race in Two Novels by Alfonso Hernández-Catá (1885-1940)”

Cuban journalist and diplomat Alfonso Hernández-Catá (born 24 June 1885 in Aldeadávila de la Ribera, Salamanca, Spain; died 8 November 1940 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) was a prolific cosmopolitan writer whose fiction is largely centered on the psychological, social, and political dimensions of human experience. In this dissertation, I analyze the stories of the male protagonists in two of his novels: Eulogio Valdés in *La piel* (1913; *The Skin*) and José-María Vélez-Gomara in *El ángel de Sodoma* (1928; *The Angel of Sodom*). I focus on how these characters, who struggle with “sexual and racial inversions,” such as gender dysphoria, homosexuality, and miscegenation, are allegorical portrayals of hegemonic discourses and practices on sex, gender, and race in transnational contexts from the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth.

First, I demonstrate how Hernández-Catá symbolically employs inversion—in its general meaning of reversal—as a literary device in concert with other ones that denote opposition, such as irony and antithesis, in order to invert, and therefore, problematize the stigmatizing historical and social meanings of the masculine/feminine and white/black binaries of sexual and racial inversion. By doing so, Hernández-Catá revises the homogenizing binaries of modernity and the psychological fragmentation they caused within the modern subject in order to reveal how the progress and advancement of eugenics and sexual reform reproduced and failed to attend to the hegemonic flow of power and knowledge during neocolonialism. While modernity has been regarded as an era of progress and change, I contend that it has not resolved the uneven management of resources and capital during the neocolonial period and the socioeconomic disparities that it continues to create

for the marginalized subject beyond Hernández-Catá's time. Therefore, I propose *transmodernity* as an alternative sociohistorical paradigm that rearticulates and reorients the exclusionary discourses of modern advancement and progress in order to account for ethical concerns over the sexual and racial difference of the subaltern.

I suggest that the *trans* in *trans*-modernity responds not only to the *transness* of inversion, but also to what Riley Snorton has referred to as the *transitivity* and *transversality*—as in the passing and crossing of two entities—of gender and blackness. As such, I argue that while *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* are texts that reproduce discourses on racism and patriarchy, their protagonists resist and destabilize their hegemonic presuppositions in order to formulate their own response to the repressive and homogenizing forces of tradition and modernity as they pass and cross between the intersectional binaries of sex, gender, and race. In this way, they find ways to exercise their agency and autonomy amidst the temporal, spatial, and embodied changes of the *transness* of their inversion, thus allowing Hernández-Catá's texts to transform fixed meanings of subjectivity that continue to reappear in the present of a transmodern imaginary.

## PREFACE

On 22 May this year, the art exhibition *About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and New Queer Art* was inaugurated in Wrightwood 659, an arts space and cultural resource in Chicago that engages with the “pressing issues of our time.” The installation commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York City upon featuring nearly 500 works by domestic and international artists in the wake of global gains in LGBTQIA+ rights, on the one hand, and the ongoing inequities and violence against queer and transgender people, on the other.

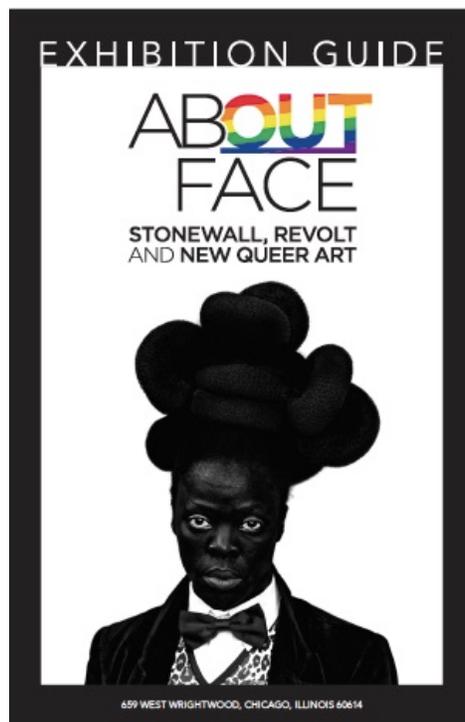


Figure 1. Exhibition guide to the *About Face* exhibit (2019).

In the exhibition guide above, its curator, Jonathan D. Katz, underscores how we have “changed the culture such that, in the main, we all are growing queerer and queerer—slowly and discontinuously to be sure, with strong regional differences and numerous, agonizing setbacks” (3). Katz states that the exhibition is about metamorphosis—like an “about-face”—whereby sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and race are unclear categories that “hybridize and overlap to the point that ‘queer’ becomes a verb,

not a noun” (*ibid.*). This critique does not only encompass the nouns of bodies, artistic forms, and spaces within ongoing processes of individual and social progress, repositioning, and reproduction. That is, it is not only “About (queer) Face(s)” and their representation. It also captures the action driving the verb “queer” in its resistance, embodiment, performance, self-fashioning, and activism like a militant “about-face” against repressive and regressive forces.

*About Face* portrays a transpolitics inscribed in the Levinasian demand for recognition of the face in a narrative of queer otherness, even when the face and body deteriorate. Katz stresses that the creation of a queerer world has not been an easy, “straight” path, but rather one “littered with corpses—with AIDS by no means the only cause of death” (*ibid.*).<sup>1</sup> Yet, the face of queerness turns to be acknowledged and to defend its difference, place of belonging, and yearning for justice. “Queer” is a verb that brings each of the pieces of the exhibit to bear on its aims, as modeled after the principles of queer theory, which are to destabilize hierarchies, the male/female and straight/gay binaries, and the stability of identity, thus focusing on art pieces in and through which “boundaries blur, forms mutate, the natural is denaturalized, and the transgressive and transcendent are linked” (*ibid.*). As its subtitle suggests, it revolts against the stabilization of categories and identities that harkens back to the histories, or trans-/queer-stories, of Stonewall that honor and make relevant the queer and trans experience today.

The exhibition begins when one enters the building into the reception area (before the doors leading to the main lobby of the galleries). On the left wall there is a plastic mural paying homage to the Stonewall Uprising that has been encrusted with heat into the wall’s brick interior, thus symbolizing the symbiosis of the spirit of rebellion with the material structure of the queer establishment. It stands as an invitation to recognize and remember the history that has legitimized

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<sup>1</sup> According to Levinas, the face “is not at all a representation, it is not a given of knowledge, nor is it a thing which comes to hand. It is an irreducible means of access, and it is in ethical terms that it can be spoken of. I have said that in my analysis of the face it is a demand; a demand, not a question” (169).

and paved the way for the present moment, and the trans people of color who spearheaded it with the bricks that they picked up from a nearby construction site and jolted at the police officers who often raided the bar. The name Stonewall—a stagnant and uniform representation of resistance along with the brick objects that not only came from the construction site but with which the structure itself was built—signifies a paradoxical metaphor of individuals who are known to destabilize and deconstruct normative sex and gender identities and, yet, revolted by throwing an object that is symbolic of the opposite: construction and stabilization. In this sense, they reclaimed the stonewalling they faced from the authorities who attacked their freedom to exist as multidimensional and autonomous individuals. According to Katz, this is also the aim of queers and the artists of *About Face*: “Queers aren’t the outliers anymore, we’re the ... cheerleaders for a brave *new* world where the stable, familiar categories of identity continue to erode and mix. ... Many of these artists actively seek to recruit audiences to the very queer recognition that, without the defining or policing of our differences, identity is always plural” (*ibid.*). He goes further to say that this “new” world is not about “creating a *more modern*, stable identity, but the perpetuation of a continuously hybrid one ... an amalgam of many identities,” and that this recognition was “modeled in art long before it could be brought to life” (*ibid.*; emphasis added).

The relation between artistic creation, identity, and the modern that Katz highlights, in tandem with the idea of the hybridity of a brave new world, is one in need of further exploration. The main considerations are that of time, of the negation of a “more modern” form of identity, and of the adoption of a new and plural way of being in today’s world. On one end, Katz proposes working against binaries of queer identity and cultural production. On the other, he situates his proposal in a binarial “old versus new” temporal and political paradigm that reduces the modern to a regressive and dichotomous mode of thought and behavior, despite the historical import and retrospective significance of the *About Face* exhibition and the development of New Modernist

Studies. To his credit, he states in an interview with the online newspaper *Art Daily* that the Stonewall Rebellion was not “the birth of a gay and lesbian movement” and that the exhibit traces the “long struggle for equality and inclusion.” Nevertheless, the question on what is “modern” in relation to history, subjectivity, and the past and present of world-making still stands. Ultimately, it raises the debate over the distinctions and convergences of what is modernity as a time period, the modern as a category of thought, meaning, and expression, and modernism as an art form and aesthetic movement concerning the subject, its environment, and metaphysics.

Modernity is often thought in historical terms as commencing in the advent of groundbreaking scientific discoveries and innovation at the end of the Middle Ages, thus defining “modern” as the contrast to an ancient and medieval past. Other times this ‘world picture’ denoting modern as “new” and “progressive” is attributed to the growth of mass industrialization, the expansion of capitalism, and the beginnings of globalization from the nineteenth century onward. Anthony J. Cascardi interrogates this totalizing view and historical bifurcation of modernity and the modern, arguing that it is illusory when centered around subjectivity because one arrives at these presuppositions about the old-versus-new ‘world picture’ through the activity of ‘world picturing’ itself (1). He argues that the paradigm of modernity is more than historical and philosophical because “the subject” exceeds these domains: “the subject exists at the intersection of a series of discourses or cultural spheres, each of which is essential for an understanding of modern culture and none of which can define modernity as a whole” (2).

Katz’s and Cascardi’s conceptualizations agree on the modern and modernity as a turning away from totality and wholeness, particularly because the subject is at the center of both the former’s consideration of identity and the latter’s views on the making of modern history. Cascardi contends that it is precisely the historical and theoretical foci on modernity that have produced contradictory definitions of the condition of subjectivity, as seen in their multifaceted discursive and

cultural iterations in the works of Descartes, Cervantes, Hobbes, Pascal, Milton, and the myth of Don Juan, to name a few examples: “the modern subject is in fact positioned within a field of conflicting discourses, such that modern culture can best be imagined as a ‘*detotalized* totality’” (*ibid.*; emphasis added). Such a ‘totality’ was “conceived” when French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) proffered his theory on self-consciousness (“I think, therefore I am”) in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), thus basing the invention of modern subjectivity within reason and historical contingency. This meant that the modern subject was generated against earlier mythic, heroic, or traditional representations of being that prevailed in the “pre-modern” era. However, to suggest that these trends were abandoned after the Middle Ages would be to reduce the social, *and even historical*, complexity of the pre-modern, as well as modernity and modern subjectivity.

While modernity is characterized as a turn from old ways of thinking and traditional customs, like the pious virtue of chivalry and courtly love overseen by the Church, such an oppositional conceptualization of a modern way of life is a historical invention that does not entirely render the presuppositions undergirding “pre-modern” ideals obsolete. Moreover, Cascardi argues that although the historical contingency of a series of modern transformations grounded in “an essential, internal order of things” cannot be denied, this does not account for how the individual in its self-conscious selfhood has been unable to insert itself within, or even disrupt, them: “[I]t is difficult for the subject to accept its place within a contingent order of events. In response the subject attempts to transform contingency into necessity, as part of an effort to legitimize itself” (5). Cascardi proposes a revision of the modern as a monolith in order to account for its transformations in accordance with how the subject charts the waters of modernity by either flowing with or going against the current. Under such a shifting paradigm, one would have to consider how queer and trans subjectivity and experience during the rise of modernization in the early twentieth century continues to be a modern problem and relevant still in modernist studies.

Cascardi's interpretation of modernity and the limitations of its progressive agenda points to the issues of tradition and progress around which the debate on modernity often revolves. On the one hand, modernity as a period of modernization has been defined as a shift from a provincial and traditional way of life to one informed and guided by technological innovation, social reform, and industrial and economic advancement. However, this did not necessarily translate to a drastic shift to more progressive moral values, especially with regard to non-conforming individuals and sexualities. For instance, in keeping with Katz's observation that the gay and lesbian liberation movement did not begin with Stonewall, one is inclined to consider the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR), which was established in Germany by sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) in 1928, although it began to take shape in the early 1920s. One of its main goals was to decriminalize and normalize homosexuality. Other European nations created their own chapters while all of them met about every one or two years in order to discuss sexual reform, eugenics, and other programs geared toward "improving the human race." However, this became code for the adoption of measures that were homophobic, sexist, racist, and xenophobic. Historian Alison Sinclair notes that WLSR members (scientists, lawyers, and artists) disagreed on how progressive the organization should be and how much the state should get involved in regulating conformity to the status quo, particularly as it pertained to same-sex sex. The German and English chapters were among the most progressive while the Spanish one held that homosexuality was abnormal and that sexual inverts should be ostracized from society (18). This resonates with the current backlash against LGBTQIA+ rights and the setbacks to furthering equality in the United States and in other countries where homosexuality is still punishable by death.

At least two main forms of modernity emerge from the history of sexual reform to the present battles for queer recognition and justice: one that simulates social progress based on pseudoscientific discourses and institutional practices that maintain the status quo, preserve

traditional ways of thinking, and perpetuate social inequities and political imbalances of power (with the exception of its separation from the Church), and another that recognizes the hypocrisy and shorthandedness of these modernizing forces in order to espouse a modernity that accounts and advocates for the marginalized other, the subaltern and oppressed. The Spanish chapter of the WLSR, or La Liga, is an example of both in that some of its members advocated for the criminalization of homosexuality while still considering it a pathological illness and abnormal state of being. This opposition, moreover, was in large part due to an anticlericalist reaction to the moral hypocrisy of the church (Cleminson and Vázquez García 199). Yet, many of these modernist intellectuals and artists dissociated from the moral and traditional doctrine of the church on the one hand, while justifying their moralistic views against same-sex sexuality under the guises of scientific positivism on the other. There were others, however, like Hirschfeld and English physician Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), who advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality and saw it as a normal way of being. On the other hand, Ellis often overlooked the disparate racial and class dimensions of gender and sexuality if only to base his eugenicist theory on the betterment of the human race on a distinction between “lower and higher races” (i.e., white and non-white) and the prevalence of homosexuality as existing mostly in the “lower classes” (Ellis and Symonds 102). Women did not fare well either in his analysis. For instance, Riley Snorton has pointed out that Ellis argued that “the average size of black women’s buttocks (seen as larger than white women’s) served a compensatory function for their smaller (read: inferior) average pelvic size,” thus setting forth a sexological discourse based on theories of species differentiation (19).

The recognition, or *mis*-recognition, of sexual and racial difference continues to problematize discourses of progress and modernization based on the exclusion and devalorization of underrepresented and oppressed groups. Such has been the plight of queer and trans subjects, particularly in the United States where marriage equality and gays in the military were avenues to

legitimize same-sex intimacy and align queerness with the “mainstream” of heteronormativity when these were hardly the aims of gay-rights organizations founded on the heels of Stonewall, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). GLF was comprised of revolutionaries who were anti-nuclear family, anti-religious, anti-war, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-patriarchal: “[The gay-rights movement] reflected a narrow agenda that hardly lent itself to solidarity with other oppressed groups. ... Most important, the movement started trying to gain access to institutions rather than trying to transform them” (Gessen). In fact, historian and playwright Martin Duberman has noted that ever since the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, hundreds of state and local legislatures have filed anti-gay bills, including measures that continue to allow anti-LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace (Gessen).

It is worth noting that recently the Stonewall Inn and the trans women of color that catapulted the revolt were given their due recognition through commemorative memorials and sculpted monuments in New York City. In addition, the FX drama television series “Pose” (2018-present) has also brought to the fore the experiences of trans women of color and the queer ballroom culture scene during the AIDS crisis in New York City. Nevertheless, trans women of color continue to be murdered at alarming rates in the US. In the past two months alone, six black trans women were killed: Claire Legato, Muhlaysia Booker, Michelle Washington, Chynal Lindsey, and Chanel Scurlock, and Denali Berries Stuckey (Ettachfini). It has been trans women and drag queens who have often been at the frontlines of the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights, and not just for the opportunity to serve in the military, but to also just be who they are regardless of their non-binary sex and gender. In a sense, trans people have embodied the intermediary position of the two camps of the gay-rights movement that Duberman describes: those who adopt a “narrow agenda that is also socially centrist or even conservative” (e.g., marriage equality and military service) and the renegades of other oppressed groups who strive to just be different (e.g., non-binary and queer

people of color) (Gessen). Such an intermediary position is representative of the paradox of modernity discussed earlier and was exemplified by intellectuals and artists who also fell into two modernist camps: those who advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality while still holding on to a binary gender model that pathologized homosexuality and sexual inversion, and those who did not care whether they or others conformed or not to heteronormativity.

The parallel between the 1920s and the present not only illustrates that the debate over the normalcy of non-conforming sexualities and genders has not drastically changed. It also demonstrates that modernity as a discourse of progress is multifaceted and that it is still relevant in its disruptions of tradition, contrary to Katz's assertion that it is in opposition to hybridity and pluralism: "It is precisely modernism [sic] aversion to pluralism that animated my thinking. As I see it [sic], modernism offers a forward march teleology, premised on polarity, whereas I am hoping for a pluralistic account of modernity. Sadly, that promise is still only nascent. As I see it, we shunt pluralism onto postmodernism, and thus give modernism a free ride." Katz's assertion is preceded by Susan Ilcan argument that modernity's failure to achieve freedom and progress for the marginalized has led us into a postmodern period (26). Not only does this view present modernity as a generational chain "defined by its coming *after* the traditional and *before* the postmodern," which by Cascardi's theorization and the historic examples discussed previously is a misleading one (Friedman 504). It also portrays modernity as unilateral and unidirectional.

While such orientations may carry historical weight by the linear way that modernity has been positioned to come after the Enlightenment and to originate in the West, they do not account for the radical disruptions that it sparked against hegemonic institutions and processes. Marshall Berman's often-cited description of modernity from his book *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* is exemplary in this regard:

There is a mode of vital experience—experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils—that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this

body of experience “modernity.” To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.” (15)

In Berman’s conceptualizations, modernity is an experience and a phenomenon that brings together both the traditions and ruptures in both their solidifying structures of being and order for people and their environment and in their dismantling disruptions and plurality. It is essentially *queer* in this regard. Such a poetic illustration not only stresses the contradictory elements of modernity. It also underscores their unity via symbiosis in order to focus, not only on the difference between two entities, nor their bifurcation, but on that in-between space that brings them together and makes them codependent. Susan Stanford Friedman refers to it as “the centripetal and centrifugal forces in contradiction and constant interplay” that encompass modernity as “neither of historical stages nor as a utopian dialectic” but as “a meaning produced liminally in between, a dialogic that pits the contradictory processes of formation and deformation against each other, each as necessary to the other” (505). If there is a force that unites or separates both elements of a binary, then there is a possible third entity that makes that happen, which facilitates going beyond the dual nature of modernity (i.e., plurality).

Berman and Friedman point to what I consider to be the *transness* of modernity and what I propose in this dissertation as the liminality of an aesthetic and a politics of *transmodernism* via a critical analysis of the *transness* of sexual and racial inversions in the life and work of Cuban writer and diplomat Alfonso Hernández-Catá (1885-1940). Modernism is often defined as a movement led by intellectuals and artists in Latin America, United States, and Europe that broke with classical and traditional methods in the late nineteenth century toward new, experimental, avant-garde forms of artistic expression throughout the first half of the twentieth. From the Renaissance through the

1870s, the term *modernist* was associated with progress, change, urbanization, mass or fashionable culture, non-conformism, and innovation. It was not until the 1880s and 1890s that the term was cemented in the arts by French artistic culture, while Spain drew from its Latin American form, *modernismo*, that Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío (1867-1916), popularized (Latham and Rogers 20).

Whereas in the nineteenth century the emphasis was on form, toward the turn to the twentieth form was coupled with content in an effort to marry high aesthetic taste and beauty with antitraditional novelty and rebellion. In fact, in 1907 modernists' gravitation toward irreverence and anticlericalism provoked the condemnation of Pope Pius X in an encyclical that equated modernism with heresy and mandated all clergy to take an oath against it (21-22). Notwithstanding, a revision of the canon of modernism and ethical concerns legitimized the turn to postmodernism; however, a postmodern inclination did not deter the persistence of tradition nor the oscillation between "modernism's authoritarianism" and the anarchy that characterized Neomodernism. That is why Ihab Hassan theorizes postmodernism not as a break from modernism but as a revision of it, which only reaffirms the latter's pertinence (134). This led to British critic Frank Kermode's coining of the term "modernisms" in an attempt to divide the movement into two groups—traditionalists and schismatics—that would account for its historical coherence as well as its "various attempts to induce crises and thus to force endings or declare new beginnings" (84). Such a proposition speaks to the newness that Katz propounds.

What critics and theorists noticed was that the crises were inherent to modernism itself in what Maurice Beebe's considers to be its four main characteristics: "formal autonomy, detachment or irony, myth as an ordering structure, and a self-reflexive turn toward its own composition" (97).<sup>2</sup> Ten years later, nonetheless, Michael Levenson's *Genealogy of Modernism* (1984) argues that "modernism" is an undefined term that is at once 'vague and unavoidable' (98). Literary critic Matei

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<sup>2</sup> He lists them in his 1974 essay "What Modernism Was."

Călinescu took this as part of modernism's "mobile arrangement of works and ideas that could be pulled into innovative, and often irreconcilable shapes" (142). Such a movement gave way to the idea that modernism is not just one thing. Rather, there are multiple modernisms that can be compared, both Western and non-Western, that transcend the temporal limits of the first half of the twentieth century. According to Latham and Rogers, the consideration of non-Western art and literature took modernism beyond the 1950s in order to include regions that were undergoing decolonization, such as Africa and the South Pacific. Such considerations opened up modernism to postcolonial critique. Efforts to include other regional modernisms led to further transnational and intersectional analyses of modernity's history and artistic expression, particularly critical race and gender studies. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has postulated that early modernisms were sexist, heterosexual, and homophobic, while historian Paul Gilroy, whom I discuss in chapter three, focuses on the African diaspora and the figure of the slave as emblematic of the transatlantic "dialectical tension between race and modernity beyond America's borders" (167). These interdisciplinary and transcontinental approaches have nurtured the interest of what since the 1990s has been instituted as New Modernist Studies in order to trace the "ever-expanding network of nodes, connections, and genealogies" of modernism(s) (152). In other words, the modern in its modernist expression has surpassed its previous iterations of modernity, ergo dovetailing into its many permutations that account for the plurality of modernisms of which Kermode spoke.

Underlying these nodes, connections, and permutations is the idea of *transness* that I believe has characterized the study of modernism, its history, and its expression. In the same way that we invoke the existence of modernism(s), so can we call upon transmodernism(s) in the development of modernity and the various modernist configurations of its expression. According to Riley Snorton, "trans" is "a movement with no clear origin nor point of arrival," resulting in its transitivity. Transitivity not only means the quality of passing into another condition, space, or temporality. As

Snorton proposes, it is also a grammar that denotes the “transubstantiation of things,” that is, “the expression of an action that requires an object to complete its sense of meaning” (6). In other words, it is the process by which a concept is thingified in a subject-object relation that obviates a stable binaristic logic in order to give way to the transversal changeability of difference: “Thingliness, in turn, denotes transitive modes of differentiation in which difference is neither absolute nor binaristic but changeable” (*ibid.*). Absolutism and binarism purport a unidirectional and linear logic of authority and progression. In this sense, transness works against these tendencies by its transversality, as in a working movement across two things in a bilateral (re)doubling that captures the unfixed, relational transformations of transness.

In order to address the modern transitive and transversal configurations of sex, gender, and race in the narrative of Hernández-Catá, I follow Snorton’s conceptual framework on the transitivity and transversality of transness as they expound it in their book *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017): “*Black on Both Sides* explains how the condensation of transness into the category transgender is a racial narrative, as it also attends to how blackness finds articulation in transness” (8). In the same fashion, the two novels I study here are examples of this formulation in which the sex and gender inversion of the protagonist in *El ángel de Sodoma* is enmeshed in an orientalist narrative of virility and femininity, and the blackness of the protagonist in *La piel* is intertwined with the transnational exchanges between the South Pacific and Europe that shape the inversions of his biracial identity. In this way, the protagonists embody the transness of inversion—the transitive and transversal movement between two genders (male and female) and races (black and white)—while the inscription of their subjectivities in a modernist narrative provides the grammar whereby the two together (transness and subjectivity) give meaning to a transmodern subject-object relation. This relation is transmodern not only on the basis of the transness of the

dualities of inversion in their function within sex, gender, and race and their representation in fiction. It is also transmodern from a sociohistorical standpoint.

Snorton argues that the dual movement of sexual and racial transness emulates the double-consciousness of being black in America and in the diaspora that DuBois introduces in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (9). As Snorton puts it: “to feel black in the diaspora, then, might be a trans experience” (8). These ideas may be underlying the division of the *About Face* artwork into five thematic sections—Transgress, Transfigure, Transpose, Transform, and Transcend—in order to make transness the hallmark of the exhibit.

I take after the five-part division of the *About Face* exhibit by frontloading the prefix “trans-” to the conceptual, methodological, and analytical framework of this dissertation. In my view, transness is the anchor of inversion, modernism, and the multiregional context of Hernández-Catá’s novels as they take the reader through the transgender, transracial, transnational, and transmodern (re)constitution and (re)configuration of its characters’ lives and narratives. These textual components are transmodern because the characters transgress the normative moral and social codes of sex, gender, and race upon transfiguring the shame of trans-/homophobia and racism in their own inverted subjective transformation. They transpose themselves within their own gender and racial inversion at the same time that they transport themselves from one space and geography to the next, disrupting tradition and transforming it in order to transcend what entraps them and find a place of belonging. In this way, *Inverting (Trans)Modern Subjects* is a (re)vision of the subject of modernity in both its subjective and discursive meanings in ways that continue to be revised today as it regards the experience of transness, thus taking sex, gender, and race in the narrative of

Hernández-Catá into a transmodern dimension that transgresses and transcends his time into the projections of the present moment.

## INTRODUCTION

The case of the concept of structure, that you also bring up, is certainly more ambiguous. *Everything depends upon how one sets it to work.* Like the concept of the sign—and therefore of semiology—it can simultaneously confirm and shake logocentric and ethnocentric assuredness. It is not a question of junking these concepts, nor do we have the means to do so. Doubtless it is more necessary, from within semiology, to transform concepts, to displace them, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them in other chains, and little by little to modify the terrain of our work and thereby produce new configurations... (24; emphasis added)

—Jacques Derrida, *Positions*

In the epigraph above, Derrida answers Julia Kristeva's question about the limits of the modes of communication and signifying structures on which semiology rests, and how they depend on the subjective and arbitrary ways that they are deployed.<sup>3</sup> The French philosopher's response very much summarizes what in my estimation describes a significant aim of the literary aesthetic of Cuban writer, journalist, and diplomat Alfonso Hernández-Catá (born 24 June 1885 in Aldeadávila de la Ribera, Salamanca, Spain; died 8 November 1940 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). Much like the necessity to transform semiotic concepts within semiology itself, so does Hernández-Catá seek to displace, reinscribe, modify, or turn against itself the broader semantic terrain of the symbolic and discursive structure(s) of inversion through a *(re)vision* of the sociopolitical forms of inversion in two of his novels: *La piel* (The Skin; 1913) and *El ángel de Sodoma* (The Angel of Sodom; 1928).<sup>4</sup> For instance, in *La piel*, the black skin of the male protagonist and Tahitian native, Eulogio Valdés, is inverted to a lighter tone due to illness when he becomes a freeman after the abolition of slavery. This physiological change reflects the ambiguity of his biraciality, the psychological turmoil of a double-consciousness, and the political racial tensions between blackness and whiteness that historically characterized French-Polynesian (post)colonial relations during the nineteenth and

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<sup>3</sup> Semiology is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation (also known as *semiotics*).

<sup>4</sup> These are the years that the first editions were published. I use later editions in my analysis.

twentieth centuries. In *El ángel de Sodoma*, the gender expression of the Spanish male protagonist, José-María Vélez-Gomara, is inverted, an attribute that he traces from birth, causing a gender reversal of his “masculine” behaviors to “feminine” ones and the inversion of his sexuality from a “heterosexual” to a “homosexual” one, that is, the reversal of the object of desire from the opposite to the same sex. He experiences psychological sex and gender duality in the form of gender dysphoria and homosexuality, thus problematizing hegemonic cultural norms in the novel that, in turn, reflects the historical social stigmas on sex and gender non-conformity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In this dissertation, I analyze how Hernández-Catá utilizes inversion as a symbolic literary device that inverts or reverses the meaning(s) of symbols and concepts in these texts in order to revise and destabilize heteronormative and hegemonic discourses, ideologies, and practices on sex, gender, and race.<sup>5</sup> For example, in both novels, there is the inversion of light versus dark colors as symbols of good versus evil in order to reverse blackness/brownness from its worth and value to its inferiority to whiteness. I argue that, while the repressive environments that the protagonists inhabit or the regional contexts in which they are inscribed pressures them into reproducing patriarchy and racial prejudice (in the South Pacific, England, France, Spain, the Caribbean, the United States, and North Africa), the resistance and agency they exhibit allows them to challenge the ambivalent otherness they experience in order to combat forces of subjection, even when it entails suffering and death. In this way, I demonstrate how these characters embody the aesthetic and discursive configurations of inversion, and how their internal struggle with gender inversion and racial alterity

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<sup>5</sup> Historically, the word *inversion* has been used in rhetoric and in other disciplines such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and geometry, as well as in psychology to refer to *sexual* inversion, or what was generally known as the adoption of behavior typical of the opposite sex; also, homosexuality (New Oxford English Dictionary). I will explore some of these meanings throughout this introduction.

reflects the historically problematic constitution of the “subject of modernity” at the turn of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth in ways that are relevant in today’s global climate.

On the one hand, I take the inverted “subject of modernity” as having a double meaning that denotes the subjects or topical complexities of historically contingent dualities (psychological, ideological, what have you) as well as the embodiment of the *trans*-formations of inversion via a literary aesthetic and within the excesses of subject-ivity. On the other, I contend that inversion as a *trans*-formational concept and practice that is not completely resolved in the two novels and that is still contested today lends itself to a *trans*-modern revision of the history and expression of difference, particularly the *trans*-ness of gender and race in their *trans*-national movement through time and space. This dissertation presents Hernández-Catá as an active participant and key figure that broadened the conversation on revalorizing difference through his writings, those of which were socially influential contributions to debates on the modern, subjectivity, and social justice. What is more, it proposes to situate him and his texts in the canons of cultural studies and criticism in the light of their innovation during his time and of their relevance in today’s global arena.

## **I. (Mis)Conceiving Alfonso Hernández-Catá: Transnational Writings on Society, Politics, and the Human Experience**

As noted in many previous studies, both Hernández-Catá the man and his work are synonymous with the two themes that the writer himself often referred to as characterizing his entire oeuvre: “el Dolor y la Muerte” (“Pain, or Suffering, and Death”). These words appear in the prologue to his collection of short novels *Los frutos ácidos* (Acidic Fruits) that includes *La piel* and in which he states: “Despite its diverse subject matter, this book [*Los frutos ácidos*] has a profound nexus: they are not three novels reunited at random; and although the human characters change from one to the other [Hernández-Catá also published a bestiary], the two protagonists—Pain and Death—

will accompany you from the first to the last page” (“A pesar de la diversidad material, tiene este libro un nexo profundo: no son tres novelas reunidas al azar; y aunque los personajes humanos cambian de una a otra [Hernández-Catá también publicó bestiario], los dos protagonistas ideales—el Dolor y la Muerte—te acompañarán desde la primera página hasta la última”; 6).<sup>6</sup> Uva de Aragón, his granddaughter, corroborates this assertion, stating that pain and death are “two constants” (“dos constantes”) in his work (1991: 20). Pain and death have been grounded in her grandfather’s life experience since he was eight years old, the age he had when his father died. Therefore, the link between the Cuban writer’s life and his literature is inextricable. They inform each other, thus explaining why the characters in his literature are oftentimes his alter egos. He accomplishes this by subtly meshing their fictional stories with a historical emplotment that is regionally specific as much as it is universal, and that is imaginary as much as it is autobiographical, personal, and intimate.

While virtually all criticism and studies agree that pain and death are the two main themes that inspired Hernández-Catá’s life and work, there are still misconceptions about the writer and his works. The first misconception is related to these themes in light of the pessimistic tone of his texts and the tragic deaths of many of his characters. These aspects have prompted critics to pigeonhole Hernández-Catá within a specific literary style, especially naturalism and realism, when in fact his writings exhibit stylistic eclecticism and thematic hybridity. Cira Romero rectifies the misconception that Hernández-Catá’s literature is one-dimensional by synthesizing its traits in the introduction to her 2004 critical edition of Hernández-Catá’s correspondence, *Compañeros de viaje*:

[Hernández-Catá] handled fiction as literality and as paroxysm in plots that range from emblematic symbolism to the recreation of elements from daily life. Seduced by real or fictitious stories, he demonstrated a special inclination to penetrating the remotest parts of the human being, its imperfections, its instances of darkness and lucidity. His narrative is intimate and descriptive, with a rhythm of a classic tone, which converted many of his works in a premeditated escape to different stylistic resorts.

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<sup>6</sup> The first edition of *Los frutos ácidos*, published in 1915, is cited here because it is the first time that *La piel* is included in a collection of short novels with a prologue, after appearing by itself for the first time in 1913 in the literary magazine *El Libro Popular*.

[Hernández-Catá] manejó la ficción como literalidad y como paroxismo en tramas que van desde el simbolismo emblemático hasta la recreación de elementos de la vida cotidiana. Seducido por historias reales o ficticias, mostró especial inclinación por penetrar en lo más recóndito del ser humano, en sus imperfecciones, en sus instantes de oscuridad y también de lucidez. Fue intimista y descriptivo en su narrativa, con un ritmo de cierto tono clásico, que convirtió muchas de sus obras en una premeditada huida hacia diferentes resortes estilísticos. (10)

In this sense, Hernández-Catá's narrative, as one that de Aragón has situated in modernism, contradicts the characterization of the modern as anti-hybrid. However, Hernández-Catá lived and wrote in a time when a variety of literary styles were in use and his texts are eclectic for this reason as well as for the fact that he lived and traveled in both the Western Hemisphere and Europe where modernism and other literary movements were in vogue. Notwithstanding, de Aragón's study has addressed the tendency to encase or exclude Hernández-Catá from these movements and their regional expansion, particularly in their Latin American iterations, which leads to another misconception about him: that his literature is strictly European and not Latin American, specifically non-Cuban. Therefore, when we think about his works, it is important to approach it through transnational and transformational lens due to its hybrid style and its multiregional scope. Such an approach would account for the twists and turns in his stories in relation to their complex representation of inversion and the ways that institutions perpetuated its stigma at the passing of intense social change and political upheaval.

The breadth of Hernández-Catá's aesthetic and the geographic range of his writings stem from his upbringing and early-life experiences. In a published interview with Puerto Rican literary critic José Agustín Balseiro (1900-91), Hernández-Catá clarifies doubts about his origins:

—I was born in Santiago de Cuba 24 June 1885.

—But, Alfonso—I objected—, Ramón Pérez de Ayala assures me that you saw the light of day in...

—Yes, in Aldeadávila de la Ribera, a small town in the province of Salamanca, here in Spain. Listen, however, to my story. My father, Alfonso Hernández Lastras, married Emelina Catá y Jardines in Cuba. He was Lieutenant Colonel of Infantry and Joint Chief of Staff, and was Spain's son; my mother was Cuban. They had eleven children. Ten were born in America. Due to the responsibilities of paternal imperatives they had to return to Spain, when my mom was already carrying me in her womb. That's how, my random motives, I wasn't born in Cuba. But I had not reached the age of one before we returned to Santiago, where I was raised. My maternal family's ancestors are Cuban revolutionaries. My maternal grandfather was executed by firearm by the Spanish, and my only male

uncle partook in the war of emancipation since it began. In Santiago I studied in Juan Portuondo Elementary School first, and then in the Institute of Secondary Education until I was sixteen years old. At that age, and because I was the son of a Spanish official, they sent me, already an orphan, to Toledo, to a military academy from which I escaped by foot to Madrid. Once I was in Madrid I experienced many privations that I've told you about before, and I studied in the free university of life and in public libraries... . . . Do me a favor, a great personal favor. Don't take away, not even there, the dream that I'm from Santiago, that I'm Cuban. And when I die, if I die, as should be, before you, clarify that fact on behalf of the strict truth.

—Nací en Santiago de Cuba, el 24 de junio de 1885.

—Pero, Alfonso —le objeté—, Ramón Pérez de Ayala me asegura que usted vio la luz en...

—Sí, en Aldeadávila de la Rivera, pueblcito de la provincia de Salamanca, aquí en España. Óyeme, sin embargo, mi historia. Mi padre, Alfonso Hernández Lastras, casó en Cuba con Emelina Catá y Jardines. Él era Teniente Coronel de Infantería y Estado Mayor, y era hijo de España; mi madre era cubana. Once hijos tuvieron. Diez de ellos nacidos en América. Por imperativos de los deberes paternos tuvieron que volver a España, llevándome ya mi madre en su seno. Así fue cómo, por motivos de azar, no nací en Cuba. Pero no contaba un año todavía cuando regresamos a Santiago, donde me crié. Mi familia materna es de abolengo revolucionario cubano. Mi abuelo de esa línea fue fusilado por los españoles, y mi único tío varón tomó parte en la guerra de emancipación desde el primer día. En Santiago estudié en el Colegio de don Juan Portuondo, primero, y en el Instituto de segunda enseñanza, después, hasta los dieciséis años. A esa edad, y por ser hijo de oficial español, mandáronme ya huérfano, a Toledo, a un colegio militar del cual me escapé a pie, viniéndome a Madrid. Ya en Madrid pasé privaciones que te he contado otras veces, y estudié en la libre universidad de la vida y de las bibliotecas públicas... [...] hazme un favor, un gran favor personal. No me quites, ni siquiera ahí, la ilusión de que soy de Santiago, de que soy cubano. Y cuando yo muera, si muero, como debe ser, antes que tú, aclara el hecho a favor de la estricta verdad.<sup>7</sup> (37-38)

De Aragón also mentions how Hernández-Catá's upbringing was influenced by the revolutionary spirit against Spanish colonialism that ran through the veins of his maternal family. About two years after his father's death (Hernández-Catá was nine or ten years old), their son witnessed the funeral of José-Martí (1853-95), a prominent writer, journalist, and key player in the Cuban revolution, also

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<sup>7</sup> Hernández-Catá reiterates the words in this citation in an interview that Alfonso Camín cites in his biographical sketch of the author: "I was the son of a Spanish soldier and Cuban mother. I was born in Aldea de Ávila, in the province of Salamanca. By I have never been to that town, nor does it interest me. I was barely a month old when they took me to Santiago de Cuba. I spent my childhood in Santiago until the age of sixteen. The places of childhood are the real crib of a person. I feel completely Cuban. My family, almost entirely, is Cuban. My grandfather is a great patriot who died for the independence of Cuba. General Polavieja executed him by firearm. Do you want further proof of my Cubanness? Believe me. Every day I feel more that I'm from there. I love that country ... As Stendhal wanted written on his epitaph: 'Henry Bey le Milanese,' I would like written on mine: 'Hernández Catá, Havananite.' Because Havana is the city that I most like among the ones that I know" ("Soy hijo de militar español y de madre cubana. Nací en Aldea de Ávila, en la provincia de Salamanca. Pero nunca estuve en ese pueblo. Ni puede interesarme. Apenas tenía un mes cuando me llevaron a Santiago de Cuba. En Santiago pasé mi niñez, hasta los diez y seis años. Los lugares de la niñez son la verdadera cuna del hombre. Yo me siento completamente cubano. Mi familia, casi por entero, es cubana. Mi abuelo fue un gran patriota que murió por la causa de la independencia de Cuba. Lo fusiló el general Polavieja. ¿Quiere usted más pruebas de mi cubanidad? Créame. Cada día me siento más de allí. Me encanta aquel país... Así como Stendhal quería que en su epitafio pusieran: «Henry Bey le milanese», yo quisiera que pusieran en el mío: «Hernández Catá, habanero». Porque es La Habana la ciudad que más me gusta entre todas las que conozco" ("Cuentistas españoles: Alfonso Hernández-Catá". *Los hombres y los días*. Madrid, Renacimiento, 1927, pp. 223-29.)

known as the Father of Cuban independence. Despite Martí's fall in battle, young Alfonso, still an adolescent, often participated in anticolonial revolts in Santiago de Cuba, where he grew up, before being sent to the military academy in Toledo, Spain. A few years after, he obtained Cuban citizenship, which along with his engagement in political affairs prompted him to become a diplomat for Cuba.

Since 1911, he served in various European and American countries (including personal visits to the United States) during the volatility of Spain's loss of its last major colonies and the advent of U.S. neocolonial imperialism in Latin America, a region that had been suffering its own violent transitions into self-governance through *caudillismo*, or the rule of strongmen. Hernández-Catá was strongly opposed to corruption, repression, militarism, and dictatorial rule, all of which describes the kinds of governments in Spain and Cuba during the 1910s and 20s (when he wrote *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma*), especially Cuban President Gerardo Machado y Morales (1871-1939) and Spanish Prime Minister Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja (1870-1930). In recalling Hernández-Catá's diplomatic visit to Cuba in the first months of 1930, Cuban intellectual, politician and diplomat Raúl Roa (1907-82) underscores the consul's opposition to the tyrants:

It was a bright April morning when we received the novelist, Alfonso Hernández-Catá at the Association of Law Students. He brought a message from Spanish students to his Cuban comrades. Luis Botifoll, who presided the event, opened it up and gave me the floor. I didn't waste time to take the bull by the horns. My speech was a frank call to revolution. I condemned the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the tyranny of Machado. Alfonso Hernández-Catá had no other choice but to excuse my diatribe and elaborate on my assertions. Moreover, he risked his charge—he was Cuban consul in Madrid—by tracing an ingenious parallelism between both regimes.

Era una luminosa mañana de abril aquella en que recibimos al novelista Alfonso Hernández Catá en la Asociación de Estudiantes de Derecho. Traía un mensaje de los estudiantes españoles para sus compañeros cubanos. Luis Botifoll, que presidía el acto, lo declaró abierto y me concedió la palabra. No perdí tiempo en coger al toro por las astas. Mi discurso fue una franca incitación a la lucha revolucionaria. Enjuicié ásperamente la dictadura de Primo de Rivera y la tiranía de Machado. A Alfonso Hernández Catá no le quedó otro remedio que perdonarme la catilinaria y abundar en mis asertos. Incluso se jugó el cargo—era cónsul de Cuba en Madrid—trazando un ingenioso paralelismo entre los dos regímenes. (86)

According to Roa, Hernández-Catá set aside his diplomacy in order to condemn the dictators. He, in fact, gave up his diplomatic title in order to protest Machado's government, which was violently repressive; torturing and assassinating its detractors (Bueno 945).

Hernández-Catá lived in a time of change, transformation, and ideological extremism that caused much suffering, violence, and death in his lifetime, which he took to heart even in his own bouts of sadness. His granddaughter describes him as “given to melancholy and he was always sure that he would die young” (“era dado a la melancolía y siempre aseguró que moriría joven”; 2017). That is probably why the characters in his stories lead painful lives and die tragically, like Eulogio and José-María. It is also why their lives reflect the sociopolitical conflicts of the period of their publication. If they are psychologically Hernández-Catá's alter egos, they also witness and experience what the author did in real life. Eulogio, for example, is of mixed race, a diplomat in Birmingham, England and Le Havre, France, is an avid reader, and against tyranny. These are all traits that Hernández-Catá shares with the protagonist in addition to have written *La piel* when he is consul to Cuba in Birmingham and Le Havre.

The same can be said about José-María, the protagonist of *El ángel de Sodoma*, whose father represents an authoritarian figure, who is enamored with Paris, and likes to dress in fine clothing. Hernández-Catá's father was a soldier and the novelist loved going to Paris with his brother-in-law and Hispano-Cuban writer and journalist Alberto Insúa (1883-1963), who in his memoirs emphasizes Hernández-Catá's “excessive enthusiasm for ‘French things’” (“excesivo entusiasmo por las «cosas de Francia»”; 604) and his use of big and colorful ties: “He used polychromatic ties like big butterflies” (“Usaba unas corbatas policromas, como grandes mariposas”; 496). Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964), a prolific Spanish critic and Hernández-Catá's contemporary, takes it even further but with a more critical tone: “[Hernández-Catá], the current director of [the press] Mundo Latino, was always well dressed, with the gaudy luxury of the nouveau riche, a fake vest, grey ankle

boots, rings on his thick fingers and a mid-leg jacket and cravats of Bohemian elegance” (“[Hernández-Catá], el director ahora de [la editorial] *Mundo Latino*, iba siempre bien vestido, con un lujo chillón de rastacuero, chaleco de fantasía, botitos grises, sortijas en los gruesos dedos y chambergo y chalinas de bohemio elegante”; 358).

If the characters in Hernández-Catá’s texts are inscribed in the time frame of his life, they also inhabit the regions to which he traveled, thus reflecting the social and historical contexts of the spaces he traversed. After escaping the military academy, Hernández-Catá strived to break into the literary scene in Madrid and Cuba. He studied English, French, music, and history, and read frequently at the Biblioteca Nacional de España. He attended various social gatherings in which he expanded his cultural and literary knowledge and where he befriended many writers, namely his long-term mentor, Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920). He would send drafts of his work to Pérez Galdós, which the Spanish novelist tore in pieces and requested that he start anew until he improved his writing (Balseiro 38). In return, Pérez Galdós eventually sent one of his stories for publication in the Spanish magazine *Blanco y Negro*. It was then that Hernández-Catá started to make a name for himself. He wrote articles and stories for various Spanish newspapers and magazines such as *Crónica*, *Nuevo Mundo*, *Blanco y Negro*, *Abora* and *La Esfera*. De Aragón, for instance, has identified over fifty collaborations by Hernández-Catá in *La Esfera* alone. Writing became a ritual, and there, in the Spanish metropolis, he published most of his works, some of them in collaboration with his soon-to-be brother-in-law, Cuban writer Alberto Insúa (1883-1963), with whom he would later travel to Le Havre and to Paris. In France, Hernández-Catá also became acquainted with various artists, writers, and publishing houses. French writers such as Guy de Maupassant (1850-93) and Flaubert (1821-80) influenced his narrative. Hernández-Catá, like Maupassant (whose stories were also set in Le Havre), became known for his short stories, which followed a naturalist style and pessimistic tone.

In Cuba, he also endeavored to gain recognition and he met many artists and writers. In 1905, his family petitioned him to return to Cuba where he wrote for local newspapers such as *La Discusión*, *Diario de la Marina*, *El Fígaro*, and the magazine *Social* to which he contributed more than thirty of his texts. He therefore initiated his writing career as a journalist, like most writers of the time, but soon after, with the help of Pérez Galdós and his colleagues, he dove into fiction. In 1906, a few of his poems were featured in the poetry collection *La corte de los poetas. Florilegio de rimas modernas* (The Poets' Court: An Anthology of Modern Rhymes; Madrid: Librería de Pueyo). In 1907, he returned to Spain and married Insúa's sister, Mercedes Lila, with whom he had five children. That same year his first novel, *El pecado original* (The Original Sin), was featured in *El Cuento Semanal* (The Weekly Story), a literary publication of commercial literature founded and directed by Cuban writer Eduardo Zamacois (1876-1976) who knew Hernández-Catá since 1904 and became known for publishing writers and stories of decadent, sensual, and erotic content. Also, in that year the newlyweds return to Cuba and settle in Havana where the husband begins to write for the Cuban newspaper *El Fígaro*. Meanwhile, his first book, *Cuentos pasionales* (Passionate Stories; 1907), is published in Madrid to rave reviews due to the noticeable influence of Maupassant and Rudyard Kipling in its stories.

The first edition of *Cuentos pasionales* includes five short stories and two plays, which could be considered as Hernández-Catá's literary debut and an exemplary sampling of his later work (Bueno 937). The expanded third edition, published in 1920, includes fourteen short stories and five plays. By that time, he had matured as a writer. The composition of his short stories is often compared to that of Uruguayan author Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937), American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), and Russian writer of short fiction Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) because of their similarity in structure and their depiction of the struggle of man and animal to survive. In the first edition of *Cuentos pasionales*, stories about the psyche of animals, such as "El milagro" (The Miracle), inspired

later writings like *Zoología pintoresca* (Picturesque Zoology; 1919) and *La casa de fieras* (The House of Wild Animals; 1920). It also included plays about human survival such as “La hermana” (The Sister), “El padre Rosell” (Father Rosell), and “Un drama” (A Drama): “[His] best works were short stories, although, in some of these, techniques normally used by dramaturges than prose writers have been identified, and in others there is a pronounced essay-like quality” (“[S]us mejores obras fueron los cuentos, aunque en algunos de estos se ha señalado técnicas más propias de los dramaturgos que de los narradores y en otros un pronunciado carácter ensayístico”; Enciclopedia de Historia y Cultura del Caribe).

In 1909, his second book, *Novela erótica*, is published in Madrid. By that time, he had befriended various Cuban artists and writers such as Cuban critic and writer Jesús Castellanos (1878-1912) who on occasion would write reviews of his works. In his book, *Los optimistas* (Havana, 1914), Castellanos says the following about his friend in his 1909 review of *Novela erótica*:

Rereading his works chronologically, one could begin to create the nomenclature of the major gods of this generation according to how they have prevailed in the currents of taste: first the naturalists, those that in the beginning of our youth shook us profoundly, those that inspired the raw pages of *Cuentos pasionales*; after D’Annunzio; today the theory of precious and strange writers: Maeterlinck, Poe. ... and already insinuating themselves in his most recent works such as the fantastic and contradictory Pelayo González, the blessed impression of the smiling Anatole France, Remy de Gourmont, Eça de Queiroz. ... Hernández-Catá is style. ... An ingenious *contour* ... with a technique closer to a dramaturge than a novelist. ... A fine ironist. ... fervent lover of the paradox, devotee of antitheses. ... Son of his century, in sum, with the qualities of refinement and taste of a contemporary of King Sun. ... *Novela erótica* ... is an incomplete testimony of the imaginative and analytical gifts that can be found in the author.

Releyendo sus trabajos por su verdadero orden cronológico, pudiera irse haciendo la nomenclatura de los dioses mayores de esta generación según han imperado en las corrientes del gusto: primero los naturalistas, los que en nuestra primera juventud nos sacudieron hondamente, los que le inspiraron las páginas crudas de los *Cuentos pasionales*; después de D’Annunzio; hoy la teoría de preciosistas y raros: Maeterlinck, Poe. ... y ya insinuándose en sus trabajos recientísimos sobre el fantástico y contradictorio Pelayo González, la impresión bendita de los sonrientes Anatole France, Remy de Gourmont, Eça de Queiroz...Hernández Catá es la moda. ... Un ingenioso conteur ... con una técnica más de dramaturgo que de novelista. ... Un fino ironista. ... ferviente enamorado de la paradoja, devoto de las antítesis. ... Un hijo de su siglo, en suma, con las cualidades de refinamiento y gusto de un contemporáneo del Rey Sol. ... La *Novela Erótica* ... es un testimonio incompleto de las dotes de imaginación y análisis que hay en su autor. (323-25)

Castellanos goes on to describe *Novela erótica* as exhibiting a morbid sensuality and neo-secular energy while still following a naturalist style that displays for its readers the clinical vitrines of hyperesthesia and of the libraries of anatomy (326-27). Castellanos captures the innovative eclecticism of Hernández-Catá's aesthetic style and themes, which is due to the fact that his literature spans four decades in which various fin-de-siècle literary movements were taking shape. This characterizes the heterogeneity of his writing, highly depending on how, as Derrida would have it, he sets the concept of structure to work.

Critics from Hernández-Catá's time and those that have studied his works today have agreed to the overarching modernist tendencies of his writing, which often encompassed many of the new aesthetic styles and literary schools that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century such as Decadentism, Symbolism, mysticism, exoticism, Parnassianism, etc. In his 1925 revue of authors, *La nueva literatura*, Cansinos Assens describes Hernández-Catá as follows: "Alfonso ... reaches still the lyrical latter ends of the innovative pleiad, which has just achieved the most epic literary revolution; one can yet hear the vibrations of the last chords of the Valle-Inclanesque sonatas, in which he sings everything modern and all that is old about our restlessness" ("Alfonso ... alcanza todavía las postrimerías líricas de la pléyade innovadora, que acaba de realizar la más épica revolución literaria; oye vibrar aún los últimos acordes de las sonatas valleinclanescas, en que canta todo lo moderno y todo lo antiguo de nuestra inquietud"; 241). However, not everyone found Hernández-Catá's oeuvre to be worthy of encomium. Some thought it was untimely, unpatriotic, and distanced from national concerns. Those so inclined used this to question his Cubanness. Uruguayan critic, Alberto Zum Felde, was one who denied it and even includes the writer's brother-in-law Insúa and Zamacois in the following statement: "Identified with Hispanism, they have no relation with their native land. They are writers that have turned Spanish, although they were born in the ex-Antillean colony, from which they have spiritually uprooted themselves" ("Identificados con lo hispánico, ninguna relación

tienen con su tierra natal. Son escritores españolizados, aunque hayan nacido en la ex colonia antillana, de la que se desarraigaron espiritualmente” (de Aragón 19). Félix Lizaso (1891-1967), a Cuban writer and scholar in earnest of Cuba’s national hero, José Martí (1853-95), writes an essay in 1938 in which he criticizes Hernández-Catá’s lack of focus on regional and national issues:

Hernández-Catá’s oeuvre has significantly resonated among us. We’ve never considered it entirely ours; many have thought that it was about another Spanish novelist, and, in that case, it was better to meet true Spanish novelists. Edited in its entirety in Spain, not one breath of our land crosses through its pages. What doesn’t have a firm center in which to support itself runs the risk of not progressing any further; without personal substance, the work gets lost in the void.

Entre nosotros la obra de Hernández Catá ha tenido una resonancia insignificante. Nunca la hemos considerado bastante nuestra; muchos han pensado que se trataba de un novelista español más, y, en ese caso, era mejor conocer los verdaderos novelistas españoles. Editada en su totalidad en España, no cruza por sus páginas ningún aliento de nuestra tierra. Lo que no tiene centro firme en que apoyarse corre el riesgo de no alcanzar progresión mayor; sin sustancia propia, la obra se pierde en el vacío. (de Aragón 53)

To which Hernández-Catá responds in a letter addressed to Lizaso on May 5, 1938 from Río de Janeiro, Brazil:

With a delicate and friendly hand, you touch some of the wounds of my morale, and even the reasons for the apparent lack of Cubanism that the blind and those with bad intentions have pointed out in my work. On the one hand, there’s my affinity for the absolute conflicts of man, and on the other, there’s the integrity of not visibly putting the varnish of Cubanism at first glance on that reality that’s too descriptive, too peculiar, caricatural almost, that reveals little of the heart. To settle for the easy “Kodak” when there are machines that almost photograph at night, spectroscopic almost, is to settle for little, right? Your fleeting observations about *Mitología de Martí* likewise impressed me much.

Toca usted, con mano delicada, amistosa, algunas de las heridas de mi moral, y hasta el porqué de esa aparente falta de cubanismo que los ciegos o los malintencionados han señalado en mi obra. De una parte, mi tendencia a los conflictos del hombre absoluto, de otra mi probidad para no dar por cubanismo un barniz visible al primer golpe de vista, esa realidad demasiado adjetiva, demasiado peculiar, caricatural casi, que poco revela de la entraña. Conformarse con la fácil “Kodak” cuando hay máquinas que retratan casi de noche, espectroscópicas casi, es conformarse con poco, ¿verdad? Sus observaciones al paso acerca de la *Mitología de Martí*, me impresionaron mucho asimismo. (Romero 168)

There is ample evidence to support the claim that Hernández-Catá was Cuban through and through and not at the expense of the breadth of his cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and cultural knowledge. For instance, he often gave conferences about Cuba in various places such as those that he gave in Barcelona in 1910 for the Sociedad Libre de Estudios Americanistas (Free Society of

American Studies). Barreras reproduced one of the conferences, “Cuba después de 1908” (Cuba after 1908), in the magazine *Cuba en Europa* edited in Barcelona, which also includes a very favorable review of the first two conferences he gave regarding all aspects of Cuban cultural, sociopolitical, and economic affairs entitled “Patriótica labor del Sr. Hernández Catá” (The Patriotic Work of Mr. Hernández Catá).<sup>8</sup>

Of equal importance is Hernández-Catá’s service to Cuba as a diplomat for three decades. In February 1909, he became second consul to the Cuban government in Le Havre and in Birmingham in 1911. Both Le Havre and Birmingham appear as settings in his novella *La piel*, published in 1913. And his novel *La juventud de Aurelio Zaldívar* (The Youth of Aurelio Zaldívar; 1911) is set in Le Havre as well. However, Cuban scholar Cira Romero points out that Cuba is present in these texts, even if scarce or implicit: “Although Cuban themes were scarce, they were present in a more or less evident way in *La juventud de Aurelio Zaldívar*” (“[L]a temática cubana, aún siendo escasa, estuvo presente, de forma más o menos evidente, en *La juventud de Aurelio Zaldívar*”; 2009: 6). In addition, *La piel* was first published in Havana, the year after the Negro Rebellion of 1912 (Levantamiento Armado de los Independientes de Color), which was an armed conflict between peasant Afro-Cuban workers in the sugarcane industry against the Cuban army. The rebels sought to improve living conditions for poor blacks but the uprising was quashed by Cuban armed forces and by the intervention of U.S. Marines. In a letter to Hernández-Catá’s granddaughter, Uva de Aragón, Salvador Bueno states: “[Hernández-Catá] was very courageous to publish ‘La piel’ in Havana in 1913 briefly after what was called the ‘racist war’” (“[Hernández-Catá] fue muy valiente al publicar ‘La piel’ en La Habana en 1913 poco después de la llamada ‘guerra racista’”; de Aragón 87).

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<sup>8</sup>*Cuba en Europa* 1.6 (25 May 1910): 6. Also included in *Cuba en Europa* by Hernández-Catá are: “La palmera.” 1.6 (25 May 1910): 1-2; “Cuba después de 1908.” 1.8 (25 June 1910): 3-5; “La evolución de la vida cubana.” 1.9 (10 July 1910): 1-2; “La industria tabacalera de Cuba. El tratado comercial hispano-cubano.” 1.12 (25 August 1910): 3-4; “Cuba: la leyenda y la realidad I.” 1.13 (10 October 1910): 6-7; “Cuba: la leyenda y la realidad II.” 1.14 (25 October 1910): 6-7; “Martí en España.” 4.130: 1-4.

Veterans of the War of Independence of 1895 planned the rebellion, the same war that José Martí strategized and led, and to whom Hernández-Catá dedicates his *Mitología de Martí*, as cited in the letter to Lizaso. At the age of eight he witnessed Martí's burial. What is more, Hernández-Catá was born just a few years after the end of the Ten Years War in Cuba (1868-78) and spent most of his childhood in Santiago de Cuba during the two subsequent wars of independence. As a kid he would pretend to be a *mambí* (a Cuban rebel fighting against the Spanish army) as his friend, Cuban critic Antonio Barreras Martínez Malo (1904-73), points out in his notes to Hernández-Catá's autobiographical short story "La Quinina" (La Habana, 1926):

In 1930, as Hernández-Catá passed with his notebook through San Tadeo Street—among other—, he stopped in one of its slopes and said: "Here, through this street and its vicinity, I played with my childhood friends, the Spanish against the mambises, as the war of emancipation was in full swing. I took my role so seriously that on more than one occasion I punished my enemies' bravery with the primitive slingshot—infallible weapon—, that I handled marvelously..."

En 1930, paseando Hernández Catá con el anotador por la calle de San Tadeo—entre otras—, se detuvo en uno de sus declives y le dijo: 'Aquí, por esta calle y las alledañas, jugué con mis compañeros infantiles, a españoles y mambises, en plena guerra de emancipación. Tomaba tan en serio mi papel que en más de una ocasión castigué la aparente bazarria de mis enemigos, con la honda primitiva— arma infalible—, que manejaba a maravilla...' (*Memoria de Hernández-Catá*, 256)

Even when living in Spain he corresponded with Cuban writers and intellectuals, and from the Spanish metropole he demonstrated his disapproval of Spanish colonialism. For instance, in 1921 he was sent to Le Havre again after publishing a series of fourteen articles entitled "Crónicas de Hernández Catá" (Hernández-Catá's Column) in the Cuban newspaper *El Mundo* from July to October of that year, which addressed the emancipation of Morocco from Spanish rule. As a result, the Spanish government, in lieu of his removal as consul, transferred him to the French city. Therefore, the mention in the biographical sketch above of his family's revolutionary spirit and his aversion for the heavy discipline he experienced in the military school of Toledo parallels his penchant for social justice, a virtue that he idolized in Martí and that he demonstrated in his opposition to the repressive governments of Gerardo Machado, the President of Cuba from 1925 to

1933, and of Miguel Primo de Rivera, Prime Minister of Spain from 1923 to 1930. That inspired his book *Un cementerio en las Antillas* (A Cemetery in the Antilles; Madrid, 1933), which is a diatribe against Machado's dictatorship.

Hernández-Catá would serve as second consul to Cuba in various other places in Spain (Santander in 1913 and Alicante in 1914) and then as first consul in Madrid (1918-25), Lisbon (1922-27), Copenhagen (1927-29), and Seville (1929-30). Cuba then names the novelist Minister Plenipotentiary in Spain, however, in protest to the repressive and violent dictatorship of President Machado, he renounces his title. Once the tyrant is deposed, he is named minister to Cuba once more and serves under that title in Panamá (1935) and Chile (1937). After that, he is named ambassador of Cuba in Brazil (1938), where he dies in a plane crash in 1940. Hernández-Catá's friend, writer and jurist Antonio Barreras (1904-73), attempted to keep his memory alive in Cuba by creating the national, and then international, literary prize "Premio de cuentos Hernández-Catá" in 1942; by publishing the journal *Memoria de Alfonso Hernández-Catá* from 1953 to 1954; and by organizing a pilgrimage to the writer's tomb at the Cementerio Colón in Cuba every year until 1961. Since then, several of the novelist's works have appeared in Cuban anthologies, especially his short stories.

Critics during Hernández-Catá's lifetime agreed with and refuted the claim that Hernández-Catá did not care to treat social matters in his writing because he focuses heavily on the psychological and does not explicitly take a stand on political issues. However, critics today, such as Cira Romero and Uva de Aragón, have argued that several of his works address the social and political climate of his time in addition to focusing heavily on marginalized and alienated individuals (de Aragón 87). Perhaps the question is how the social and political is conceptualized. For instance, Cuban writer and literary critic Alberto Garrandés almost concedes to Romero's and de Aragón's assessments, but with a caveat: "It's true that in [Hernández-Catá's] books there are some short

stories that undoubtedly expound the dilemmas of the social development of the Republic [of Cuba], but the general tendency in his stories leans toward a diverse psychologism in their explorations into the universal in humanity and that is forged in cosmopolitanism” (“Es cierto que en los libros de Catá existen algunos cuentos sin duda exponentes de dilemas del desenvolvimiento social de la República, pero la tendencia general de sus relatos es hacia un psicologismo diverso en sus exploraciones de lo humano universal y que fragua en lo cosmopolita” (21). Nonetheless, it would perhaps be better to follow this lead into an approach that explores how the “universal” is in relation with, and altered by, the particular, and how the public is in relation with the private.

### 1.1. “The Birth of the Invert”: Hernández-Catá and Writings on Inversion

Cuban writer Alberto Garrandés analyzes the social aspects in the texts by Jesús Castellanos. Although admirers of each other,<sup>9</sup> Castellanos is often contrasted to Hernández-Catá because the former, according to Garrandés, focuses his literature more on the socio-historical and political events of his time: “Castellanos presented, for the first time within the genre [of the Cuban short story] a picture with realist colors of provincial and small-town life from the perspective of the middle-class bourgeoisie [and peasantry]” (“Castellanos presentó, por primera vez dentro del género [de la cuentística cubana], un cuadro con tintes realistas de la vida provinciana y citadina desde la perspectiva de la clase media burguesa [y campesina]” (20). He goes on to say that national problems are irrelevant in Hernández-Catá’s short stories in contrast to their predominance in Castellano’s works. To be fair, Garrandés does not focus on Hernández-Catá’s novellas and novels in which, in my view, national problems are just as important as they are in the short stories that he writes, such

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<sup>9</sup> According to Antonio Barreras, Hernández-Catá and Castellanos, who met in Havana in 1907, were close friends and that other “friends” tried to break their friendship (Romero 18).

as in the texts I have chosen, because they frame the social conflicts of the narrative and how the reader could interpret them.

Castellano's own perspective on the social in Hernández-Catá's literature is perhaps even more telling. In his 1911 review of *La juventud de Aurelio Zaldívar*, the earliest of Hernández-Catá's texts to treat same-sex sexuality, Castellanos admits that the Cuban novelist paints a very convincing and accurate social picture of the community of Spanish exiles in France. Otherwise, he gives a very disgruntled and unsavory opinion of the book. He states that the protagonist, Aurelio, is noticeably less talented than Pelayo González, another one of Hernández-Catá's protagonists, and one whose level of scrutiny revolves around his pathological condition (i.e., homoerotic inversion) (383). He goes further to say:

[Hernández-Catá] believes that there is a well of psychological interest in certain enormities that a writer should study; and he is mistaken in this, because nothing can be said in a well, or badly observed manner about the irregular types if not traced capriciously nor following the somersaults of the imagination that could assault a crazy person, an imbecile, or *an invert*. And above all because we are sick of this glorification and study of *degenerate people* ever since certain literary riffraff called themselves disciples of Mirbeau and Jean Lorrain, and inundated the presses with the most infectious overflow of clinical cases.

[Hernández-Catá] cree que hay en ciertas enormidades una fuente de interés psicológico que el escritor debe estudiar; y en ello está equivocado, porque en los tipos irregulares nada puede decirse bien ni mal observado, sino trazado a capricho y siguiendo las cabriolas de imaginación que pueden asaltar a un loco, a un imbécil o a *un invertido*. Y sobre todo porque de esta glorificación y este estudio de *los degenerados*, estamos hartos desde que cierta gentuza literaria dio en llamarse discípula de Mirbeau y Jean Lorrain, e inundó las prensas con el más infeccioso desbordamiento de casos clínicos. (384-85; emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Castellanos references the discourses of degeneration and the decadent literary movement in Europe a few decades before the end of the nineteenth century and well into the first third of the twentieth. German essayist Max Nordau (1849-1923) developed *degeneration* as a concept in his book that was translated into Spanish as *Degeneración* (1902). In it he attacked young writers who followed Decandentism for its exaltation of what he considered immoral acts, such as illicit and scandalous sexual practices: “The German essayist establishes a parallelism between the notion of fin-de-siècle and fin-de-race [end of the human (read white) race]. He sees both realities as a product

of biological degeneration” (“El ensayista alemán establece un paralelismo entre el concepto de fin de siglo y fin de raza. Ve ambas realidades como fruto de una degeneración biológica” (Pedraza Jiménez 21). Discourses on degeneracy also had a racial component, especially with regards to the eugenics movement, which sought to “better” the race, that is, make societies whiter and more European. As such, Nordau showed himself to be a heavy supporter of eugenics and a detractor of homosexuality. For example, he criticized the English playwright and novelist Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) for propagating “sin and crime” due to his alleged affair with Lord Alfred Douglas.

The literature and prosecution of Wilde under the British 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act for gross indecency augmented the already increased anxieties over social “undesirables” in European and American societies such as homosexuals, or as Castellanos calls them, *invertidos* (sexual inverts). Therefore, what is quite evident from Castellanos’s critique, and those of other aforementioned intellectuals, is that Hernández-Catá’s literature is in question not for simply employing foreign writing techniques and styles but for also addressing issues that did not fall under a specific sociopolitical and national framework of heteronormativity and conservatism. What is more, Hernández-Catá lived in a time when fear of falling ill and of catching viruses set in place transnational campaigns that stressed the importance of hygiene in societies, which, aside from its focus on bodily cleanliness and health (justifiable concerns), had moral ramifications. Illnesses such as tuberculosis, which was associated with poverty, malnutrition, and heredity, caused great concern especially as a result of social tensions due to an upsurge in immigration (particularly from Spain), the reorganization of society after the abolition of slavery, and the growth of the bourgeois, working class (Marqués de Armas 142). However, positivist science had a central role in founding its parameters together with the backing of social and political institutions, for example, the Laboratorio de la Crónica Médico Quirúrgica (1887) and the Sociedad de Higiene (1891) in Cuba.

These were prime examples of the preoccupation with sanitary measures aimed at ridding society of ills and vices, including prostitution and sexual inversion.

In Cuba, heterosexuality was the norm, but it took a more forceful turn against homosexuality towards the end of the nineteenth century when it became part of the medical and legal discourse of a theory of degeneracy. In 1890, the first regional congress on medicine (Primer Congreso Médico Regional) took place in Havana where Dr. Luis Montané y Dardé, a Cuban doctor, anthropologist, and criminologist, delivered a talk entitled “Pederasty in Cuba” (“La pederastía en Cuba”). He stressed that pederasty is a repulsive vice and established heterosexuality as the code of conduct to follow without considering the variance in homoerotic desire and practice. Later, in June 1928, journalists Sergiό Carbό and feminist Mariblanca Sabas Alomá initiated a public nationalist and hygienic campaign against *pepillismo* and *garzonismo* in the newspaper *La Semana* and the magazine *Carteles*. *Pepillismo* or the *pepillo/pepillito/pepillote* is similar to a dandy but not always as refined and cultured. The *garzona* referred to a woman who exhibited a sportive demeanor, had boyish hairstyles, and did not follow the norms set for childbearing. The campaigns against the *pepillos* were in favor of virile, heroic, and heterosexual men, and those against *garzonas* favored women that were not lesbians, not masculine, and not too involved in public affairs. During these campaigns in 1928, Gregorio Marañón (1887-1960), a Spanish historian, scientist, and physician, was traveling the island, educating the Cuban public on intersexuality, what he shows in the prologue to *El ángel de Sodoma* as including or as synonymous to homosexuality.

In Spain, these measures found institutional support among Spanish doctors and lawyers who translated many sexological treatises for their audience. In addition, popular magazines and manuals on sexual hygiene were disseminated to readers of the general public. Marañón’s *Ensayos sobre la vida sexual* (1926) and *Libertad de amar y derecho a morir: Ensayos de un criminalista sobre eugenesia, eutanasia y endocrinología* (1929) by Spanish criminologist and politician Jiménez de Asúa (1889-1970)

had gone through three editions and both were very influential in Europe and Latin America in the 1920s up to the 50s (Bejel 66). These developments occurred around the same time that the World League for Sex Reform (WLSR) was established in 1928 by sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, an advocate for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Germany. Spanish reformers participated in it since its inception up until creating its own chapter called “la Liga” under the presidency of Marañón. In March 1928, the first meeting of the WLSR was held in Copenhagen where Hernández-Catá had been serving as Cuban consul since the previous year. It centered on the control of conception, racial engineering through eugenics, compassion toward people with sexual abnormalities, criminalization only of non-consensual sexual acts, and sex education (Zamostny 245). The non-consensual acts were a point of contention because that meant leaving room for the acceptance of same-sex sexual acts as long as they were consensual and done in private. For instance, in 1928 Article 455 of the Penal Code of 1870 against public indecency was modified during Miguel Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship (1923-30) in order to explicitly differentiate between heterosexual and homosexual misconduct, the latter resulting in harsher punishment (Mira 183). Yet, these were the measures that instigated and promoted a particular type of national subject within a specific heteronormative agenda that had transnational and transatlantic reach:

It is interesting how certain discourses were conspired in that time. It could be said, in addition, that a cyclical and historical discursivity exists with respect to the ways in which national masculinity as a closed and exclusionary identitarian unit has been imagined, while an alterity is constructed that is crossed by certain stigmas related, on one end, to some foreign and colonizing elements that have been alternated in different moments, and, on the other, to the (homo)sociosexual element utilized since the end of the eighteenth century up to our days like a recurrent discursive tool to argue for that hegemonic masculinity and heterosexual institutionalization. As such, the identity of the Cuban homoerotic subject [or of another nationality] has been thought from a hygienic perspective, analogous to belittled attitudes and postures that scheme against the sovereignty, stability, progress, and defense of the nation.

Es interesante cómo se confabulan determinados discursos en el tiempo. Podría decirse, incluso, que existe una discursividad cíclica e histórica respecto de las maneras en que se ha imaginado la masculinidad nacional como unidad identitaria cerrada y excluyente, al tiempo que se construye una otredad atravesada por determinados estigmas relacionados, por un lado, con algunos elementos foráneos colonizadores que se han ido alternando en diferentes momentos, y, por otro, con el elemento (homo)socio-sexual, utilizado desde fines del siglo XVIII hasta nuestros días como un

recurso discursivo recurrente para argumentar esa masculinidad hegemónica y la institucionalidad heterosexual. Así, la identidad del sujeto homoerótico cubano [o de otra nacionalidad] ha sido pensada desde una perspectiva higiénica, análoga a actitudes o posturas apocadas que atentan contra la soberanía, la estabilidad, el progreso y la defensa de la nación. (Sierra Madero 88)

Similar discourses and restrictions existed in England where the emerging field of sexology included studies by British psychiatrists and sexologists that recriminated homosexuality. In France, the charges against homosexuality were in place by the Codé Napoléon but enforcement was laxer than in England, Spain, and Cuba. Similarly, the book *Sexual Inversion* by English physician Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) and English poet and literary critic John Addington Symonds (1840-93) was published in 1897 and it advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality, a cause that was later supported by Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa in Spain. However, their views on the topic did not go beyond the realm of medicine as they continued to believe that sexual inversion was a pathological abnormality, while Hernández-Catá, in my reading of his texts, pushes back on this perspective. Therefore, Hernández-Catá's texts on sex and race, by topic alone, were a form of cultural and political transgression in and of itself in the realm of modernity.

## II. A (Re)Vision of Inversion

Generally, *inversion* means the action of inverting or reversing something, or the state of being inverted or reversed (NOED). For example, a coin shows one of its two sides when it is inverted; however, that does not mean that one side no longer exists, rather that it is not showing and that the other side is present. Therefore, inversion is not one-sided but mediates between two entities, between presence and absence. The reversal also denotes change, establishing the *transitive* nature of inversion whereby it passes from one condition to another. This is not to be confused with transformation, which is permanent. In which case, inversion denotes change but without completely altering the symbiosis between the two entities nurturing the inversion. Even if both sides of the coin remain the same respectively, the visibility of one side over the other is evidence of

a change brought into effect by the inversion. Inversions, however, are bidirectional such that an animal's fur or a human's hair changes from one color and/or texture to another from summer to winter and vice versa. In this sense, there are natural inversions and there are manufactured kinds that, according to the repetitive and circular passing of time (like the seasons of the year), are *transversal*, in that they cross both sides of the reversal.

### 1.1. Defining (Sexual) Inversion and “Homosexuality”

The term *homosexuality* appeared for the first time in two pamphlets that Austro-Hungarian political activist Karl Maria Benkert (1824-82) wrote and published in Leipzig in 1869 under the pseudonym Kertbeny. According to him, “homosexuality” was a condition that was not acquired but innate and should not be criminalized. In 1887, Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) co-opted the term for his foundational encyclopedia on sexual deviance, *Psychopathia Sexualis: eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study; 1886)*, thus converting its politically gay-friendly connotations into a clinical designation (Halperin, 2014: 480-81). The same year of the coinage of *homosexuality*, German neurologist Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal (1833-90) published an article on “contrary sexual feelings” or “sensibility” that are “contrary to the sex of the person who experienced it—that is, a feeling of belonging to a different sex from one’s own, *as well as* a feeling of erotic attraction” to the same sex (Halperin, 2014: 479). This phrase signaled toward both homosexuality as sexual-object choice as well as the reversal of a person’s sex and gender role, or sexual inversion.

Historically, inversion—defined as “a turning inside out,” “a reversal,” or “a turning contrary to,”—dates back to the middle of the sixteenth century (OED). Since its initial uses in the nineteenth century, this definition was extended to the “inversion of the sexual instinct,” a clinical phrase that Italian psychiatrist Arrigo Tamassia (1848-1917) introduced in his article “Sull’

inversione dell'istito sessuale" in 1878, which linked same-sex sexual desire and sexual-object choice as the reversal of a person's masculinity or femininity to that of the opposite sex (*ibid.*). David Halperin clarifies that for Westphal and his colleagues,

contrary sexual feeling or sexual inversion was an essentially psychological condition of gender dysphoria affecting the inner life of the individual, not necessarily expressed in the performance or enjoyment of particular homosexual acts. ... Rather, the notions of contrary sexual feeling and sexual inversion seem to glance back at the long tradition of stigmatized male passivity, effeminacy, and gender deviance, which focuses less on homosexual sex or homosexual desire per se than on an accompanying lack of normative masculinity in one or both of the partners. (2014: 480)

Although 1870 marks the first published use of (*sexual*) *inversion*, Havelock Ellis suspected it was used much earlier. Halperin emphasizes that it was commonly used throughout the 1880s, while *homosexuality* "did not really begin to achieve currency in Europe until the Eulenberg affair of 1907-1908 ... and even thereafter it was slow in gaining ascendancy" (1990: 156, note 3). He also points out that the term *homosexuality* usually referred to sexual object choice, while *sexual inversion* denoted a number of practices that deviated from conventional gender roles.

The term *sexual inversion* (or simply *inversion*) was used significantly at the turn of the nineteenth century to refer to sex and gender non-conformity and may have been more difficult to target as a social stigma as a result of its comprehensive use to describe various forms of sexual "deviance." Conversely, the term "homosexuality," at times used interchangeably with sexual inversion, signaled toward a more specific type of sexual orientation or identity (the "homosexual") and sexual practice (e.g., anal intercourse), particularly between men. This shifted the discourse to one about a sexual act that harkened back to, and was conflated with, the already stigmatized and penalized practice of sodomy, abhorrent under the traditional, Victorian guises of religious and social morality as exemplified by the 1895 trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde.<sup>10</sup> Halperin states: "Throughout the nineteenth century ... sexual preference for a person of one's own sex was not

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<sup>10</sup> See Merlin Holland for a detailed study of Wilde's trial.

clearly distinguished from other sorts of non-conformity to one's culturally defined sex-role" (1990: 15). This stresses further the point that sexual inversion was one of the predominant models of sex and gender from which emanated other forms of "deviance," particularly modern homosexuality.

Historically, medicine and law delineated acceptable sexual practices under the vocabulary of *sexual inversion* and *homosexuality* (and other terms) and within a value system of sameness versus difference based on sex and gender. According to Halperin, *inversion* as a term that at the time referenced gender deviance "represents an age-old outlook on sexual non-conformity, whereas 'homosexuality' marks a sharp break with traditional ways of thinking," where non-conformity denotes sex and gender difference, and traditional ways of thinking indicates the sameness of a dominant majority's one-mindedness (156, note 2). Chris White echoes Halperin's remarks by explaining how the introduction of "homosexual" as part of a new lexicon prompted a different framework that was needed in order to break from tradition and turn the penalties against the crime of sodomy into a liberationist discourse spearheaded by "the homosexual" as a "subject" of modern science:

Science became the mainstay of the nascent liberation movement, and from the middle of the nineteenth century a new vocabulary began to be invented, by those who had a vested interest in being treated as healthy, law-abiding human beings, usually borrowing from the scientific discourses of classification, biological determinism and moral neutrality. The fundamental tenet of this framework is that same-sex desire is inborn, and thus neither acquired (the result of a perverse and immoral challenge to the norm), nor a corrupting threat to the normal majority, who are as secure and natural in their sexual identities as homosexuals are in theirs. (3)

German writer and activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95) was among those who advocated for the rights of sexual minorities, specifically for the inborn thesis of homosexuals, portraying them as Uranians, or a third sex where men have a feminine soul in a man's body and women have a masculine soul in a woman's body. This supposedly new framework, nevertheless, still kept intact the gender binary that characterized inversion, particularly when Havelock Ellis distinguished masculinity and femininity from sexual object choice pertinent to homosexuality in *Sexual Inversion*

(1897), which he coauthored Symonds as part of his seven-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1913-31) (both, like Ulrichs, were against criminalizing homosexuality) (Halperin, 1990: 16). The same occurred in Spain where the term *sexual inversion* did not turn obsolete once *homosexuality* became more common. Foucault reminds us in the first volume of his influential work *The History of Sexuality* (1978) that ‘homosexuality’ as a psychological, psychiatric, and medical category was characterized “less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of *inverting* the masculine and feminine in oneself” (43; emphasis added).

Cleminson and Vázquez García argue that in Spain distinctions between sexological terms was not as clear-cut and that both *sexual inversion* and *homosexuality* were used simultaneously. There also was no linear progression from the sexual invert to the homosexual as may have been the case in other countries. They admit, nonetheless, that homosexuality as sexual-object choice was a newer category that succeeded older ones such as *sexual inversion*, the *third sex*, *Uranians*, etc. They also say that medical and legal professionals and intellectuals drew from international sources in order to formulate their own perceptions and discourses on gender and sexuality. They trace how “medical attention on the subject of homosexuality was not static and how conceptualizations evolved primarily in light of foreign theories that entered the Spanish medical and legal professions” (15). In other words, it took a while before modern conceptions of homosexuality—particularly with regards to same-sex sexual acts—crystallized in Spain. Instead, “homosexuality” often referred to forms of effeminacy and gender “deviance”: “By ranging over such permeable categories as effeminacy, and by being conscious of how emerging subjectivities that established some kind of relationship with same-sex sexuality came about, we can trace an illusive subject or cluster of signifiers around what became ‘homosexuality’” (13). Often times homosexuality was used to refer to gender difference, which was unique to sexual inversion, however, this version of homosexuality often did not include the act of homosexual sex (12). They go further to say that:

Despite this eclectic conceptual mix one common point of crossover between popular sexological texts, works of general pathology, legal medicine and criminology, was the connection made between gender deviance and the sexual aberrations rather than an emphasis on actual sexual acts. In this framework, the ‘invert’ is conceived above all in this period [the second half of the nineteenth century] up to the mid 1910s as someone who transgresses the limits between masculinity and femininity; hence, the recourse to the concepts of hermaphroditism (whether biological or physical). The male invert or aesthete and the female variety, the mannish woman, display physiognomy, form of dress and set of gestures of their own. (62)

In summary, homosexuality was a derivative of sexual inversion upon referring to gendered behaviors and identities, whereas *sexual inversion* was an umbrella term that had more discursive currency.

## 1.2. Sexual Reform and the Suppression of Sexuality: Eugenics, the WLSR, and the Liga

Considering that Hernández-Catá follows a western paradigm in order to formulate the discourses on sex, gender, and race in his writings, one would have to draw mainly from the history of sexual reform and eugenics in Europe, particularly Spain, which is where many of the writer’s texts were published. Alison Sinclair underscores that “the political and social persuasions of reformers in Spain ranged over a wide and complex spectrum” (10). Spanish doctors and educational experts took an eclectic approach to talk and write about sex education and reform, whereby from 1926 to 1936 they drew from both national and international sources (mainly Havelock Ellis, Freud, and Marañón) and combined hypotheses regarding the configurations of gender and sexuality, such as “hereditary factors, environmental elements and the activation of innate predispositions by environmental circumstances” (Cleminson and Vázquez García 163, note 45). Freud was one of the most influential in Spain, especially when Luis López Ballestero translated his complete works for the first time in a foreign language in 1922 with the Spanish publisher Biblioteca Nueva (Sinclair 15). However, this was mostly due to unfavorable perceptions of his work that criticized his psychoanalytical theories at least up to the mid 1920s (Cleminson and Vázquez García 121). Before then, the Spanish publisher Hijos de Reus had been circulating Ellis’ works on

eugenics and sexuality prior to Luis López Ballesterero's translation of Freud. Although Marañón drew from Freud's theories to define traditional sex roles, applied psychiatry and not psychoanalysis was the main driver behind the eugenics movement and sexual reform.

The eugenics movement in Spain resembled the educational focus of the movement in England spearheaded there by the Eugenics Education Society founded in 1907. Ellis was one of its members and was influential in the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR) and its Spanish chapter, la Liga (the League), despite his notable disassociation from its activities. The precursor to the WLSR was the First International Congress for Sexual Reform on the Basis of Sexual Science held in Berlin on 3 September 1921. It took place the same year as the Battle of Annual, perhaps Spain's biggest defeat during the Moroccan War, therefore making it emblematic of the regenerationism that the Iberian Peninsula derived from the WLSR. The Congress in Berlin laid the groundwork for the founding of the WLSR by German physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) at its first congress in Copenhagen on 3 July 1928, just a little over three months before the release of the first edition of *El ángel de Sodoma*.<sup>11</sup> Invitations and membership cards were sent out before the WLSR's inauguration, Ellis being among the invitees and who the WLSR elected to be an executive board member—along with Hirschfeld and August Forel (1848-1941)—and then one of three honorary presidents in 1930.<sup>12</sup> The congress at Copenhagen is significant because Hernández-Catá was Cuban consul to Spain there from 1927-29, the period in which he was writing *El ángel de Sodoma* (Aragón 22).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> According to its colophon, the first edition finished printing at the press on 17 October 1928.

<sup>12</sup> Sinclair states that he was given this title in 1929 (13).

<sup>13</sup> It is probable that during his diplomacy there he wrote *El ángel de Sodoma*, inspired no less by the events surrounding the movement towards sexual reform. It is therefore unlikely that he wrote the novel in Havana, as Cleminson and Vázquez García affirm (232). It is also possible that he might have met Havelock Ellis there and given him a signed copy of the novel, as stated earlier. Ellis was a cosmopolitan thinker and very involved in other organizations of interest to him and his work. He published a book on Spain entitled *The Soul of Spain* (1908), which Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) helped to translate to Spanish for the serial magazine *La España Moderna* (Sinclair 16).

For more than two years, Ellis maintained extensive correspondence with the activist for socialism and sexual revolution, Hildegart Rodríguez (1914-33), also one of the founding members of the Liga—established in March 1932—and who served as its secretary at the age of seventeen alongside Marañón as president: “The Liga gathered together the groupings of hygienists, eugenicists, lawyers and educational reformers who were already part of a wider international scene, and who had been promoting ideas of eugenics and sexual reform in Spain for some time, and particularly through the 1920s” (Sinclair 2). According to Dose, the WLSR in all its regions reached a total membership of 190,000, of which 183 were individual members and the rest organizations.<sup>14</sup> By 1932, the Liga had 51 members, which Hildegart hoped would reach to 100 (Dose 3; Sinclair 16). The WLSR also published proceedings from the congresses, including from the one in Berlin prior to its founding.

Spanish doctors and lawyers translated many sexological treatises for their audience and popular magazines, such as Ellis and Symonds’ *Sexual Inversion*, published in Madrid as *La Inversión Sexual* (Hijos de Reus, 1913). Hildegart adopted Ellis as her mentor and saw him as a father figure, reading many of his works, particularly his exploration of eugenics in his book *The Task of Social Hygiene* (1912) (Sinclair 140). Ellis’ influence can be traced in her writings for the Liga’s national journal, also edited by Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa, among others—*Sexus: Organo de la Liga Española para la Reforma Sexual sobre bases científicas* (Sexus: Scientifically-based Organ of the Spanish Liga for Sexual Reform; 1932-33) (Sinclair, chapter 6; Martínez 57-58). Like Ellis’ study, *Sexus* followed deterministic arguments regarding women’s destined role as wives and mothers. Ellis’ view

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<sup>14</sup> Such organizations were the German National League for Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, and the League for the Protection of Motherhood and Sex Reform (Dose 3). The WLSR held congresses in Berlin, Copenhagen, London (Sept. 1929), Vienna (Sept. 1930), and Brno (Sept. 1932). Meetings were planned for Moscow, Paris, the United States, and Madrid but they did not take place (Sinclair 16).

was also reinforced by what Australian gynecologist Norman Haire called ‘planks’ of belief, which were the main tenets of reform that framed the WLSR:

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.
3. *Control of conception, so that procreation may be under-taken only deliberately, and with a due sense of responsibility.*
4. *Race betterment by the application of the knowledge of Eugenics.*
5. Protection of the unmarried mother and the illegitimate child.
6. *A rational attitude towards sexually abnormal persons, and especially towards homosexuals, both male and female.*
7. Prevention of prostitution and venereal disease.
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. (Sinclair 16-17; emphasis added)

Eugenics and sexual reform overlap in these planks, emphasizing the protection and care of women, education, and sexual liberalism. However, not everyone agreed on the proposed framework, particularly with regards to the treatment of homosexuality. Hirschfield, on his end, pushed for “the emancipation of homosexuals within society via two routes: scientific knowledge about homosexuality, and integrating the homosexual movement with other related movements of sex reform” (Sinclair 19). Although the topic was heavily discussed at the 1921 congress in Berlin, it was barely touched on in the 1928 Copenhagen Congress (*ibid.*). One of the reasons for this was the leaders’ disagreement on the drafting of the planks. Hirschfield’s original version was more liberal, calling for the “tolerance of free sexual relations” and the “setting up of a code of sexual law, which does not interfere with the mutual sexual will of grown-up persons” (Dose 7).<sup>15</sup>

Plank eight was also different from the versions approved at the Copenhagen and London congresses. Hirschfield’s earlier version proposes not criminalizing or stigmatizing “conceptions of sexual aberrations of sexual desire” as opposed to “disturbances of the sexual impulse” (*ibid.*). With “conceptions,” Hirschfield was perhaps targeting reformers of a negative persuasion toward

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<sup>15</sup> See Dose, page 7 for Hirschfield’s original draft of the planks.

homosexuality and trying to hint at changing their mindsets, as opposed to “disturbances,” which automatically makes sexual disturbers the subject of the sentence, thus placing the burden of blame on them. Although both versions consider the pathological origins of homosexuality, Hirschfield’s version refers to it more loosely as “more or less” pathological. He also does not describe it as abnormal nor phrases treating homosexuals ‘rationally.’ In fact, those considerations do not appear at all in his version, while in the final one there is an additional plank that speaks just to that point; plank six (Dose 7-8). Haire was concerned that Hirschfield’s draft of the planks would be less palatable to an English audience, particularly the notion of free love (7).

The French and Spanish versions of the resolutions were drafted independently and were not translations of the approved Copenhagen version but rather included wording of their own (Dose 8). They also were less influenced by Hirschfield, particularly the Spanish Liga, which tried to align more with the approved version, albeit unsuccessfully. The distinctive approaches to the resolutions implied that the aims of eugenics for the betterment of society were at odds with sexual reform, which reflected in the disagreements and power struggles that eventually led to the disbanding of the WLSR in 1935, immediately after Hirschfield’s death. Not only was there dissent between Hirschfield and Haire, but Ellis also kept his distance from the founder and was absent from the WLSR congress in London (Sinclair 18). This friction could be due to the different views that Ellis held about transvestism, and why he decided to disassociate from hardline eugenicists while maintaining an ancillary position in the WLSR.

Hernández-Catá might have been one of the people that Ellis favored. The Cuban writer certainly admired the reformer. According to the copyright page of the first edition of *El ángel de Sodoma*, 25 of its 3,000 published copies were distributed “en papel imperial del Japón, y 10 en papel de Holanda, con filigrana Van der Gelde, numerados y firmados por el autor” (“in imperial paper from Japan, and 10 in paper from Holland, with the watermark Van der Gelde, numbered and

autographed by the author”; front matter). Hernández-Catá autographed one of the 25 copies to Ellis with the following handwritten and personalized dedication under the novel’s title of the book’s title page: “A Havelock Ellis / con la admira / ción de / A. Hernández-Catá” (“To Havelock Ellis with the admiration of A. Hernández-Catá”). Before this dedication, there is also a bookplate that reads “From the Library of Havelock Ellis.”<sup>16</sup> It is probable that they ran into each other in 1928 as a result of Hernández-Catá’s diplomatic assignment in Copenhagen and Ellis’ attendance at the WLSR congress there. At the very least, the event could have given Hernández-Catá the chance to chat with Ellis about the novel in order to later hand or send him a copy. This is very plausible considering that Hildegart included Hernández-Catá in her initial list of the 41 founding members of the Liga (Sinclair 90). It indicates, nevertheless, that he aligned more with Ellis’ liberal views on sex and gender non-conformity than with those of conservative members like Hildegart who considered sexual perversions abnormal.

The list of members of the Liga was mostly structured from top to bottom by level of influence and according to their profession, with big movers at the top while less influential ones were at the bottom, namely writers of fiction who were further removed from the practice of medicine and law. They were also listed according to their value or significance for Hildegart. Prominent doctors and lawyers figured at the top half of the list. Lawyers, in particular, were very active and vocal in the Liga considering that they were in the minority—only about a fourth of the number of members in the field of medicine (eight to 28)—especially during the founding meeting, which took place 3 March 1932. The members were divided in five sections: eugenics, feminism and marriage, sex education, prostitution and prevention of venereal disease, and legislation. This notably left out two of the seven sections that Hildegart had originally envisioned for the Liga: birth

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<sup>16</sup> Ellis’ copy of *El ángel de Sodoma* is archived in the special collections of the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami.

control and a rational attitude to sexual inversion (Sinclair 87, 95). Leaving out these two important sections is telling of the Liga's priorities and the detrimental consequences such a decision had on institutional interventions on sexual non-conformity.

The Liga was different from other chapters of the WLSR. Although international affiliates participated in its activities (such as Ellis and Hirschfield), the Liga maintained its own character by noticeably diverging from the Copenhagen planks and dismissing the topics of separation of marriage from Church and State and of sexual "abnormalities." To begin, the Liga referred to their version of the planks as the Decalogue, a term associated with, and carrying the morally punitive weight of, the Bible's Ten Commandments. When it was time to discuss plank six ('A rational attitude towards sexually abnormal persons, and especially to homosexuals'), there was much dissent among the members, particularly Quintiliano Saldaña (1878-1938), a conservative lawyer who supervised Hildegart's law dissertation and wrote extensively on culture, psychology, sexology, law, and literature (Sinclair 229). His main contention was "how far the State should hold back on regulation of perversions. He believed that there was a need to ensure that allowing tolerance did not lead to public scandal, and that the action on homosexuality should perhaps be limited to legislative pressure so that appropriate education would avoid such 'deviations'" (91). Marañón suggested removing the word 'homosexuals' but opted instead for eliminating the plank entirely, again putting into question the extent of his progressive views on sexual reform.

The Liga's inability to agree on sexual reform with regards to homosexuality and sexual inversion had lasting consequences for marginalized people in Spain, which became more severe during and after Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. The Liga was short-lived and measures for reform were piecemeal. By the founding of the Second Republic in 1931, the Spanish Penal Code had been amended to criminalize homosexuality, and conservative views on sexual "deviance" predominated sociopolitical discourse within the short time that liberal ideas began to take hold of official and

public opinion before the repressive onslaughts of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. For example, the proposition of coeducation was again a topic of debate during the Second Republic in which hygienists argued that it could lead to the feminization of boys and masturbation. When a law was introduced in 1931 in favor of coeducation, “it was revoked under right-wing rule in 1934” (Cleminson and Vázquez García 170, note 111).

Hildegart, for instance, not only agreed that homosexuality was a pathology but also that homosexuals should be institutionalized, thus diverging from Ellis who considered them normal and innocuous (Sinclair 17). A very learned and educated woman at a very young age, her views began to take shape at the age of eleven when in March 1926 she attended the Campaña Sanitaria (Hygiene Campaign), which specialist in dermatology and venereology Antonio Navarro Fernández (1870-1931) organized. Navarro Fernández wanted social and hygienic reform, which he expounded in his published works on prostitution, social will and conscience, and race and nation.<sup>17</sup> He was a founding member of the Liga and contributed to the review *Archivos De Higiene y Sanidad Pública* (Archives of Hygiene and Public Health; 1925). The *Archivos* had international reach beyond Europe, including contributions from the U.S., Canada, Japan, Siam, South Africa, and New Zealand. Its activities were published in the review *Sexualidad* (Sexuality; 1 February 1925 - 30 December 1928), which Navarro Fernández edited. It had a regenerationist bent and included the participation of Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa.

The first issue of *Sexualidad* dealt with sexual perversions against favored heterosexuality. Saldaña and Jaime Torrubiano y Ripoll (1879-1963)—an academic theologian, lawyer, and journalist—were key figures in studying and articulating sexual education and morality for the

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<sup>17</sup> Navarro Fernández published *La prostitución en la villa de Madrid* (Prostitution in the City of Madrid; 1909), *Conciencia y voluntad sociales* (Social Will and Conscience; 1909), *Dactiloscopia en España: Estudio medico forense de la identidad* (Fingerprinting in Spain: Forensic Study of Identity; 1912), and *El porvenir de la raza blanca* (The Future of the White Race; 1912) (Sinclair 43).

review. Saldaña denied that homosexuality existed in Spain and he cites Ellis in his book of essays, *La sexología (Ensayos)* [Sexology (Essays); 1930]. Likewise, Torrubiano y Ripoll suggested readings, such as Ellis' *Estudios de Psicología Sexual* (Studies in the Psychology of Sex) and German dermatologist, Iwan Bloch's *La vida sexual contemporánea* (Contemporary Sexual Life; the German original was published in 1907). He published his own work as well, *Teología y Eugenesia* (Theology and Eugenics; 1929), propounding conservative, regenerationist views on sexuality based on degenerationist theory.

### 1.3. Degenerationist Thought and Theories on Intersexuality

Cleminson and Vázquez García's observations on the invert's transgressions are founded on degenerationist theory, which held that "degeneration was a condition that resulted from adaptation to a morbid environment, a condition which was then immediately converted into something fixed in the heredity of the person and thus transmitted from one generation to the next" (69). Although Spanish degenerationist thought was heavily influenced by the French model, it also drew from other international sources: British sex psychology (Symonds and Ellis), German psychopathology (Westphal, Moll, Krafft-Ebing, Hirschfeld), and psychoanalysis (Freud). The two main degenerationist positions that were taken in Spain with regard to sexual inversion were that it was inherited or congenital. The former was biological and deterministic, which French psychiatrist Valentin Magnan (1835-1916) expanded to include any inherited imbalances affecting the brain. The latter was an older form attributed to the father of degenerationist theory, French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809-73), which argued that congenital alterations occur in an embryo that could affect development. Nonetheless, a common element to both views was "the importance attributed to psychic stigmas and mental and behavioural qualities which may indicate a morbid disposition" (Cleminson and Vázquez García 70-71). At this point, the main questions were whether

sexual inversion was hereditary, congenital or acquired, whether there were “psychical or physical stigmas that allowed for its diagnosis,” and whether it was a menace to society (*ibid.*).

In 1899, Spanish psychiatrist J. Martínez y Valverde published possible answers to these questions in his *Guía del Diagnóstico de las Enfermedades Mentales* (Diagnostic Guide to Mental Illnesses), the first treatise in Spanish psychiatry to espouse degenerationist views. In this book he describes the sexual invert as an individual that is physically a man but psychologically a woman or that has a woman’s body but is psychologically a man, conditions that can be congenital or acquired, whether by heredity or formed in the psyche. Henceforth, sexual inversion moved from a physical to a mental domain, an idea based on previous nineteenth-century views on ‘psychic hermaphroditism.’ Modern medicine departed from the scarce and almost impossible case of physical hermaphroditism that characterized the medieval period in order to propound the idea of an individual that combined the psychic characteristics of the other sex (Cleminson and Vázquez García 101-02). Once the theory transitioned from a predisposed state to a psychological disposition, an argument could be made for the moral dimensions of sexual inversion. Martínez Valverde, in his description of female sexual inversion, for example, underscored the moral ramifications of sexual degeneration, opening the door to the theory of “the defense of society” that jurists and criminologists adopted against such “aberrations” (Cleminson and Vázquez García 71-73).

Other degenerationists before 1920 proposed ideas similar to Martínez Valverde’s such as psychiatrists César Juarros (1879-1942) and Gonzalo Rodríguez Lafora (1886-1971). They focused on the environmental factors of sexual inversion that led boys to masturbate or desire other males.<sup>18</sup> Juarros translated French psychiatrist Emmanuel Régis’ work as *Tratado de Psiquiatría* (Treatise of Psychiatry; 1911), which drew from Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, one of the first books to

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<sup>18</sup> Juarros published his theories in his books *Psiquiatría Forense* (1914) and *Psiquiatría del Médico General* (1918), and Lafora in his study *Los Niños Mentalmente Anormales* (1917).

study homosexuality/bisexuality. Like Régis, Juarros adopted the term ‘Uranism’ to refer to same-sex love as well as sexual inversion. He concludes in his book *La Psiquiatría del médico general* (Psychiatry for the General Physician; 1919) that sexual perversions are either acquired or congenital, physical or psychic, or both of these combinations, but that the main cause was a state of degeneration (Cleminson and Vázquez García 117-20). Lafora, in particular, explored homosexuality based on the theory of bisexuality, or the existence of both sexes within one being. According to him, one sex predominates at birth in heterosexuals but this process is stifled in homosexuals, who Lafora considered abnormal. The approximation of Lafora’s thought to Marañón’s theory on intersexuality is evident, thus ushering in the sexological perspective on sexual inversion (Cleminson and Vázquez García 80). Critics such as Cleminson and Vázquez García, Bejel, and Sierra Madero have examined in detail Marañón’s ideas in relation to gender and sexuality in Spain and to *El ángel de Sodoma*, therefore I only highlight the salient tenants of his work here.

Marañón took after psychiatry to build on the biological foundations of sexual inversion in his theories on intersexuality, which he expounds in works he published between 1926 and 1930, such as the prologue to the second edition of *El ángel de Sodoma*. He relied more on the physical than psychic form of hermaphroditism by proposing that individuals are born with two sexes but that one sex must predominate over the other and anything otherwise would be abnormal.<sup>19</sup> However, the latent sex does not completely disappear after birth. Men and women pass through a critical period of femininity and maleness—during puberty for men and the climacteric (i.e., menopausal) period for women—in which each individual must “kill off” the other sex.

The scientific implications of José-María’s quandary are further illuminated by Marañón’s theories on intersexuality. In a way that is reminiscent of Darwin’s theory of evolution and survival

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<sup>19</sup> See p. 129, note 21 in Cleminson and Vázquez García for a list and explanation of Marañón’s works in which he addresses intersexuality. Although, as stated earlier in this chapter, Marañón had laid down the foundations of his work on intersexuality in earlier works such as *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* (1926).

of the fittest, Marañón theorizes that when men and women are unable to annihilate the opposing sex, they enter a state of intersexuality, which can be permanent or transitory. The permanent kind are hermaphroditism, virilization, feminization, homosexuality, and the “inversion of psychology, affection and social behaviour” (Cleminson and Vázquez García 103). For men the transitory process could be regressive as opposed to women in whom it is progressive because the male’s feminization only requires the weakening of his virility while the female’s masculinization involves a much more complex process of ‘overcoming femininity.’ If man does not overcome the ‘crisis’ of feminization, he will be inclined to permanent forms of intersexuality (Cleminson and Vázquez García 101-07). For instance, Marañón writes in his prologue to *El ángel de Sodoma*:

La intersexualidad del instinto—homosexualidad—es una rama torcida en el proceso de la vida sexual. Para que no brote no hay otro remedio que fortificar la diferenciación de los sexos, exaltar la varonía de los hombres y la feminidad de las mujeres. Empresa ardua porque en ella se incluyen multitud de problemas biológicos, pedagógicos, morales y económicos de infinita trascendencia. Pero empresa hacedera, a condición de no cerrar los ojos ante la verdad. Si la vida del sexo es un laberinto, es estúpido vendarse además los ojos para buscar la salida.

The intersexuality of instinct—homosexuality—is a twisted branch in the process of sexual life. So that it does not sprout, there is no other remedy but to fortify the differentiation of the sexes, exalt the masculinity of men and the femininity of women. An arduous enterprise because included in it is a multitude of biological, pedagogical, moral, and economic problems of infinite significance. But a feasible enterprise, granted that one does not shut one’s eyes to the truth. If sex life is a labyrinth, it is moreover stupid to blindfold one’s eyes in order to find the exit. (32)

Note that Marañón moves from a scientific (endocrinological) standpoint to pedagogical, moral, and even economic concerns. The influence of his own pseudoscientific bias is evident. If sexuality is a labyrinth, the tone of certainty and rhetorical authority in his assertions reveals that he seems to know his way to the maze’s exit in a time when terminology, theories, clinical studies, and politics on gender and sexuality were in flux and contested. According to Cleminson and Vázquez García,

What was to change around 1918, from the time of Marañón’s first exposition of this understanding of the ‘internal secretions’, was the articulation of a specific theory that combined both the somatic and gonadal aspects of hermaphroditism and a discussion of sexual instincts. Marañón’s use of the concepts of the hermaphrodite permitted a whole set of explanations for phenomena, including homosexuality, which were grounded under the copious umbrella of ‘intersexuality.’ (101)

Although an explicit reference to intersexuality does not appear in *El ángel de Sodoma*, Marañón uses the text's treatment of sexual inversion as fodder for the reiteration of his theories.

#### 1.4. From Sexual to Racial Inversion

In thinking through the state of inversion, one must also consider how it happens or is achieved. As stated previously, there are natural and manufactured kinds of inversion, whether at will or accidental. This study concerns both these types—even the accidental ones insofar that they can be triggered by willful action and behaviors, even if undesired—by placing them in the context of the discourses on sexual inversion and miscegenation (which was viewed by eugenicists as a type of racial inversion) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Medical and social conceptions of inversion were equally ambiguous and arbitrary, leading to contradictory and porous definitions of gender expression and sexual preference. The very coupling of the term *inversion* with the term *sexual*, along with the coining of the term *homosexuality* in 1869, points to the fact that efforts to rationalize and linguistically constrict a cultural reality involving a plethora of gendered and sexed bodies, affects, meanings, and values were well underway in ways that resembled that of race within the eugenics movement.<sup>20</sup> The ways that homosexuality and sexual inversion were defined in extension with race is a significant example of this terminological issue.

Ellis was one of the prominent figures at the forefront of the study and articulation of these discourses, establishing in his book *Sexual Inversion* that sex, along “with the racial questions that rest on it,” is the main problem of future generations (x). Somerville focuses on Ellis's study and the connection between sex and race in nineteenth-century medical literature, in which she states: “the structures and methodologies that drove dominant ideologies of race also fueled the pursuit of knowledge about the homosexual body: both sympathetic and hostile accounts of [inversion and]

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<sup>20</sup> See Halperin, 2014.

homosexuality were steeped in assumptions that had driven previous scientific studies of race” (17). This would explain, for example, why the narrator of *El ángel de Sodoma* attributes the protagonist’s inversion to the influence of his younger brother who brought all sorts of “vices” from his travels abroad: “Jaime brought the second ones [symptoms of disgrace] from his trip to remote lands, like indomitable contraband bought and hidden in his soul—until then docile—in one of those ports where the races and vices from various continents converge” (“Los segundos [es decir, los síntomas de la desgracia] los trajo Jaime de su viaje a tierras remotas, a modo de contrabando indómito comprado y escondido en su alma, hasta entonces dócil, en uno de esos puertos donde confluyen las razas y los vicios de varios continentes”; 41).

As Somerville aptly states, “anxieties about miscegenation shaped sexologists’ attempts to find an appropriate and scientific name for the newly visible object of their study” (31). That visible object of study was the invert, whether it was the mulatto whose skin was indicative of miscegenation or the (usually male) sexual invert/homosexual whose (usually effeminate) appearance and behavior made his “condition” obvious. Although miscegenation refers to a mixing of the races as exemplified by the mulatto’s mixed skin tone (albeit not always, but assumed to be, the case), for miscegenation to happen the inversion of “pure” whiteness or blackness must occur, or so it was *conceived* in both possible senses of the word. In discussing *The Mulatto in the United States* by Edward Byron Reuter (1880-1946), the 22<sup>nd</sup> President of the American Sociological Society, Somerville notes that the mulatto was only viable based on a framework that separated the races (30). Prominent American eugenicist Charles Davenport (1866-1944) equated miscegenation with disharmony, while Ellis recommended sterilizing the “unfit” in his 1911 pamphlet *The Problem of Race Regeneration* (just two years shy of the publication of *La piel*) in order to deter the degeneration of the race (31). The prevailing idea was to preserve and perpetuate the purity of the race (read the white, and therefore superior or higher, race) and to suppress acts and behaviors to the contrary, including

sexual inversion (after a certain point conflated with homosexuality) and interracial coupling: “The mulatto, as an embodiment of the object of eugenic efforts, also became an important, if contradictory, figure in sexologists’ attempts to characterize the sexual invert” (*ibid.*).

Like Somerville, I do not intend to collapse the broad discursive field of the categories of sex, gender, and race as part of one and the same historical and conceptual process, but I do hope to demonstrate how Hernández-Catá’s texts are examples of the way they were handled by certain writers, intellectuals, and practitioners to discursively buttress each other in a specific time in history. Moreover, their intersection has not been rigorously studied in Hernández-Catá’s narrative and much less as a recurring thematic frame of several of his texts. Creating fragmented characters whose constitution as sexually and racially inverted subjects reveals how sexual regulation and processes of racialization at the turn of the twentieth century were unsuccessful in their objectives to control and “correct” marginalized sectors of society. The characters start out as symbolic emblems of a cultural moment or social practice regarding the inversion of masculine versus feminine gender expression and/or of black to white racial identity. However, as they come in contact with the structures and mechanisms of social and institutional conditioning, they begin to experience a psychological and embodied deconstruction of identity that leads to their own subjective ambivalence and ambiguity, even death.

I contend, therefore, that the portrayal of sexually and racially ambiguous characters in Hernández-Catá’s writings exhibits an ironic play with ideas and concepts with regard to inversion that is geared toward the deconstruction and destabilization of prevailing fin-de-siècle structures of sexual regeneration and socioracial prejudice. The bodies and identities of the gendered, sexed, and racialized subjects become the sites of a sociocultural conflict. He does this in order to not only produce new configurations of symbolic representation, but to also demonstrate how setting and pushing the limits of their meaning and value —the “confirming and shaking” that Derrida speaks

of—can have liberating but also conflicting effects on the human subject, therefore bringing into question the legitimacy and efficacy of moral and ethical norms and standards at the beginning of the twentieth century.

According to Federico Revilla, *symbolic inversion* is based on *coincidentia oppositorum*, or the confluence of contrary values, which can be imagined as the junction of two rivers whose transit between good and evil, high and low, life and death, etcetera, is indiscernible. It refers to how these opposites mutually condition each other's meanings in a relation of symbiotic interdependence:

La inversión simbólica produce lo que, para la mentalidad lógica, son simplemente contradicciones. El deslizamiento desde una significación antagónica se produce sin que, por lo demás, se altere la estructura simbólica general, antes bien, consolidando dicha estructura por una mejor ligazón recíproca de sus elementos. No es entonces una perturbación, una excepción ni un fallo, sino algo del todo normal en el discurso simbólico. Todos los símbolos ambivalentes son objetos de frecuente inversión: la serpiente, por ejemplo. Toda inversión sorprende y fija la atención; perturba, pero atrae; intriga, sugiere, divierte... es un frecuente recurso burlesco. ... La inversión supone contrariar la normalidad: un desafío a lo establecido ... Semejantes formas de inversión suponen un desacuerdo, consciente o no, del hombre con la realidad que se le ofrece: una manifestación de inconformismo o una reivindicación de su creatividad, por modesta que sea.

Symbolic inversion produces that which, according to mental logic, are simply contradictions. Notwithstanding, slippage in the oppositional sense is produced without altering the general symbolic structure and, as such, consolidates said structure for a better reciprocal liaison of its elements. It is not then a perturbation, an exception nor an error, but something entirely normal in symbolic discourse. All ambivalent symbols are objects of frequent inversion: the serpent, for example. Every inversion is a surprise and calls to attention; perturbs, but attracts; intrigues, suggests, amuses... it is a frequent burlesque device. ... Inversion purports to contradict normality: defiance of what is established ... Such forms of inversion purport man's disagreement, conscious or not, with the reality offered him: a manifestation of unconformity or a reclaiming of his creativity, modest though it may be. (385; 1<sup>st</sup> ellipsis in original)

Symbolic inversion, therefore, considers the symbiosis and flux of what would otherwise be two contradictory symbols or elements in order to consolidate, deconstruct, spotlight, or parody the qualities of either as separate entities or in relation to one another. Sexual and racial inversions follow the same principles because they describe a deviation from what social customs and institutional knowledge have determined as the accepted and “normal” physical attributes and public and private behaviors. How they were defined and described in practice at the turn of the nineteenth century in Latin America and Europe was often contingent on ambiguous pseudoscientific theories,

neologisms (particularly the term “homosexual”), and observations on human behavioral patterns. Such an arbitrary construction of a male versus female sex and gender identity (i.e., “sexual invert” or “homosexual”), of a masculine versus feminine form of sexual and gender expression, and of the black versus white race, revealed its slippage from, and contradictions within, the reality of diverse experiences of the modern subject.

### III. Toward a (Trans)Modern “Subject”

*La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* are best understood within the parameters of modernity in the light of their historical placement in the early twentieth century, when modernization is taking place. Their protagonists, Eulogio and José-María respectively, try to legitimize themselves within the circumstances of modernity, the contingency of which is not just beholden to time and space but to oppressive situations that hinder their autonomy and agency. This setting urges one to reconsider how these texts challenge and go beyond the precariousness that modernity discharges on the modern subject. In *La piel*, Eulogio is unable to adapt to the new modern systems of neocolonialism that plague Tahiti as he realizes that European foreigners have redeployed the old forms of racial and economic coercion in the new and incipient transnational networks of communication and trade that they dominate. Although the institutional influence of the Church and chattle slavery are not as strong after abolition, the methods of their manipulation and subjection are transferred to other modes of backhanded and legally binding repressive measures that continue to invoke religious and racialized tropes of inferiority. The same can be said of José-María in *El ángel de Sodoma* who carries the weight of his ancestral coat of arms despite living in a city that is described as both Levitical *and* pagan, equally representing the traditional piety of the Spanish Catholic faith versus modern anticlericalism. Ironically, he strives to preserve tradition amidst modern social changes. To a certain extent, he is not misguided in his approach because modernity preserves the essentialism and

homogeneity of tradition with its emphasis on “the purity of its project, the reduction of all Other(s) to the Western Same, and the sovereignty of Western culture as a whole” (Iltis 26). The caveat is that modernity stresses these actions through the supposed progressive “objectivity of scientific and technical knowledge,” like José-María who relies on a scientific magazine that he reads in a municipal library in order to instruct him on how to be heteronormative, thus subsequently becoming the pride of the Spanish town when he excels at bookkeeping and accounting, both technical skills (*ibid.*). In *La piel*, Eulogio also relies on scientific literature and the latest news that he reads in periodicals in order to bring order and wholeness to his otherwise distraught consciousness and displaced existence.

Iltis postulates that modernity in the early twentieth century was concerned with controlling and ordering the world in order to “organize reality in terms of the ‘freedom’ of the individual” (*ibid.*). She and other writers argue that these aims are no longer feasible; for the world cannot be managed nor ordered by an already limited paradigm. The freedom that modernity seeks, moreover, is not possible. On the contrary, it has “led to new forms of subjugation (globalizing discourses and political powers, marginalized knowledges and groups across cultures and nations) ... at the expense and exclusion of the situated knowledges of marginal and subaltern groups: women, indigenous populations, gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities” (*ibid.*). The main problem that modernity faced was thinking that it could separate ‘*pouvoir-savoir*’ (“power-knowledge”), making its progressive and objectivist plan for the future illusory (*ibid.*). However, this is just one strain of modernity that, as I demonstrate, Hernández-Catá does not entirely follow and that his texts revises.

### 1.1. Inverting Purity and Progress: Modernity at a Crossroads

Hernández-Catá’s short novels respond to the crisis of modernity both from a paratextual vantage point and from the narrator’s point of view. For example, the respondent in the epigraphic

preface to *El ángel de Sodoma* defies the ideal of modernist purity and order by proposing to write about an unpleasant taboo, that is, sexual inversion. In the preface to *Los frutos ácidos*, the collection of short novels in which *La piel* is included, Hernández-Catá tells the reader that the two main protagonists of the collection are suffering and death, quite contrary to modernity's progressive agenda and projections into the future. Both *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* are centered on subaltern characters whose privilege only allows them to get so far in life. For instance, the narrator of the former poses the question just after a few pages into the story about whether Eulogio is capable of overcoming racial prejudice like Frederick Douglass did, and the narrator of the latter addresses the reader in the first paragraph of the narrative, asking them to be sympathetic and deferential to the tragic downfall of the Vélez-Gomaras. Eulogio, for example, is an ethnic minority in an indigenous community who is unable to apply the Western knowledge he acquires from the priest and slave owner, nor from the seminary and university he attends, because those teachings only reinforce the systems of subjection already set in place to jeopardize his self-realization. The same occurs with José-María whose Spanish ancestral knowledge and scientific library books do not help him to alleviate the ambivalence he feels towards his condition and repressive environment.

These aspects of the protagonists' characterization parallel the crises of modernity that Ilcan describes. In Europe, Latin America, the United States, and the territories that they colonized or influenced, hygiene campaigns, eugenics movements, and sexual reforms were gaining traction in order to prevent the spreading of disease and the propagation of sexual "vices," such as prostitution and homosexuality. These vices are addressed in *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* as both stigmatized and accepted realities of provincial and urban life, thus stressing the irresolute and unmanageable nature of these practices by modern institutional and legal measures for reform, not only because it was impossible to contain them, but also because those who were creating policies disagreed on the extent to which they should be regulated institutionally or enforced by the state.

For example, in the 1920s and 30s physicians, scientists, lawyers, and artists of the WLSR, along with its Spanish chapter, the Liga, were torn when it came to deliberating on sexual practices, especially sexual inversion and homosexuality. They also dealt with matters on the “betterment of the race” through eugenics and sexual education. Ellis was one of its leaders and Hernández-Catá appeared in the original member list of the Liga. However, due to their more progressive stances on these issues, they both distanced themselves from these organizations. Hernández-Catá even more so in the light of his preference for the license that artistic expression afforded him versus the rigidity and at times unreliable nature of pseudoscientific theories. One can see this in how he revises inversion in the two short novels.

By “(re)vision of inversion” I seek to point out Hernández-Catá’s aesthetical modification of the *perception* of inversion as a moral and ideological concept in his narrative that draws from the historical, anthropological, scientific, and cultural discourses on sexual inversion in their intersections with those of racialization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Latin America, Europe, United States, North Africa, and the South Pacific. Eulogio and José-María are situated in this transnational matrix that encompasses the continuity and discontinuity, unilaterality and fragmentation, and symbolic and physical dimensions of modern subjectivity and the history of modernity via its artistic expression in modernism. As Adis Barrio Tosar explains, the industrial and technological advances of modernity alienated the individual, causing disunity with his nature and environment, as well as an existential crisis that crossed the rational boundaries of experience into metaphysical and imaginative realms. The literary fiction of modernism shed light and brought these changes to bear as an object of the imagination and cultural production, at times in competition with scientific discourse:

A profound metaphysical anxiety starts to express the existential alienation of man and his divided self. This resentment worsens the artist’s tension between reality and ideality, and gives way to an alternative solution that exceeds the exotic and, in another turning of the screw, the modernist utterance, thus situating scientist attitudes in writing. A displacement is produced toward a difficult

*third position* that forces the extremes of the fragmented world, appealing to the discordance of languages in the construction of the literary image; languages that turn parodic and antithetical upon assuming impossible unilaterality in the empirical apprehension of knowledge...

Una profunda preocupación metafísica comienza a expresar la alienación existencial del hombre y su ser escindido. Este resentimiento recrudece la tensión del artista entre realidad e idealidad, y da lugar a una solución alternativa que excede lo exótico, y a otra vuelta de tuerca al enunciado modernista, colocando en la escritura las actitudes cientistas. Se produce un desplazamiento hacia una difícil *tercera posición* que fuerza los extremos del mundo fragmentado, apelando a la discordancia de los lenguajes en la construcción de la imagen literaria; lenguajes que se tornan paródicos y antitéticos, al asumir imposible unilateralidad en la aprehensión empírica de los saberes... (44-45; emphasis added)

This third, alternative position of displaced, fragmented, and discordant languages of knowledge and experience is perhaps what mediated the collaboration between Ellis and Symonds in their aforementioned book *Sexual Inversion*, the first English medical book on the subject and on homosexuality.<sup>21</sup> It was translated to Spanish in 1913. Ellis began corresponding with Symonds when the scientist asked the literary critic to write introductions to his series on Elizabethan dramatists, in which Ellis takes a sympathetic stance on homosexuality while conversely attempting to “out” Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), one of the dramatists discussed in the series who is known to have influenced William Shakespeare. In discussing their written communication, Ivan Crozier explains that Symonds cautioned Ellis against outing Marlowe for homosexuality and that the gay writer may have tested the physician’s opinions on this criminalized social taboo by soliciting his views on the cluster of homoerotic poems entitled “Calamus” in the poetry collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855) by American writer Walt Whitman (1819-92).

During this time, Oscar Wilde was tried for sodomy in England, an emblematic moment that hardened social attitudes and legal measures against homosexuality, thus hindering efforts to remove its stigma, which included a temporary ban on the publication of *Sexual Inversion* in England.

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<sup>21</sup> Ellis wrote most of the book after Symonds’ death, while the poet wrote a few chapters that became appendices in later editions. Symonds was gay and died before *Sexual Inversion* was published. Horatio Brown, his literary executor, advised against including Symonds as co-author of the text and deterred its publication in the light of the grief that it would cause the poet’s family, fearing that Symonds’ association with the book would reveal his homosexuality (Crozier 57).

Hernández-Catá was traversing childhood and adolescence in the wake of these historic events, therefore living as an adult through the consequences of the competition for authority between literature, science, and law (and religion, although less so) on issues of sexual and racial import. He actually dedicated one of the editions of *El ángel de Sodoma* to Ellis—who grew to both prominence and notoriety after publishing *Sexual Inversion*—proving that he read, or at least was familiar with, the medical and sexological literature that circulated at the time (Hernández-Catá was a polyglot and could read in English and other languages). He, therefore, became an active observer of social norms and practices and read all kinds of literature, enough to motivate him to write fiction about current events, and what he witnessed and experienced, very much in the fashion of the scientists and anthropologists, such as Ellis, who drew from newspapers, popular accounts, and case studies for his book (Somerville 21). He perhaps sent Ellis a copy not only because they shared sympathies toward homosexuality, but he might have thought, like Symonds, that he could prove to the physician that literature was important to a fuller and better understanding since it could elucidate the impact of society and politics on matters of sex and gender.

In the meantime, as reprints of *Sexual Inversion* continued to appear, it became more and more Ellis' book than Symonds's, as Crozier points out: "Ellis's professional interests in scientific facts and the way such facts could be used to challenge the law were emphasised at the expense of Symonds's more literary and historical contributions" (58). However, in the book *Queering the Color Line*, Somerville asserts: "Despite their claims to scientific objectivity and truth, these writers' investigations [those of scientists, physicians, and lawyers] were inevitably shaped by contemporary political and cultural ideologies" (21). This assertion aligns to an extent with Crozier's statement that "*Sexual Inversion* was an expression of the scientific naturalism to which Ellis and the majority of British scientists subscribed at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than the more literary text for which Symonds had *sympathies*" (58; emphasis added). I say 'to an extent' because, although

literary texts and scientific naturalism informed each other insofar that both produced narratives about the natural world, their approaches and aims were distinct as Somerville and Crozier underscore. Literature was able to account more for the ruptures and discontinuities of modern processes and shed light on its moral and ethical complications much more than scientific inquiry could with its empirical concentration on biology and eugenics. Although Ellis advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality and considered it to be a natural disposition, his isolation from the WLSR did little to bring progressive change to the organization. Even though his advice was solicited by the Liga, most of its Spanish members eventually took the conservative route against homosexuality.

What is at stake in this discussion on the intersections or divergences of literature and science is the sympathy that Crozier problematizes in his characterization of Symonds' literary proclivities, which is the same ethical value that Ellis needed in order to make a case against the criminalization of sexual inversion and homosexuality, otherwise he risked stigmatizing them as *unnatural* degenerations of human nature, as other scientists had done based on the tenets of scientific naturalism. As David and Collins observe, "a largely unspoken rule in both the sciences and the humanities is that, insofar as one attempts to explain human behavior or beliefs, they must be explained by natural causes [as in scientific naturalism], not by appealing to such things as an immaterial soul or a transcendent ethical or supernatural order, as previous thinkers had done" (233). English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-82) and his theory of evolution set scientific naturalism in motion, becoming a dominant standard in the sciences well into the second half of the twentieth century, but not without its limitations, particularly with regard to ethics and the understanding of the mind (*ibid.*).

## 1.2. 'Divergent Modernities': Hernández-Catá's Modernism(s) and the Subaltern

Although his aim was not to achieve scientific objectivity, Hernández-Catá borrowed from clinical and scientific discourses in order to give more dimension to his narrative, but *not* at the expense of a literary aesthetic that he grounded in an ethical philosophy of the subaltern. Adis Barrio Tosar states that scientific discourse in his works is ambiguous in order to destabilize its objectivity and truth with regards to the modern subject:

In general, Hernández-Catá's discourse assumes an equivocal tone in its presumed philosophical-scientific discourse. Upon elucidating the etiology of the phenomena in clinical experience, he transposes his discussion to life, art, and man, whereby the torrent of his prose unravels into ambiguity, the mystical and metaphysical, more in tune with the conventions of literature than with the disciplines founded on rigorous and precise positivist analysis...

En general, el discurso de [Hernández-]Catá asume un tono equívoco en el pretendido discurrir filosófico-científico. Al dilucidar la etiología de los fenómenos dentro de la experiencia clínica, traslada su discusión a la vida, al arte y al hombre, por lo cual el torrente de su prosa se desencadena en lo ambiguo, místico y metafísico, más en sintonía con las convenciones de la literatura, que con las disciplinas fundamentadas en el riguroso y preciso análisis positivista... (51)

The description that Barrio Tosar offers and the conventions of literature she mentions refer to the literary style and movement known as *modernism*, which aimed “to break with classical and traditional forms” (NOED). This does not mean, nevertheless, that these forms were completely abandoned, but they were employed in more irreverent and subversive ways in conjunction with avant-garde art and literature. Cuban writer, journalist, and revolutionary José Martí (1853-95) is credited with foregrounding literary modernism while Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916) is known for catalyzing its flourishing. In his book *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, Julio Ramos centers the work of Martí and the Cuban revolutionary's vindication of the subaltern to demonstrate how the disparate expression of modernism in literature reflected the uneven manifestation of modernization in Latin America. The subaltern subject, therefore, embodied this conundrum by not conforming to the homogenizing traditions and systems of sociocultural and state institutions, which, in turn, made the institutionalization (or nationalization)

of literature impossible (Ramos xli). It is imperative to situate Hernández-Catá and his literature within these modern divergencies.

This brings us to the matter of geography and the kinds of modernisms that came into effect in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, specifically in relation to modernity in Latin America and Spain. Mejías-López argues that Spanish modernism is hugely indebted to Latin American modernists despite its efforts to downplay its influence and erase it from their literary history in order to “avoid contemplating the possibility that the modernization of Spanish letters did not come from Europe after all, but rather from America” (210). As an (Latin) American writer from Cuba, Hernández-Catá exemplifies what Mejías-López postulates. For instance, in the epigraphic preface to *El ángel de Sodoma*, he criticizes poets who fail at creating beauty under the false pretense of having mastered poetic forms and figures and scientific discourse, while he prefers to dive into the thick of the swamp’s mud in order to attend to the issues that are ignored and repudiated by society. In other words, Hernández-Catá was not interested in producing art for art’s sake, nor on advocating for clinical or scientific approaches to explain sex and gender non-conformity, despite believing in the merits of high-art and perfecting the craft of writing. Instead, he was most interested in addressing the sociopolitical concerns and problems surrounding these issues.

Manuel Martínez Arnaldos submerges the crisis of modernity into the transatlantic well of modernism that Hernández-Catá’s short novels encapsulate:

The complexity and contradictions inherent in modernism are a topical constant that extends itself across Hernández-Catá’s entire oeuvre. His short narrative is a kaleidoscope through which we can inquire into all and every one of the modernist peculiarities in their Spanish and Hispanic American conjunction. [He is a] profound and strong modernist personality *that is constrained by* the deliberate election of formal and aesthetical principles in terms of the handling of the short story and short novel.

La complejidad y contradicciones inherentes al modernismo son una constante tónica que se extiende a lo largo de toda la obra de Hernández Catá. Su narrativa breve es un caleidoscopio a través del cual podemos indagar todas y cada una de las peculiaridades modernistas en su conjunción española e hispanoamericana. Una profunda y fuerte personalidad modernista *que se ve constreñida por* la deliberada elección de unos principios formales y estéticos en cuanto al manejo del cuento y de la novela corta. (316; emphasis added)

From Martínez Arnauld's evaluation one gathers that Hernández-Catá was frustrated by the constraints of literature and its structures to communicate the reality of experience and the modern subject's hardship, reinforcing Derrida's suggestion of transgressing and transforming the signs of signification. Hernández-Catá perhaps found enough balance in his journalistic and diplomatic assignments to not abandon fiction writing entirely. However, his approach to literature and to his own creations was always critical, up to his death.

In a letter to Cuban poet Emilio Ballagas (1908-54) from Rio de Janeiro written in 1940, the year of his death, Hernández-Catá confesses the following:

My drama? You'll see. I don't like anything of what I've written, and I don't want to augment it. I feel strong upwellings in me: comprehension, love, an acute vision of life that has changed while I changed as well. And I want to express that other world with another accent; but I found a wall of silence that was necessary to avoid osmosis that, in the end, would have made them [the upwellings] equal to a continuation. I know that you understand me: that's why I write these things about which I have not written to anyone. I have never worked so much on my art as I do now that I publish not.

¿Mi drama? Verá usted. No me gusta nada de lo que he escrito, y no quiero aumentarlo. Siento en mí marejadas fuertes, comprensión, amor, visión aguda de la vida que ha cambiado mientras yo cambiaba también. Y quiero expresar este otro mundo con otro acento; pero hallé necesario una pared de silencio para evitar ósmosis que, al cabo, hubieran equivalido a una continuación. Sé que usted me comprende: por eso le escribo estas cosas que no le he escrito a nadie. Nunca he trabajado tanto en mi arte como ahora que nada publico. (2004: 186)

In this letter, Hernández-Catá admits to the changing of the times that have also changed him, and his resolution is to continue pushing the envelope in ways that capture what essentializing forms cannot. Like Cascardi, he questions the limits of historical contingency and language to convey the internal reality of the subject, portraying their discursive closures as exclusionary of other worlds. In other words, his feelings are tied to an ethical concern for the marginalized, the minority, and the subaltern that is the epicenter of his literature, a focal point that he cannot entirely target and pin down within the limits of an essentialist outlook.

In his article about modernism and the evolution of the short novel genre, Martínez Arnaldos agrees that Hernández-Catá's own inscription in modernism is the same literary movement that he externalizes by critically narrativizing its contradictions and closures:

To a certain extent, Hernández-Catá praises or allies with the idea of high culture that during those years or after Ortega y Gasset developed in his diagnostic of modern society ... But it is interesting to establish the inherent criticism of the project of modernity and the ambivalence of the writing subject with respect to their purpose of managing one or other literary genre as an articulatory system of their modernist consciousness.

Hasta cierto punto, Hernández Catá preconiza o se alía con la idea de alta cultura que, por esos años o algunos después, desarrollará Ortega y Gasset en su diagnóstico sobre la sociedad moderna ... Pero lo interesante es constatar el criticismo inherente al proyecto de modernidad y la ambivalencia del sujeto escritor respecto a su propósito en el manejo de uno u otro género literario como sistema articulador de su consciencia modernista. (317)

Ambiguity in Martínez Arnaldos' assessment is not only a feature of Hernández-Catá's writing but it is inherent in the writer himself, therefore creating an ambivalent symbiotic relation between fiction and reality, between discourse and history, between the subject and society that the dyad modernity/modernism encompasses.

For instance, Hernández-Catá wrote *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* as a foreigner in France and Spain during a historically turbulent time away from his Cuban homeland, which explains the external vantage points of his more critical and objective approach to addressing the sociopolitical and economic problems that these countries and territories faced. As a transatlantic figure, Hernández-Catá's style is transnational, despite having published and set most of his texts in Europe. Therefore, the cosmopolitanism that he exhibits in his works lends itself to hybridity, which requires a reevaluation of the modernist aspects of his short novels:

And through subtle manipulation of tradition, Hernández-Catá harmonizes romanticism and naturalism ... the influence of these movements in the making of the modernist short story in relation to its artistic content as a literary genre and discursive phenomenon. ... In his short novels there is more pacing, he flees from the anecdote, from the adventure, from the quickness to reach conclusions. He pretends to find an internal and dense space in contrast to an exterior one ... where he can analyze the human soul. And he opines like Baroja that the novel is a genre, protean and multiform, where everything fits: the philosophical, psychological, utopian, etc.

Y mediante una manipulación sutil de la tradición, Hernández Catá armoniza el romanticismo y el naturalismo ... la influencia de estos movimientos en la conformación del cuento modernista en relación a su contenido artístico como género literario y fenómeno discursivo. ... En sus novelas cortas hay mayor morosidad, huye de la anécdota, de la aventura, de la rapidez hacia la conclusión. Pretende conseguir un espacio interior y denso, en contraste con el exterior ... donde analizar el alma humana. Y opina como Baroja que la novela es un género, proteico y multiforme, donde todo cabe: lo filosófico, lo psicológico, la utopía, etc. (Martínez Arnaldos 318-19)

Contrary to Katz, Leila Gómez argues that hybridity cannot be understood without considering the problem of modernity. Hybridity allows one to make sense of the mixture of temporalities and forms of expression that exceed them: “The concept of hybridity seeks to examine the way in which highbrow avant-garde and popular culture are related to the symbolic and economic market, to technological advances, and to the traditional matrixes of deep cultural roots” (182-83). The subaltern subject is caught to a degree in the epicenter of this precarious modernist conundrum, the complexity of which Hernández-Catá’s hybrid aesthetic captures in his novels, not just in its mixing of literary styles, but more so in the way it interweaves historical periods, spaces, and conflicts in the physical and transcendent tapestry of being. In the prefaces to his novel *La voluntad de Dios* (God’s Will; 1921) contained in the collection of novels *Una mala mujer* (A Bad Woman; 1922), Hernández-Catá stresses these points:

The writer should be a tree deeply rooted in the subsoil of the world, nourished by the juice of its problems, transmuting in the leaves, flowers and fruits of its aspirations and deceptions; and said, finally, with an artist’s arrogant aspiration: that if entertaining is a coveted goal, to concern and gather in one’s work some of the perennial palpitations or circumstances of the human spirit is a much more precious and difficult finality.

[E]l escritor ha de ser árbol arraigado hondamente en el subsuelo del mundo, nutrido del jugo de sus problemas, transmutador en hojas, flores y frutas de sus aspiraciones y decepciones; y dicho, en fin, con altanera aspiración de artista, que si entretener es meta codiciable, preocupar y recoger en la obra algunas de las palpitaciones perennes o circunstanciales del espíritu humano, es finalidad mucho más preciosa y difícil. (19)

The world order reflected in Hernández-Catá’s texts is challenged as the constitution of unity of a modernist aesthetic and modern subjectivity is compromised. In *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma*, the aims of modernity toward scientific innovation and socioeconomic progress are not met when confronted with the non-traditional and resistant otherness of sex and gender non-conformity

and racial alterity during the neocolonial period. Neocolonialism demonstrated that modernization and globalization had not separated *pouvoir* from *savoir*, power from knowledge, but rather individuals and multiregional networks had stratified and concentrated knowledge and capital with their power to control its resources and flow. Such is the case with French interests to obtain complete sovereignty over Tahiti upon dominating the flow of knowledge and “modernizing” its resources. It is also the case with the father-figure in *El ángel de Sodoma*, who tries to harness his children’s future with a life insurance policy that would secure the hegemony of the family’s legacy over their lives and the town in which they live. In this sense, these texts address concerns that critique the traditional modernist paradigm of improvement and global advancement, but not to depreciate its significance, rather to shed light on other concerns that ensued from it and to offer an alternative way of understanding its effects on the freedom and agency of the individual.

Ileana would attribute these developments to postmodernism, which according to her is a critique of Western “objectivity and domination,” a questioning of the hegemonic binary power-knowledge and its manifestations in the postcolonial era, upon emphasizing “plurality, difference, and the marginal”: “postmodernism/postcolonialism, referring to a dialectical link between the modernity of the early twentieth century and Euro-imperialism, seeks to open the fractured or dislocated nature of totalities, explore the fluidity of boundaries and identities, and expose the potential for differences within situated knowledges” (26-27). On the one hand, modernity leads to *fragmentation*, or what Andrea Mura has described as “the outcome of the *hyper-intensification* of the modern binaries which had opposed individuals to society” (76). On the other, postmodernism as a counter-discourse against exploitation and exclusion has been challenged as merely a response to modernity, as *post-*, that is, *after* modernity, offering a critique without solutions, creating more possibilities with no guarantee for improving the subject’s sense of belonging. It seems that in its attempt to block the tendency to lean toward the polar opposites of modern binaries it has created

its own dichotomy of sameness versus difference, singularity versus multiplicity, center versus periphery, and acceptance versus marginalization, ergo leading to another form of hyper-intensification or fragmentation but in the opposite direction of modernity's emphasis on homogeneity and tradition. Furthermore, at what point do we account for the beginning and end of postmodernity if it is to be a response to modernity?

Mura demonstrates that globalization as emanating from modernity has not ended as evidenced by the expansion of cyberspace and informatization, thus leading to the blurring of the public and private that has further alienated individuals and to the creation of new forms of management and trade that maximize diversity and creativity in service of augmenting profit and consumption (79). A postmodernism ethics can, therefore, create more socioeconomic disparities if it does not account for the ways that markets and information are managed by new forms of domination, harkening back to the power-knowledge dilemma that plagued modernity as she conceptualizes it. Although postmodernism posits to open the world to more options and selections beyond the oneness and unilaterality of modern tradition, people continue to choose tradition and have not stopped discriminating based on nationalisms and community formations designed to exclude others, whether marginal or dominant, thus problematizing the extent of a person's capacity to choose at will in accordance with fairness, ethical morale, and the egalitarian and responsible use of resources. One must still reckon with the ongoing political dynamics that infiltrate, influence, or control these processes.

These dynamics can be observed in *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* when the protagonists do not completely abandon the traditional customs and philosophies that they have inherited or acquired despite their newfound individuality and determination. For example, toward the end of the story, Eulogio begins to reconcile with his blackness but neither does he rebel against the Europeans. To a certain extent, he tries to find a middle ground and cooperate with them under the

expectation that there will be peace between them and the Tahitians, without having to compromise his cultural identity or freedom. When it seems like they have accepted his difference and embraced equal participation in the trading and allocation of resources, the Europeans' greed and thirst for power betray his trust. Similarly, José-María leaves his Levitical hometown and refuses to marry due to his preference for men, but while he is reveling in the freewheeling environment of Paris he scoffs at the sexual looseness and effeminacy of other inverts and homosexuals, comparing them to unscrupulous prostitutes. He vows to not join those circles and prefers to consummate his same-sex attraction in a more reserved way that emulates traditional courtship. Although he has left the repressive Spanish province, slights of its conservatism have not left him, largely due to the conditioning of his upper-class upbringing.

In the light of this discussion, one is motivated to consider how to make sense of the state of affairs during the early twentieth century in a way that captures the historical and subjective formulations of modernity together with the difference, hybridity, pluralism, and ethical concerns that arise from the ongoing global flow and political formations of power and knowledge that straddle homogenization and heterogeneity. I propose a median discursive structure that others have referred to as the state of *transmodernity* and its symbolic and practical manifestations via *transmodernism*. The *trans-* in *trans-modernity* accounts for what Mura refers to as the desedimenting effects of globalization brought on by modernization—new formulations of space, resources, and subjectivity via decentralization and displacement—with which the fragmenting binaries of modernity could not cope. In this sense, transmodernity denotes a move from recognizing the globalizing effects of modernity to the ways that they are addressed and dealt with after its failures and beyond its limitations. The *trans-* in *trans-modernism* responds to and brings to fruition this transition by pointing to how (as in the thought given to and the actions taken) modern values and tropes have been rearticulated and revitalized symbolically and discursively in order to make the

hybridization and pluralism of globalization readable to individuals and groups in search of purpose, and that are seeking to belong, to mobilize an agenda or project, or to formulate an ethics of change or for justice. This requires a different approach to tradition that does not reproduce the hegemonic nationalisms and exclusions of modernity (which was not in itself a total break from the traditional customs or ways of thinking of the past) but that does not lead to complete alienation and the detriment of individual freedom and social well-being. Therefore, transmodernism, in its revision of tradition, does not repeat the closures of modern binaries nor the reproductions of dominance that postmodernism, in Ilcan's formulation, attempts to resolve. Instead, it proposes an open and fluid *transness*, that is, a movement among varying temporalities, spaces, bodies, and discourses.

In situating ourselves in the context of Hernández-Catá's narrative, its language and discursive field, I take after Mura's post-structuralist analysis of the languages and discourses of transmodernism. According to Mura, transmodernism is a metastructure "through which definite sets of symbolic codes are articulated in their depiction of reality," understanding that their definitive nature is not meant to foreclose ambiguity or *différance* but to make signification possible for the production of meaning. In his theorization of the relation between signification and *différance*, Derrida postulates that "Différance is what makes the *movement* of signification possible only if each element that is said to be 'present,' appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element" (288; emphasis added). In my view, Derrida is describing *différance*—"the possibility of conceptuality by the systematic play of differences"—as a container through which signification moves within temporal and spatial dimensions, past, present, and future. Transmodernism follows the logic of *différance* as Mura presents it as an imaginative container or symbolic reservoir of signifiers "from which discursive articulations draw in order to construct their respective representations" (70). In their relation to the temporal and spatial social fields of

transmodernity, Mura clarifies that the discursive signifiers of transmodernism are fictional and temporary closures, therefore their meaning can be dislocated or displaced. This speaks to the aforementioned desedimenting attribute of transmodernism whereby the closures of discursive signification are “always exposed to crisis ... through which the *naturalisation* of discursive practices is contested, social relations unsettled, the unity of a certain field of discursivity disarticulated and meaning de-fixed” (71).

I argue that inversion is representative of the moving symbolic domain contained in transmodernism and the sociopolitical concerns of transmodernity. I propose that its representation in *La piel* and *El ángel de Sodoma* follows the unfixed and unstable movement of transness that the in-betweenness or intermediary nature of inversion encapsulates in its general sense of reversal. In other words, by employing inversion as a literary device that reverses symbols and concepts in general, the Cuban writer destabilizes the fixed meaning that inversion was given by sexologists, physicians, and other intellectuals and authority figures to refer to and stigmatize sexual inversion in concert with eugenicist and racial discourses on miscegenation. He revises the term as it has been naturalized and fixed in meaning by the social and biological sciences in order to vindicate its transitivity and free expression in both literature and society. The dialectic of fixed and inverted meanings poses an in-betweenness in which Eulogio and José-María find themselves straddling the dichotomies of modernity. They struggle to reconcile their otherness (geographic, cultural, biological, and social) with the sameness of Western homogeneity; the nucleus of traditional ideology and moral piety with the porousness and uninhibited release of the periphery; the natural dispositions of their individuality with the onus of duty to society. Ultimately, they have to decide how to break down these dualities and find their own path, which may resemble a critical postmodern scenario of a search for meaning and fulfillment. The difficulty with a postmodern approach, however, is that it does not lead to an abandonment of tradition nor to an ethical

resolution. Therefore, the problematic of modernity is still in force whereby the subject must find ways to place itself within its transformations while aspiring to self-realization. In other words, transness becomes the changing reality of what could thus be conceived as a transmodern subject.

Although situating Hernández-Catá's novels in Mura's conceptualization of transmodernism may seem anachronistic given that Mura places transmodernity within the technological advancements and newly-formed communicative digital networks of the late twentieth-century, it can still be argued that the transformative characteristics of modernization have always been present. In other words, modernity has always been transmodern in the light of its inherent transness and self-revision. The transitive nature of modernity could be seen in the beginnings of the twentieth century, particularly in how it was debated with regard to sociopolitical issues and in how non-conforming individuals destabilized its progressivism. What some considered to be progressive stances on non-conforming sexuality and racial inequity, others did not. Measures that were thought to counter traditional norms were still perpetuating disparities, ergo the need to transgress them, an act that the characters in Hernández-Catá's novels do not take lightly.

#### **IV. The Chapters**

In the first chapter that follows, I analyze *El ángel de Sodoma* and execute a close reading of the fictionalized dialogue in the epigraphic preface to the novel, which compares writing about the stigma on sexual inversion to the mud of a swamp. I show, however, that the respondent in the conversation reverses the symbolic messiness and ugliness of the swamp to a valorization of the subversive literary text and its subject matter. In other words, what initially is symbolic of grotesqueness turns into a work of aesthetical worth, the contents of which should also be valued. Based on this foregrounding paratext and other examples, I argue that an aesthetic of symbolic inversion reverses the stigma on sexual inversion in the short novel.

In chapter two, I expand on the analysis in chapter one in order to examine *El ángel de Sodoma* as an allegory of the dictatorship of Spanish Prime Minister Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja (1870-1930). The protagonist's last name, Vélez-Gomara is reminiscent of the Peñón Vélez de la Gomera, the Spanish military enclave in Morocco that created strife and divisions among political and civic groups in Spain, especially during the 1910s and 20s. Spanish interests in Morocco can be traced back to the sixteenth century when they made their first attempts to claim the military enclave. Such a long history is represented by the coat of arms that adorns the house of the Vélez-Gomaras in *El ángel de Sodoma*. However, like the decline of the Spanish empire, the prestige of the Vélez-Gomara lineage is also declining as a result of the corruption, illegal activities, and irresponsibility of its men, namely José-María's father, Santiago, and brother, Jaime.

While some critics (Fowler, Bejel, and Zubiaurre) have argued that the family's downfall is caused by José-María's inversion and same-sex attraction, I contend that from the beginning of the novel, the onus of responsibility is placed (*inverted*) rather on Santiago and Jaime, that is, the heterosexual characters, thus centering the novel's argument on a crisis of patriarchy and normative masculinities. Moreover, when the father dies, his spirit becomes an oppressive presence in José-María's life in ways that parallel Primo de Rivera's life and dictatorship. As a result, José-María feels obliged to save the family's honor by repressing his inversion and same-sex desire, marrying his two sisters, and helping Jaime become an educated and responsible adult. Although he is successful in the latter two, he is unable to contain his inverted and homosexual inclinations. In fact, he eventually rebels against the normative moral codes and social expectations of his family and hometown, and flees to Paris in order to live as his true, inverted self. I observe how his internal struggle is inscribed in a discourse of combat between honoring the virile legacy of his ancestors and setting free his own expression of masculinity and femininity. By extension, I show how this battle to conserve the family's coat of arms and the Velez-Gomara name harkens back to the discourses of Spanish

masculine virility versus Moroccan effeminate inferiority that fueled Spanish hegemony in North Africa. Despite José-María's allegiance to his family, in the end he forsakes it by committing suicide in a scene that I contend shows how his femininity annihilates the hegemonic masculinity perpetuated by his father and his Spanish hometown, thus serving as an allegory of the failures of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and of the hegemony of Spanish nationalism and neocolonialism in the early twentieth century.

In chapter three, I critically examine how racial inversion in *La piel* is instantiated by the reversal of Eulogio's black skin and his biracial duality as a result of his mother's black ancestry and his father's European heritage. In order to combat racism and European colonization in Tahiti, he is often tempted to invert his identity from black to white, thinking that by denying his blackness he will be able to save the Tahitians from neocolonialism. Despite his misgivings about the white man (referred to as "the enemy" in the text), he places his trust in the colonizer, not realizing that he is part of a corrupt scheme to build a railroad system on the island that is a pretext to manipulate his good intentions and betray his yearning for justice. Throughout the short novel, he loses his sense of self the further away he is from his homeland and the longer he represses his Tahitian heritage. When he finally realizes that accepting his blackness is the key to achieving self-fulfillment and he prepares himself to fight for Tahiti's freedom, it is too late and he is killed.

I contend that while studies have portrayed Eulogio as a puppet of the colonizer unable to act on his own volition due to the suppression of his blackness, I argue that there are instances in which Eulogio resists colonization and is constantly thinking of ways to quell racial tensions between Tahitians and Europeans. Although initially he criticizes the black natives for their complacency, which he attributes to Tahitian culture, towards the end of the novel he asserts his Tahitian heritage as he finds himself singing the natives' indigenous songs. I show how this progression in the story is foreshadowed in the scene when his skin changes. In that moment he asks the doctor if he can also

change his heart. Albeit the physician suggests that it is possible, Eulogio refuses to do so. Instead, he prefers to stay true to his heart, which manifests in his self-acceptance and fight for racial justice later in the text.

In addition, I demonstrate that Eulogio's identification with famous black figures such as Frederick Douglass inscribes *La piel* in the conflictive and violent historical context of enslavement and postcolonialism in Latin America and the South Pacific. I demonstrate that these and other historical allusions position the short novel as an allegory of the discourse on black terror and resistance exacerbated by the slave revolts in Saint Domingue, which also set off new forms of oppression against persons of color beyond chattel slavery, particularly in Cuba where the Armed Uprising of the Independents of Color in 1912 in favor of black rights was squashed by the Cuban army. I shed light on how, as a slave, Eulogio is born into these systems of oppression that later on, as a freeman, he strives to resist as they take on new forms, thus serving as an allegory to historical events that inspire the novel. Considering these aspects of the narrative, I argue that *La piel* offers an ethics of postcolonial resistance to subjection and of justice for the subaltern subject that reverses the inversion of blackness to whiteness as symbolic of a reclaiming of the *trans*-formation of the modern subject.

Since justice for the Tahitians is not achieved at the end of the novel and the racial conflict is not entirely resolved, I emphasize the *trans*-itional aspects of modernity and modern subjectivity that contextualize the text, like I do with *El ángel de Sodoma*. Therefore, I also offer *La piel* as a text that is transmodern in scope. Furthermore, I propose that both texts are transmodern in that they not only look back at historical moments, such as slavery and colonialism, in order to reinscribe them in Hernández-Catá's contemporary context. Their reprinting and numerous editions during the author's lifetime underscore the need to revise and reinsert them in new social and historical contexts in which they acquire new relevance and meaning in changing times.

There is an inherent eclecticism in Hernández-Catá's cosmopolitanism and worldview that is reflected in the multifaceted dimensions of his narrative style, and ironic, and sometimes playful approach to storytelling: "Many characters are like whispers of the author's own soul, constructed by a voice very proximate to his own conscience. It is not too often itself the one speaking, as though it pretended to prolong agonies, dream fragments of strange lives, with fear, much fear of the presence of the undesired, the unwelcomed [death]" (Muchos personajes son como silbidos del alma del propio autor, contruidos por una voz muy próxima a su misma consciencia. Es, no pocas veces, ella misma hablando, como si pretendiera dilatar agonías, soñar fragmentos de vidas extrañas, con miedo, mucho miedo a la que siempre es presencia no deseada, nunca bienvenida [la muerte]"; 2004: 10). In some cases, these characteristics go beyond the narrative itself in a broader engagement with paratextual elements of the texts and their different editions. For example, the epigraphs and dedications of the first edition of *El ángel de Sodoma* are metaliterary devices that Hernández-Catá employs in order to enrich interpretations of the novel. In the second edition, room is made for a new prologue and epilogue that offer a more homophobic perspective of the story. The novella, *La piel*, is another example of how editions are altered in order to offer more interpretational dimension. In the second edition, there are references to historical figures who were abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, who do not appear in the first, which can alter the reading.

It was in search of agonies and dreams of strange lives that Hernández-Catá found his voice as a young writer in Spain and Cuba. Such an approach may seem problematic, however, if Hernández-Catá's narrative is only aimed at deconstructing and destabilizing discourses and ideologies, without offering some type of resolution. However, the fact that Hernández-Catá chose to write about controversial topics during a repressive and racially prejudiced historical moment, even if to highlight their calamitous and uncertain outcomes, demonstrates that he wanted to give visibility and importance to sociocultural phenomena and to question or, at the very least, explore

them with more nuance. In addition, it shows that, in revealing their complexity and multidimensionality, he is problematizing unilateral and conventional perspectives on gender, sexuality, and race. In this way, Hernández-Catá's literature has political weight in the same way that the characters oscillate between complying and resisting social pressures in their own struggle to position themselves in society and to exercise their autonomy and agency despite their conflicted identities.

PART ONE. TOWARD A (RE)VISION OF MASCULINITY: ALFONSO HERNÁNDEZ-CATÁ'S *EL ÁNGEL DE SODOMA*

I. Introduction: An “Inverted” Approach to *El ángel de Sodoma*

—And you’re going to write a novel about ‘that’?  
What willingness to write about unpleasant matters!

—About ‘that,’ yes. The poetasters have vulgarized and made ugly so many gardens, so many dawns, so many sunsets, that it’s now preferable to lean over swamps. It all depends on the manner in which the mud is stirred, my friend. If it’s true that there are mephitic nocturnal dews in the ponds, it is also true that they offer greasy iridescences, and that irises and water lilies, despite their rotten roots, pathetically strive to blossom their unblemished leaves. What is more, artistic chemistry, like the scientific kind, can obtain pure essences from the detritus. More work and less lucid, you’d say. It doesn’t matter!

—¿Y va usted a escribir una novela de «eso»? ¡Qué ganas de elegir asuntos ingratos!

—De «eso», sí. Los poetastros han vulgarizado y afeado tantos jardines, tantos amaneceres, tantas puestas de sol, que ya es preferible inclinarse sobre las ciénagas. Todo depende, del ademán con que se revuelva el cieno, amigo mío. Si es cierto que hay en las charcas relentes mefíticos, también lo es que ofrecen grasas irisaciones, y que lirios y nenúfares se esfuerzan patéticamente, a pesar de sus raíces podridas, en sacar de ellas las impolutas hojas. Además, como la química científica, la artística puede obtener de los detritus esencias puras. Más trabajo y menos lucido, dirá usted. ¡No importa!

(Epigraphic preface to the first and second editions of *El ángel de Sodoma*)<sup>22</sup>

When the first and second editions of *El ángel de Sodoma* (The Angel of Sodom) were published in 1928 and 1929 in Madrid by Mundo Latino press under the direction of its author, Alfonso Hernández-Catá (1885-1940), the novel became an instant bestseller both for its appealing and controversial subject matter: homosexuality.<sup>23</sup> However, from the interlocutor’s cautionary

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<sup>22</sup> All translations to English of primary and secondary sources are mine unless otherwise noted. All subsequent citations of the novel are from its second edition published in 1929. In a typewritten letter from Madrid dated 1 June 1930 to writer, historian, political activist, and literary critic Waldo Frank (1889-1967), Hernández-Catá grants him permission to translate *El ángel de Sodoma* to English and requests that the second edition be used: “Now the novel is being reprinted here, and tomorrow I’ll mail you a copy of the second edition, which is in better care than the first. The text to translate should be the second [edition]” (“Ahora se está reimprimiendo aquí la obra, y mañana le remitiré un ejemplar de la segunda edición [sic], que está más cuidada que la primera. El texto para traducir debe ser el de la segunda”; Waldo Frank Papers 58).

<sup>23</sup> The novel is also about sexual inversion but I use the term *homosexuality* in order to not only designate how the main content of the novel was described in its time, such as by the writer of the epilogue to the second edition, Luis Jiménez de Asúa, but also for the rhetorical effect of making the novel’s content more recognizable by the contemporary reader. Although still in use, *sexual inversion* is a less common term used to label the present-day homosexual or gay person. I explain terminological distinctions in more detail later in this chapter.

interrogation of writing about the ‘asuntos ingratos’ of ‘eso’ in the epigraphic preface cited above, as in not one but *many* unpleasant matters, we can fathom that the novel concerns much more than homosexuality. A brief summary of its plot may lead to this conclusion.

The novel takes place in Spain before and after the First World War in a provincial town with a port and harbor that shows signs of modernization and industrialization; for example, there are trains, ships, and cars.<sup>24</sup> However, it is in decline, like the house of the Vélez-Gomaras, a noble, upper-class family that for generations had maintained its high-ranking status and influence in the town (1-3).<sup>25</sup> As told by an omniscient narrator, the story sets off when the children of the Vélez-

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<sup>24</sup> References to urbanization are repeated throughout the novel whereby the influence that the culture of Madrid and Paris had on Hernández-Catá is perceptible. At that time, Madrid, like other major cities, had experienced exponential increases in population, ranging from half a million in 1900 to a million by the mid-1930s (Graham 86). The text calls the place where the Vélez-Gomaras live “la ciudad” (“the city”), while it states that there were 100 heads of lineage there, which could range from hundreds to thousands depending on how one counts the generations of a lineage (48). The place where the Vélez-Gomaras’ house is located is described as a Levitical city (“ciudad levítica”) marked by slights of paganism near a port where sailors disembark, looking for sexual gratification (*ibid.*). They satisfy their pleasures in the shacks of the suburbs in the periphery of the city (“casucas del suburbio”), a clear reference to prostitution. There is also a reference to an automobile show (52). Moreover, the city is personified as a character that serves as the children’s counsel, therefore alluding to its small, town-like quality where everyone knows each other (59). At the time, semi-rural population centers in Spain fell under 10,000 inhabitants, therefore we can postulate that from a numerical-demographic standpoint the Vélez-Gomaras live in a semi-rural center, and from a sociocultural viewpoint, in a semi-urban town that is near a port, with a relatively affluent interior and a decadent, and possibly poor, periphery.

<sup>25</sup> Aside from the obvious Spanish origin of the characters’ names, there are certain details in the text that imply that the story takes place in Spain. For example, the following excerpt denotes that Jaime had traveled to other lands on Spanish ships, the same ones on which he would return after his travels to meet his siblings, therefore indicating that they were docked in a Spanish port near their parents’ home: “Although nothing can be done in those damned Spanish ships—because the captain was more cautious about morality than bad climate—he [Jaime] was able to see her [the daughter of the tamer of beasts] once in tights” (“A pesar de que en los malditos barcos españoles nada se puede hacer, porque el capitán se cuida más de la moral que del mal tiempo, él [Jaime] había logrado verla [la hija del domador de fieras] una vez en mallas”; 83-84). Cleminson and Vázquez García suggest that the novel might take place in Cádiz or Havana (233). It is unlikely that it takes place in Havana because in the novel Jaime is said to have travelled six to seven times to the Antilles and American lands (175-76), which are mentioned from a distant vantage point: “Three months before, newspapers published news that in a city in America . . .” (“Tres meses antes los periódicos publicaron la noticia de que en una ciudad de América . . .”; 172). Also, José-María travels to Paris in train, therefore his place of departure must be Spain. Mejías-López gives more historical context about the novel’s Spanish origins: “Spanish readers of the novel must have noticed that the father’s name is that of Spain’s patron saint Santiago *matamoros*, and the last name, Vélez (de) Gomara, to which the town so desperately clutches, is near identical to the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, one of Spain’s military enclaves in Morocco.” Regarding the family’s class, they have great repute but José-María has to work to pay off debts left from their father’s financial troubles. Therefore, from an economic standpoint, a status of the upper middle class might be more appropriate while from a social point of view, an upper class/noble/aristocratic standing would fit their high reputation. With regard to the time period, the text mentions a war (66) and a great economic boom that was short-lived (67). Since Spain remained officially neutral during the First World War, it served as a supplier of goods and armaments for both sides, thus experiencing an upsurge in its economy. As a result, it is likely that the story develops during the 1920s, ergo reflecting the sociohistorical time period in which Hernández-Catá lived.

Gomaras suffer the loss of their parents. Their mother (who remains nameless if only to be referred to as the wife, mother, or “mujercita” [little woman]) dies of illness and their father, Don Santiago, of a self-inflicted car crash after learning that his life insurance could save his four children from the destitution that his financial irresponsibility would have bestowed upon them. Eighteen-year-old José-María, the eldest of the children and the protagonist of the novel, does not only feel obliged to become the caretaker of his orphaned siblings but to also marry his two sisters, Amparo and Isabel-Luisa, to honorable men, and usher his brother Jaime through nautical school with the help of their guardian, Captain Eligio Bermúdez Gil, a family friend and professor at the nautical school who is the steward of their father’s life insurance. The children try renting out some of the rooms in the house but when the tenants move out, José-María feels obliged to take a job as a banker and is recognized everywhere he goes. He is therefore entrusted with carrying on the legacy of the Vélez-Gomara name and its esteemed position in society. Meanwhile, his brother Jaime goes abroad and returns accompanied by the daughter of a tamer of beasts and other members of a traveling circus. Upon Jaime’s insistence, José-María begrudgingly accompanies him to the circus’ show. While Jaime is in pursuit of the daughter of the tamer of beasts, José María is stunned by the attractive, herculean physique of one of the male acrobats and is awakened to his yearning towards the performer, which he painstakingly hides from his brother. From then on, he experiences psychological and emotional turmoil accompanied by ambivalent feelings of clarity and confusion, and pleasure and repression as he tries to come to terms with the closures and possibilities of a newfound and growing desire for the same sex.

From that point forward, José-María realizes that he cannot continue to uphold the patriarchal and heteronormative expectations of his birthright despite his efforts to be more masculine: smoking cigarettes, exercising, visiting brothels, and having a platonic relationship with a young lady called Cecilia. She, instead, notices his distant demeanor and refusal of intimacy, which

makes her suspect of his preference for men, especially when he tells her that their relationship cannot be, and ends it. At the same time, he tries to make sense of his condition and wonders whether it is a congenital degeneration or a curse. In a quest for answers, he walks into a library and reads a scientific manual, which serves as a prompt to perform heteronormative behaviors that are accompanied by an urge to pass as heterosexual. Meanwhile, the stereotypically feminine aspects of his behavior and personality are heightened throughout the story. As a child, he socialized mostly with girls, played with dolls, and avoided playing aggressive games with boys. His mother doted over him, which then translated to his motherly care for his siblings, or as the text calls it, the role of “la madrecita” (“the little mommy”; 78).

José-María strives to maintain the family’s honor as new head of household, and that of his sisters’ through marriage. Once they are wed and the whereabouts of Jaime are unknown after getting involved in contraband abroad under another name (Nicolás Smith), José-María realizes that it is his turn to live his own life. As a result, he travels to Paris under the pretense of changing his name, like his brother did, in order to freely express himself and carry out his desires. However, when he uses his family name (Vélez-Gomara) to check into a hotel and goes unnoticed, he abandons his original idea of moving to a more remote one under a false identity. After, he explores the city and follows an unnamed man into a bookstore. They secretly arrange to meet at the Javel metro station later in the day. Before their encounter, the hotel clerks leave a letter from the Jamaican consulate for José-María that was sent by his brother-in-law, Claudio Osuna (Isabel-Luisa’s husband), announcing the death of his brother Jaime who was aboard a contraband ship captured near Florida. Claudio asks him not to say a word about it to anyone for the sake of preserving the family’s honor. He also tells him to distract himself in Paris, be unsparing with money, and to represent, not so much the Vélez-Gomara name, but the union of the Osuna and Vélez-Gomara households. José-María reads the letter before his tryst with the man at the bookstore and finds

himself caught between the pressures of dishonoring his family and the knowledge that his Spanish hometown could have about his change in lifestyle, which tortured the possibility of acting on his sexual desires. Consequently, he goes to the Javel metro station, but instead of consummating his rendezvous, he takes death by the hand and throws himself onto an incoming train, simulating, like his father, an accidental suicide.

*El ángel de Sodoma* is not the first text in which Hernández-Catá treats male sexual inversion. It also appears in his earlier novel *La juventud de Aurelio Zaldívar* (The Youth of Aurelio Zaldívar), published in 1911, albeit in a more subordinate way, and he addresses female sexual inversion in his previous novella *El sembrador de sal* (The Sower of Salt; 1923). At the turn of the century, other authors wrote novels and plays on male inversion in their writings, such as Portuguese writer Abel Botelho in *O Barão de Lavos* (The Baron of Lavos; 1891), and Brazilian author Adolfo Caminha in *O Bom-Crioulo* (The Good Creole; 1895), and French novelist Marcel Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*; 1913-27). Other works of fiction in the Spanish language also featured male same-sex sexuality. In 1914 and 1919, for example, *Lujuria: Cuentos nefandos* (Lust: Abominable Stories) by Miguel de Marcos and *Las impuras* (The Impure Ones) by Miguel de Carrión were published respectively in Cuba. José González Castillo's drama *Los invertidos* (The Inverts) is also published in 1914 in Argentina. It stages the story of Dr. Flórez, a married lawyer who secretly has an affair with his close male friend. In addition, Chilean writer Augusto D'Halmar's novel *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* (The Passion and Death of Father Deusto) is published in 1924, and it is about a same-sex relationship between a Basque priest in his thirties and Pedro Miguel, a Gypsy pre-adolescent choir boy. Spanish writer Álvaro Retana also published various short novels that celebrate or present a more subversive strand of homosexuality and sexual inversion such as *Las locas de postín* (The Show Queens; 1919). Other works by Retana that include queer themes are *Los Extravíos de Tony* (*confesiones amorales de un colegial ingenuo*) [Tony's Deviations (The Amoral Confessions

of an Ingenuous Schoolboy); 1919], *Los ambiguos* (The Ambiguous Ones, 1922), *Mi novia y mi novio* (My Girlfriend and My Boyfriend, 1923), among others.

The sheer number of published texts on sexual inversion denotes the varied treatment of the topic and that it was not a monolith. Yet, amidst the burgeoning of homoerotic literature in Latin America and Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century, the story of *El ángel de Sodoma* stands out in interesting ways due to its multidimensional representation of gender and sexuality. For instance, Augusto D'Halmar's novel *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* is similar to Hernández-Catá's, however, the protagonist decides in the end to deny his same-sex desire, unlike the protagonist of *El ángel de Sodoma* who, towards the end of the novel, comes to terms with it.<sup>26</sup> While Retana had previously written several texts on inversion and homosexuality that are much more affirming of what we would consider today a transgender or queer identity, his texts and those by other writers—such as González Castillo's *Los invertidos*—do not take a more ample and multilayered approach to sex and gender as does Hernández-Catá who develops these themes intersectionally with those of race, class, and nation, and via various lens such as the moral, religious, psychoanalytical, social, and scientific. In addition, he does so through a protagonist who is constantly questioning and pushing the epistemological and existential boundaries of these categories and discourses via a polysemic narrative of great psychic depth that is, furthermore, transnational and transatlantic in scope in light of the dynamic migration of peoples in and between Europe and the Americas, the acceleration of industrialization, and the growth of globalized economies at the turn of the nineteenth century in said regions.

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<sup>26</sup> D'Halmar, like Hernández-Catá, spent time in Spain and his novel is also set there, as well as being published in Madrid.

In his review of *El ángel de Sodoma*, Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964), a prolific Spanish critic and Hernández-Catá's contemporary, describes the novel with sardonic jest as "a pathetic story about a homosexual ... [that] made all the inverts of literature [presumably all the effeminate, homosexual writers] cry from emotion ... who now flaunted the Wildean banner so unscrupulously ... at the start of the century. ... Alfonso became the defender of the homosexual ... and put on airs of a social apostle" ("historia patética de un homosexual ... [que] hizo llorar de emoción a todos los invertidos de la literatura ... que ahora ostentaban el cartel wildiano tan descaradamente ... al comienzo del siglo. ... Alfonso venía a ser el defensor del homosexual ... y se daba ínfulas de apóstol social"; 360-61).<sup>27</sup> The critic goes further in his review and mentions a "close friend" of Hernández-Catá by the name of Daguerre who was supposed to collaborate with the Cuban writer on creating plays for the theater. According to him, Daguerre tried to dissuade his "friend" from writing the story: "Then came *El ángel de Sodoma*... I wanted to get it out of his head..., we argued..., he left saying that I wanted to snatch his success, that I was a failure, a bitter man" ("Luego vino lo de *El ángel de Sodoma*... Yo se lo quise quitar de la cabeza..., discutimos..., él salió diciendo que yo quería arrebatarse un éxito, que era un fracasado, un amargado"; 361-62; all ellipses in original).

Daguerre thought that *El ángel de Sodoma* was well written but dangerous, an ill-suited subject for a book, and that it would reflect negatively on Hernández-Catá: "As for himself, Daguerre found the work to be well written but he lamented that the author had chosen such an argument

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<sup>27</sup> The full passage is as follows: "*El ángel de Sodoma* hizo llorar de emoción a todos los invertidos de la literatura y le valió a su autor felicitaciones agradecidas de los Pepito Zamora y los Pepito Ojeda, que ahora ostentaban el cartel wildiano tan descaradamente como Antonio de Hoyos y Répide al comienzo del siglo. Alfonso venía a ser el defensor del homosexual, como el otro Alfonso, Vidal y Planas lo era de la prostituta ... y se daba ínfulas de apóstol social" ("*El ángel de Sodoma* made all the inverts in literature cry from emotion and its author was favored by grateful congratulations by the Pepito Zamoras and the Pepito Ojedas, who now flaunted the Wildean banner so unscrupulously like Antonio de Hoyos and Répide at the start of the century. Alfonso became the defender of the homosexual, like the other Alfonso, Vidal and Planas were of the prostitute ... and put on airs of a social apostle"; 360-61; ellipsis in original). According to Martín-Márquez, Cansinos-Asséns was "a pronounced homophobe who nonetheless socialized with many gays in Madrid" (194).

[homosexuality]. That was dangerous; they were going to include him in the number of *invertes* and attribute the psychology of his hero [the protagonist of the novel, José-María] to him” (“Daguerre, por su parte, encontraba muy bien escrita la obra, pero lamentaba que el autor hubiese elegido ese argumento [la homosexualidad]. Aquello era peligroso; lo iban a incluir a él en el número de los *invertidos* y atribuirle la psicología de su héroe [el protagonista de la novela, José-María]”; 361; emphasis added). After both editions of *El ángel de Sodoma* appeared in bookstands, Article 616 of the Penal Code in Spain criminalized homosexual acts under the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja (1923-30; seven years in power), and the law lasted until 1932. Therefore, Daguerre’s concerns are legitimate, however, Hernández-Catá was careful and he wanted to challenge detractors, like his “friend,” who thought that the idea of writing a novel about homosexuality and sexual inversion was reprehensible.

It is likely that the conversation that Hernández-Catá fictionalizes in the epigraphic preface cited above (the epigraph to this chapter, no less) is inspired by exchanges he had with intellectuals, artists, and other figures who, like Daguerre, disapproved of homosexuality and gender “deviance” in literature and society, thus pointing towards a larger problem about sex, power, and national identity.<sup>28</sup> For instance, in his study on the novel—“Reframing Sodom: Sexuality, Nation, and Difference in Hernández Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma*”—Alejandro Mejías-López notes that in the epigraphic preface the respondent defends the authority of literature over science at the insistence of his interlocutor (endnote 7), which may have been a problem for readers who thought otherwise, especially the writers of the prologue and epilogue to the second edition of the novel: Spanish physician and historian Gregorio Marañón (1887-1960) and Spanish criminologist and one of the

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<sup>28</sup> Abel Sierra Madero makes this observation as well: “On the first page of the book, Hernández Catá narrates an anecdote about the comments he received on his disposition to write a novel about that topic” (“En la página inicial del libro, Hernández Catá narra una anécdota acerca de los comentarios que recibió ante su disposición de escribir una novela sobre el tema”; 139).

main engineers of the Spanish republican constitution of 1931, Luis Jiménez de Asúa (1889-1970). As Mejías-López rightfully notes, “Both Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa extol the merits of the book and its author, but behind the open praise there is a barely veiled anxiety about the very nature of the literary text, its authority and its openness to interpretation; therefore, both must be curtailed by the joint effort of doctor and lawyer.”<sup>29</sup>

Both editions of *El ángel de Sodoma* are dedicated to Marañón, who Hernández-Catá knew well and whose reputable name could have saved the text from censorship. Sinclair notes that sexual reformers and eugenicists walked a tightrope under Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship when it came to publishing texts, however Marañón “managed to avoid difficulties with the authorities, conceivably because he was a publicly approved figure” (59). In his prologue to the novel’s second edition, Marañón makes distinctions between sex and gender categories upon writing his own version of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), which he entitled almost identically: *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* (Three Essays on Sexual Life; 1926). In addition to this book, he expands on his ideas in later endocrinological studies in which he argues that humans develop as intersexual or bisexual beings, but that one sex, either male or female, must eventually dominate the other. Therefore, sexual inversion, or an individual’s adoption of behaviors of the opposite sex (oftentimes male to female), is a deviation from the norm.

Although Marañón advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality, he still considered homosexuality a pathological illness and sexual inversion an abnormality:

In sum, we can conclude that intersexuality is an obligatory and temporary phase—although not always definitively temporary—of normal evolution; while homosexuality is an abhorrent episode of that evolution, although it may not have a meaning of monstrosity or illness, instead a profound root in declining abnormality. ... The homosexual is simply the son of an evolutionary loss. He is not a sick person nor a monster, neither a delinquent, even when he can break the law like a person of the more perfect sex.

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<sup>29</sup> His article was published online, therefore it has no pagination.

Y en suma, podemos concluir que la intersexualidad es una fase obligada y pasajera—aunque no siempre definitivamente pasajera—de la evolución normal; en tanto que la homosexualidad es un episodio aberrante de esa evolución, aunque no tenga un significado de monstruosidad ni de enfermedad, sino una raíz profunda en la anormalidad periclitada. ... El homosexual es simplemente el hijo de un extravío evolutivo. No es un enfermo ni un monstruo, ni tampoco un delincuente, aun cuando puede delinquir como el individuo de sexo más perfecto. (29-30)

By today's standards, we might consider Marañón's views as medically outdated and even homophobic, however, many figures during his time, including advocates and sympathizers of homosexuality, "adopted scientific positions precisely because such a strategy could take them outside the parameters of the contemporary religious, legal and moral strictures" of society and the state in order to advocate for its decriminalization (Crozier 12). For instance, Jiménez de Asúa was also against criminalization and writes in the novel's epilogue to the second edition: "...what is most lamentable for us is that the Spanish Code, with anachronistic ineptitude, has made homosexuality into a criminal figure and punishes it in Article 616" ("...lo más lamentable para nosotros es que el Código español, con torpeza anacrónica, haya hecho del homosexualismo una figura delictiva y la castigue en su artículo 616"; 245).

In the same epilogue, nonetheless, Jiménez de Asúa endorses Marañón's views on the pathological nature of homosexuality/sexual inversion: "In Spain, Gregorio Marañón ... affirms that 'every form of sexual inversion corresponds to an organic self-inversion' and that 'the invert is, then, as responsible for his abnormality as a diabetic would be of his glycosuria'" ("En España, Gregorio Marañón ... afirma que «toda forma de inversión sexual corresponde a una inversión orgánica propia» y que «el invertido es, pues, tan responsable de su anormalidad como pudiera serlo el diabético de su glucosuria»"; 243-44). He takes this further, albeit ambivalently, in an interview that he mentions in said epilogue: "In an interview that a journalist from *The Herald* did of me on 6 May [1929] I criticized popular beliefs that portray inverts as vicious, without realizing that they are truly sick, and I attacked the new Code that punishes the homosexual as a delinquent" ("En una interviú que me hizo el 6 de mayo [de 1929] un periodista del *Heraldo* critiqué las creencias del vulgo, que

mira como viciosos a los invertidos, sin percatarse de que son verdaderos enfermos, y arremetí contra el nuevo Código, que castiga como delincuente al homosexual” (247). He is referring to the Penal Code under Primo de Rivera mentioned earlier, which he decries, although he simultaneously adds to the pathological stigmatization of sexual inversion.

Henceforth, *El ángel de Sodoma* contributed in small measure to the growing visibility of, and discourse on, homosexuality as a result of the ongoing suppression and criminalization of the practice in political and legal rhetoric and social and institutional sectors. Marañón himself attests to the success of *El ángel de Sodoma* in his prologue to the novel:

After its triumphant initial voyage through the public and criticism, Hernández-Catá’s book makes the same trip in this second edition; it’s the first important literary work that has been constructed in our language about the argument on a sexual aberration, which has been eliminated from the kingdom of art for being immoral and monstrous, but that in life serves as an argument for innumerable dramas and tragedies, and that, in some distant and diffuse form, influences a good part of the activity of our societies. Its appearance coincides with that of the first scientific books in which the study of this same problem is addressed.

El libro de Hernández Catá que, después de su inicial viaje triunfador por el público y la crítica vuelve ahora a emprenderle en esta segunda edición, es la primera obra literaria importante que en nuestra lengua se ha construído sobre el argumento de una aberración de la sexualidad, eliminada por inoral y monstruosa del reino del arte, pero que en la vida sirve de argumento a innumerables dramas y tragedias, y que, de un modo lejano y difuso, influye en buena parte de la actividad de nuestras sociedades. Su aparición coincide con la de los primeros libros científicos en que se aborda el estudio de este mismo problema. (21-22)

It is unlikely, however, that in Spain the novel brought about real change to counter homophobia and view that homosexuality is unnatural, especially after prominent figures hindered its reception in the wake of sexual repression during Primo de Rivera’s government as well as its later intensification during Francisco Franco’s dictatorship from 1939 to 1975. Yet, Cleminson and Vázquez García allege: “Though it is improbable that most homosexuals would have come across the novel by Hernández-Catá or even the theories of Gregorio Marañón, that there were some reverberations of this kind of work in some quarters of the broad homosexual subculture is, as we have already suggested, undeniable” (243). I would add that this might have been the case in other sectors of social and intellectual life too, and not just in homosexual subculture. These different sectors

(literary, sexological, and legal) intersected, otherwise neither Marañón nor Jiménez de Asúa would have known about it. In addition, suggestive or erotic novels (*literatura sicalíptica*) were extremely popular during this time period, making their suppression—and therefore, impact—by society and state censorship more noticeable.

Notwithstanding, *El ángel de Sodoma* should be noted for more than its negative or affirming portrayal of homoerotic content. Typically, readers and critics have been inclined to only focus on this topic. In this chapter, I contend that while *El ángel de Sodoma* sheds light on the merits of a literary project that raises readers' consciousness of the repression of homosexuality, it also raises awareness of the impact of hegemonic masculinity on not just the homosexual characters but the heterosexual ones as well. According to R.W. Connell's gender order theory, hegemonic masculinity is a practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and their relations of alliance within a framework of gender politics against women (both cisgender and queer), marginalized people (namely gay men), and effeminacy (e.g., sexual inverts, intersex or transgender people, and crossdressers). It derives from the theory on cultural hegemony by Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), which explains how the unequal distribution of power within the cultural dynamics of a hierarchical society leads to the dominance of certain social groups. Cisgender and heterosexual men typically embody the traditional archetype of hegemonic masculinity by falling in line with the institutions that set patriarchy in place such as the labor market, the family, the Church, the state, among others: "Within this framework, hegemonic masculinity is also seen as being institutionalized in largescale gender regimes, that is, as a process that involves both social structure and personal life" (Demetriou 341). As such, a "complicit masculinity" is established that is institutionally honored both by men and civil society in general (Connell 79-80). As a result, patriarchal masculinities become a cultural ideal or form of cultural hegemony that reproduces hegemonic masculinities.

At the same time, hegemonic masculinity and its reproduction of patriarchy “is in a constant process of negotiation, translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration” (Demetriou 355). It is negotiated among men themselves in the way they exclude or include other men and how these men translate their own masculinity when faced with forces that threaten it. It is also not exclusive to white, heterosexual males but to men of all races, genders, sexualities, classes, and backgrounds, even, for example, gay men who discriminate against each other based on ethnicity, degree of effeminacy, etc. Moreover, it is reconfigured according to the affects, laws, relations, and changes that impact a person, community, or nation by will of both dominant and consenting parties. The level of consent, if minimal, allows for it to also be challenged and subverted while being attentive to how new, softer, subversive, or camouflaged forms can “appear less oppressive or egalitarian” when in truth they are the opposite, as is the case with many sexual reformers’ conceptions of homosexuality during the early twentieth century: that it should be decriminalized but it is still abnormal and does not fit in the cultural ideal of patriarchy.

I argue that the sexual invert, José-María, is the transitive link that holds the tension between both ends of the chain of hegemonic masculinity. One end of the chain pressures him to reproduce patriarchy and sociocultural biases while the other end urges him to think of ways of executing his agency to free himself from its grasp and create new links that nurture his autonomy and self-realization. As such I explore how hegemonic masculinity leads to a reflection of the limits of sex and gender expression in tandem with the possible exercising of the will toward emancipatory action and self-realization, even in the face of death. For instance, contrary to homophobic readings of the text, I argue that José-María’s suicide, instead of reinforcing the power that the family name and Spanish community have over his autonomy, is an act of defiance against reproducing its patriarchal legacy in light of José-María’s femininity and same-sex desire, which preclude him from perpetuating the family name through procreation and from the reproduction of Spanish heteronormativity.

Based on a critical close reading of the epigraphic preface and the novel, I also argue that hegemonic masculinity is attached to a sociohistorical concern over Spanish *regeneracionismo* (regenerationism), a ‘vital disposition’ that, from the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, sought to rid Spain of corruption and combat backwardness in order to rebuild the country’s sociopolitical and intellectual life through processes of modernization and nationalist fervor.<sup>30</sup> This meant that the traditional makeup of the family, as the nuclear microcosm of the nation, had to remain intact via the conservation of patriarchy and the regulation of sex and gender non-conformity in order to preserve male power. Otherwise, the loss of virility, as Cleminson and Vázquez García observe, would be associated with “the decline of political and military clout ... Political instability, economic dependence on other countries, the lack of individual initiative, corruption, favouritism and class struggle,” which in turn were attributed to “a lack of will power and organic coherence of the nation and the exhaustion of collective energy, all of which were seen to have resulted in the decline of the ‘race’” (68). This decline was part of the discourse of *de*-generation, with *re*-generation serving as its counterpart.

These tendencies became more popular as the regenerationist revolution of the masses became more dependent on a “cirujano de hierro” (“iron surgeon”)—a temporary dictator *ideally* guided by juridical and constitutional law to manage the nation’s direction and deliverables at home and abroad—in order to restore Spain to its colonial past, its “essence,” and its competitive standing against other nations. Part of this plan of national restoration was the “recuperation of virility in the form of strong men and institutions [modeled after the authoritarianism of the dictatorial strongman] to extirpate the cancerous growths which marred Spanish attempts at improvement and that sank the nation in abulia or extreme apathy” (18). As a result, homosexuality and sexual

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<sup>30</sup> Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell (2001) note: “En realidad al regeneracionismo se lo debe definir más como una actitud o un talante vital que como una escuela de pensamiento” (“In reality, regenerationism should be defined more as an attitude or vital disposition than a school of thought”; 206).

inversion were excluded from this recipe since “the notion of effeminacy as a lack of virility was deemed by many political, philosophical and social commentators as one of the reasons—in tandem with structural deficiencies in the Spanish economy, political institutions and psyche—why Spain had fallen behind other nations and had become ‘decadent’” (*ibid.*). As such, I interpret *El ángel de Sodoma* as an allegorical critique of the failures of the hegemonic masculinity that characterized regenerationism, which the heterosexual characters (Santiago and Jaime) exemplify and José-María reproduces as a result of his biased perceptions of femininity, the social pressures to conform, and his high-class reputation skewing his worldview. Yet while José-María struggles to reconcile his femininity with his social male identity, that same femininity with which he struggles affords him the agency to not be a prisoner of circumstance but to act on his own will, even if sustaining that principle leads to his own annihilation.

Previous studies on *El ángel de Sodoma* have focused on taking sides in the debate on whether the novel is homophobic or emancipatory based on the politics of the decriminalization of homosexuality, and on Marañón’s and Jiménez de Asúa’s constrictive paratexts that bookend the narrative. As Mejías-López highlights: “Despite understanding the framing texts as repressive, literary critics have interpreted the novel precisely as Marañón and [Jiménez de] Asúa intended, reading it as a mere vehicle for the scientific and nationalistic homophobic views put forth in their essays.”<sup>31</sup> Although Hernández-Catá was influenced by the social politics of sex and gender during

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<sup>31</sup> Mejías-López’s study is from 2007, therefore he is referring to previously published studies that constrict the novel to its scientific and legal framing, thus offering a negative and homophobic portrayal of José-María’s character and story. These include Victor Fowler’s chapter, “El ángel de Sodoma” in his book *La maldición: una historia del placer como conquista* (1998); Emilio Bejel’s article, “Positivist Contradictions in Hernández-Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma*” (2000), redeveloped in the fourth chapter of his book *Gay Cuban Nation* (2001); Juan Carlos Galdo’s article “Usos y lecciones del discurso ejemplar: a propósito de *El ángel de Sodoma* de Alfonso Hernández Catá” (2000); Maite Zubiaurre’s “Introducción” to Stockero’s 2011 reprint of the novel; and Luis Navarro-Ayala’s dissertation chapter “Frenchness?: The Homoerotization of the Hispanoamerican Narrative in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century” (2012). Nonetheless, Jeffrey Zamostny’s 2012 dissertation chapter, “Gretchen’s Place: Chaste Inverts between Tradition and Modernity in *La antorcha apagada* and *El ángel de Sodoma*,” puts a spin on repressive readings of the text by highlighting that José-María’s tragic death is not a result of his sexual condition but of making the mistake of not changing his last name in Paris, which would have prevented receipt of the letter from the Jamaican consulate about his brother’s death, and consequently, the obligation of confronting the family’s dishonor (282-308).

his time, thus inspiring the novel's content, I contend that the text is not set on resolving the debate on whether homosexuality should be criminalized nor, by extension, on taking sides about whether its story is homophobic or emancipatory. Instead, I argue that the novel gives visibility to *both* sides of the discursive and experiential ramifications of social non-conformity and hegemonic masculinity in the lives of *both* non-conforming *and* conforming individuals, groups, and subcultures in concert with matters of race, class, and belonging. In other words, the novel is not just about portraying homosexuality as a social problem. It also explores the male versus female and masculine versus feminine gender binaries that are pertinent to sexual inversion in order to problematize *both* gender normativity *and* non-normative masculinities in its intersections with biased discourses and discriminatory practices.

If there is one main goal of the novel that Marañón got right, albeit misguided and misleadingly, is that it exalts womanhood, therefore hinting at the novel's emphasis on gender expression (41). What is more, Cleminson and Vázquez García remind us that homosexuality was seen as a 'foreign vice,' therefore, "Of more immediate concern amongst doctors and regenerationists, however, was the broad notion of 'effeminacy' in males. This quality was associated with passivity, with a lack of vital energy, with an excess of sensibility and bohemian lifestyles in the cities" (180). José-María embodies all of these concerns, while his homosexuality is an additional layer placed on his already bewildering gender identity triggered by the foreign acrobat that his brother brings from overseas. By problematizing the spectrum of gender and sexuality, the novel extends further its critique to other aspects of (Spanish) society, such as the moral hypocrisy of patriarchy, socioeconomic privilege, and classist, racist, and gender-based prejudice, not only as reflected in homosexual subculture, but also in the sociopolitical arena of the nation-state, particularly as a result of Santiago and Jaime's dishonorable acts; again, lifting the onus of responsibility off of the sexual invert.

Thematic variety can be seen in the way the writer in the epigraphic preface defies his interlocutor's objections to write about 'asuntos ingratos' ('unpleasant subjects'), as in not one but *many* social issues. Based on this line of interpretation, the story of the Vélez-Gomaras in *El ángel de Sodoma* can be read as a fictional representation of the sociopolitical and economic problems that troubled Spanish society from the time of the Restoration of 1876 to beyond the fascist government of Francisco Franco (1939-75). As Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell point out: "Regenerationism transcended the thought of its creators and it reached a prominence of decisive importance in Spanish political and intellectual life throughout all of the twentieth century" ("El regeneracionismo trascendió el pensamiento de quienes fueron sus creadores y llegó a tener un protagonismo de decisiva importancia en la vida política e intelectual española a lo largo de todo el siglo XX"; 213).

In what follows of section two in this chapter, I explain how the metafictional qualities of the epigraphic preface to *El ángel de Sodoma* allow us to establish the allegorical relationship between the novel's fictional account of sexual inversion with the historical reality that inspired it. I argue that Hernández-Catá achieves this by transforming sexual inversion into symbolic inversion via the metaphoric treatment of the former in the epigraphic preface and its reversal from a taboo to a topic worth writing about in the fictional narrative that follows it. In section three, I critique Mejías-López's interpretation of the novel as calling the reader to take an ethical stance of justice for the homosexual. I contest his views in order to problematize the tendency to discuss the novel as *either* homophobic *or* emancipatory based on the historical criminalization of homosexuality. If looked at more closely, we realize that José-María has not committed any infractions of the law. Perhaps the question should be whether justice should be served for his father's corruption and his brother's contraband, issues worth exploring further since both, as I will show, are held responsible for the family's downfall. What is more, whatever repression he may feel cannot be attributed only to his environment but to his own perceptions and self-loathing, thus making the question of justice for

the homosexual an irresolute one. Even in the midst of his self-abjection, he tries to overcome these obstacles on his own terms, without the help of the law or the authorities. Arguing otherwise would give credence to Marañón's and Jiménez de Asúa's scientific and judicially misguided and disparaging approaches to the novel that discredit José-María's agency to act on his own will.

I contend that the novel's argument is not centered, nor does it take a position on, the legality and criminological aspects of homosexuality because these are not explicitly addressed in-depth, if at all, in the story, nor are physical or materialized acts of homophobia. Although there are patriarchal rules that José-María is expected to follow, in many instances he is fighting against his own consciousness that has internalized the repression, homophobia, and fear of the feminine as a result of a culture of silence that he has also imposed on himself, which is in contrast to direct external attacks on his person typical of a hate crime. Even in cases of potential indirect, internal, or affective repression caused by his environment, José-María has the option of living in Paris where such restrictions do not matter, save his own internalized prejudices against effeminacy. There is the problem of his brother-in-law's letter, which states that he had sent telegrams notifying journalists of José-María's stay in Paris, an aspect that I also interpret as a meager concern. Instead of bringing justice, the novel is set up to problematize rather than solve this conundrum in order to shift the focus on how the becoming of the self is achieved within itself in the midst of unpleasant circumstances and in its own psychological prison. Part of this becoming is coming to terms with personal biases and prejudices that hinder this process of individuality and self-making. It also suggests that this dilemma should not be conflated with the problem of family honor for which Santiago and Jaime are held responsible. In the end, family honor is forsaken when José-María decides to go to Paris and he is ready to break free from its grasp, ultimately sacrificing his own life in order to annihilate the Vélez-Gomara name. I analyze the novel's ending in order to discuss these events in more detail.

In chapter two, I trace how the terminological and socio-medical history of sexual reform and the degeneration/regenerationism dyad in Spain is reflected in the narrative of *El ángel de Sodoma* in order to demonstrate that the complex sociohistorical and political underpinnings of the novel are tied to this history, which allows for a more comprehensive interpretation of the text in relation to sex and gender and its intersections with race, class, and belonging. Such an approach moves away from the limited scope of the homophobic/emancipatory/justice approach into an exploration of the multilayered dimensions of sex and gender in the text. In section two, I transition from the broad spectrum of sexual reform internationally and in Spain to a more focused discussion on how it manifested in the Spanish-Moroccan War. I specifically examine how the conflict prompted the mobilization of stereotypical tropes of virility and effeminacy based on the “racially inferior and sexually perverse” Moroccans in order to legitimize Spain’s regenerationist agenda and masculinized myth of nationalist power. I demonstrate how these ‘dis-Orient-ations’ are illustrated in the novel via the miscegenation of the Vélez-Gomara family, the intersecting Orientalist stereotypes of perversion and foreignness in the text, and the regenerationist discourse that José-María espouses in order to save his family from moral and financial ruin.

In the third section, I particularly look at how Primo de Rivera’s response to the Rif War problematized Spanish hegemony and the myth of the new modern man in ways that showed the failures of regenerationism. I begin by interpreting the father in *El ángel de Sodoma*, Don Santiago, as an allegorical representation of Primo de Rivera’s regenerationist dictatorship based on the destabilization of the masculine/feminine gender binary in the novel and how this mirrors the precarity of hegemonic masculinity in Primo de Rivera’s government and in sociopolitical reform. In the last section, I show how the failures of regenerationism are reflected in José-María’s struggle to maintain his family’s reputation intact. José-María responds to this problem by preserving his agency and fighting for his own becoming as a person, which is at a crossroads throughout the novel up to

his suicide. I argue that death is not the end of José-María's resolve to exist as an autonomous individual but a revelation of how, by annihilating himself, he relinquishes the family name and its perpetuation, thus representing the failures of hegemonic masculinity and social inequity in the novel and the shadow of its historical backdrop.

I end this chapter and part one by reflecting on how Hernández-Catá's stirring of the mud in the epigraphic preface is a metaphor for his artistic handling of the various themes, issues, and discourses in the novel, especially the final symbiosis of preservation and annihilation essential to José-María's self-realization and its reflection in Spanish society and government. The discourse of degeneration is reproduced in *El ángel de Sodoma* by a protagonist who espouses its hegemonic masculinity and fear of the feminine mindset. However, these tenants are symbolically reversed by not just the sexual invert's "degeneracy," because while José-María struggles to reconcile effeminacy, it is the authenticity of his femininity that allows him to execute his agency and aspire to freedom. It is also reversed by the loss of masculinity in the heterosexual characters, which reflect the destabilization of virility in Spain in tandem with its classist, racist, and nationalist relations with Morocco. Cleminson and Vázquez García argue that as the 1920s wore on in Spain, "more spaces for self-affirmation or resistance ... are 'forged in conflict with medico-scientific [and sociopolitical] discourses which pathologize homosexuality' [and sexual inversion] and show how subjects become 'excessive' to the discourses from which they (at least partially) emerge" (14). *El ángel de Sodoma* holds a significant place in literary production as an example of the realities that exceed these binarial and stigmatizing discourses at a crucial time when the construction and dismantling of sex and gender expression and identities informed social and national histories in ways that reflect how they were negotiated in a *transitioning* world order that can still be witnessed today.

## II. CHAPTER ONE. ‘(Re)Framing’ Sexual Inversion and Degeneration in Alfonso Hernández-Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma*<sup>32</sup>

### 1.1. From Sexual to Symbolic Inversion: The Epigraphic Preface

The first edition of *El ángel de Sodoma* was published in 1928 and an amended second edition in 1929. Both were published in Madrid by the Mundo Latino publishing house as small paperbacks divided into ten unnumbered and untitled chapters. Unlike the first edition, the front cover of the second one announces both Marañón’s prologue and Jiménez de Asúa’s epilogue. In both editions, nonetheless, there is an epigraph on Genesis, Chapter 18, which reads: “And Abraham drew near and said: Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Genesis, 18” (“Y acercóse Abraham y dijo: ¿Destruirás por igual al inocente y al impío? El juez de toda la tierra, ¿será injusto? Génesis, 18”).<sup>33</sup> In both editions, this epigraph is placed before the first paragraph, or opening, of the fictional story of the novel. (Note that the verse numbers from Genesis are not included, an aspect that I soon address.) For now, I would like to underscore how the epigraphic preface cited at the beginning of this chapter and found in both editions of the novel is placed before the epigraph on Genesis and Marañón’s prologue. Therefore, it headlines and frames all paratexts and the fictional narrative of the book, including the dedication to Marañón (“A Gregorio Marañón”), which can also be found in both editions. As such, I focus on the text’s content (including Marañón’s prologue and Jiménez de Asúa’s epilogue) with regard to its framing by the epigraphic preface in the first edition and its re-framing in the second one, and in relation to José-María’s internal conflict with sexual inversion and same-sex desire.

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<sup>32</sup> The ‘(Re)Framing’ part of this chapter’s title is taken from Alejandro Mejías-López’s article on the short novel “Reframing Sodom: Sexuality, Nation, and Difference in Hernández Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma*” (2007).

<sup>33</sup> I have decided to translate this biblical excerpt myself because we do not know from what Spanish version of the Bible Hernández-Catá is citing and it is likely that he wrote it to fictionally fit his own style according to the novel’s themes.

While José-María's conflict is most apparent in the main text, it actually begins in the epigraphic preface. There are four reasons why this is and why the epigraphic preface is perhaps the most significant of the places where sexual inversion is problematized. First, its placement before the main narrative instantiates the *symbolic inversion* that Hernández-Catá employs in order to metaphorically frame the story within the discursive parameters of sex and gender non-conformity. Second, it is a fictionalized dialogue that discusses the story that the novel tells, therefore making it an inextricable extension of the main narrative and an element integral to its interpretation. Third, it introduces the metaphors of the swamp and mud, which are key components to understanding the ambiguous complexity of the stigmatizing versus affirming representation of gender and sexuality in the text and the freedom that José-María seeks. Lastly, it blurs the lines between author, narrator, and text to the extent that we must also consider how the voice of the writer (the respondent in the epigraphic preface) is Hernández-Catá's alter ego, functioning almost like a phantasmagorical voiceover of the narrative text that is also tied to the novel's historical context. This is not to suggest that the author speaks for the main character, as in putting words in his mouth. As Mejías-López points out, the novel is narrated in both direct and free indirect speech, therefore "we witness José María's own thoughts," and the expression of his perceptions and desires "are his own and not that of the narrative voice" (endnote 13). Even so, in many instances we can hear the echo of Hernández-Catá's voice distilled through the protagonist.

In my view, analyzing the dialogue of the epigraphic preface and how its themes are in relation to those in the main narrative is crucial for a more nuanced reading and critical analysis of the novel. As Mejías-López notes, the epigraphic preface is "the framing of the frame" of the text, or a double framing, because it appears before other paratexts and the fictional narrative. It is also the first instance in which we can see three aspects of the aesthetic of symbolic inversion at work in the text's (1) paratextual quality; (2) the respondent's inversion of the image of the swamp; and (3)

the respondent's defense of a kind of writing and literary aesthetic that dialogues with the sociohistorical context by which *El ángel de Sodoma* is inspired.

While it is customary for writers to use epigraphs to entice the reader with a snapshot of what is to come in the main narrative, Hernández-Catá seems to be doing more than that with the epigraphic preface, which is a paratext, or the liminal device within and/or outside the book “that forms part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader” (Genette, epigraph). Gérard Genette describes the paratext as “a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that ... is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (2). In many cases, epigraphic paratexts are citations of quotations or sayings from other sources. In the one above (i.e., cited as the opening to the introduction to part one), however, it is an original narrative piece written by Hernández-Catá, or what Genette would call, an *autographic epigraph*, that is, one that is attributed to the epigrapher or author of the book (152). The autographic nature of the anonymous epigraph—one that belongs to the author—reveals a level of personal commitment, as in it is part of “authorial discourse,” which functions as a short preface (Genette 153).

As such, in the epigraphic preface Hernández-Catá seeks to establish himself as an implied author posing as a writer-character that inverts the perceived ideological and aesthetical misconceptions of his interlocutor. I understand that this is an idea contingent on the theory that the implied author is a construction resulting from my engagement as a reader with the text and that it does not necessarily establish the intermediary position of the implied author as its real author, that is, Hernández-Catá. However, I attempt to make a case for the synergy between both based on the historical context and aesthetical forms that condition the text on which I will shortly elaborate. In this regard, the epigraphic preface can be interpreted as Hernández-Catá's attempt to frame the novel in a particular theme about the inexplicit 'eso' insofar that it establishes him and writers of

narrative fiction as literary and cultural authorities that weigh in on the representation and interpretation of social taboos.<sup>34</sup>

The epigraphic preface straddles between sociohistorical context and literary artifice upon mediating the transition from the externally historical to the internally literary properties of the text. Since the novel is mainly about José-María, a young man who struggles with his sexual inversion and same-sex desire, we know that the ‘eso’ in the epigraph is, in part, referring to these conflicts, which the characters in the epigraphic preface discuss. At the same time, the writer acting as the respondent in the dialogue turns ‘eso’ into an extended metaphor comprised of antitheses about poetic-literary content and form (*fondo y forma*) in a style that is metaliterary, or when literature describe its own properties. The epigraphic preface is a fictional text about literature as illustrated by the reference to poetasters and about writing *El ángel de Sodoma* in its comparison to the discourses of scientific chemistry. It is also a metafictional construction about the art of writing, literature, and the value of a realist aesthetic. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as a term “given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2). The use of metafictional devices allows Hernández-Catá to position himself both inside and outside the text, making the separation between author and character in the epigraph less tenable; ergo, the relation is symbiotic. This allows Hernández-Catá to feature the respondent as his alter ego, possibly inspired by the exchange he had with Daguerre and his disdain towards the novelist for choosing to write about homosexuality. Although Hernández-Catá does not *actually* appear as a character, nor has a voice in the text, he forms part of the dialectic narrative as “the source for the aggregate of norms and opinions that makes up [its] ideology” (Herman 16). Therefore, his metafictional inscription allows

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<sup>34</sup> Genette underscores this function of the epigraph: “The second possible function of the epigraph is undoubtedly the most canonical: it consists of commenting on the *text*, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes” (157).

him to respond to questions that his interlocutor poses about the novel's fictional representation of a real social taboo.

One can notice Hernández-Catá's naturalist and modernist styles of writing in the epigraphic preface, which are characterized by a *mélange* of literary devices such as irony, satire, and antithesis and by an eclecticism in aesthetical elaboration and thematic content.<sup>35</sup> Antithesis in his texts, along with irony, operate as inversion would, whereby meanings and concepts are reversed in concert with other forms of signification.<sup>36</sup> Hernández-Catá employs these literary devices in the epigraphic preface, particularly in the way the respondent underscores the poetasters' abject rendering of beauty as a contrast between the grotesque and the pleasant. The writer-respondent places the quality of his writing above the poetasters' by insinuating that he will *stir the mud of the swamp*—the 'eso'—in a manner that is more noteworthy, first and foremost by extracting from the mephitic nocturnal dews, greasy ponds, rotten roots, and detritus the unblemished, pure, and iridescent essences of irises and water lilies. Pureness will ensue from the symbolic inversion of these natural elements so as to imply that ugliness is beauty, and to the extent that *El ángel de Sodoma* will give this motif continuity as a paradox that emerges from the juxtaposition of the sexual invert's repulsion as "other" with his virtue. In turn, the epigraphic metaphor virtually ends when the repulsion of *eso* is transformed from a sexual euphemism to a justification for writing, therefore reconfiguring sexual inversion into literary artifice via the inversion of metaphoric symbols.

On the one hand, Hernández-Catá demonstrates a tendency to elaborate the gravity of a social reality, as seen in the rest of his literature regarding individuals marginalized and ostracized by

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed study on modernism and naturalism in Hernández-Catá's works, see Clavijo (1991), Aragón (1996) and Febles (1989).

<sup>36</sup> *Irony* is defined as "the perception or awareness of a discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality" in which there may be "an element of the absurd and the paradoxical" (Cuddon 430). *Antithesis* is defined as "contrasting ideas sharpened by the use of opposite or noticeably different meanings" (46).

society.<sup>37</sup> On the other, he employs the ‘artistic chemistry’ of a modern aesthetic in order to highlight the congruities and incongruities, and the closures and excesses of said reality as it relates to gender and sexuality. In effect, the interlocutor’s description of ‘eso,’ as not just about sexual inversion but also about the pluralized “*asuntos ingratos*” (unpleasant subjects/matters)—as referring to not one but *many* issues—is telling of the magnitude of the book’s thematic content and its antithetical ideological and conceptual ramifications, those on which Hernández-Catá’s alter ego hopes to elaborate via writing in spite of his friend’s objections.

On the one hand, the interlocutor seems to take the ‘eso’ as referring to the novel’s subject matter: homosexuality. On the other, he refers to it as part of a plurality of issues, while implicating the respondent’s motives for writing a book that is about more than just homosexuality. At the same time, the respondent addresses the ‘eso’ as the detritus from which he will extract pure essences via a literary project. In other words, his writing will obtain purity from the unpleasant subjects. This motive denotes two aims: first, by killing José-María he will extract the impurities from his life, his family, and environment, thus giving continuity to his comparison to an angel whose soul is redeemable; and second, he will turn the murky content of his story into a work of artistic beauty.

In the epigraphic preface, the reader gets a glimpse of Hernández-Catá’s pluralistic aesthetic philosophy that he then employs in the main narrative that follows. For instance, in his essay about the art of writing, “*Estética del tiempo: lo nuevo, lo viejo y lo antiguo*” (Havana, 15 June 1928), Hernández-Catá emphasizes the impossibility of absolute meaning and underscores its pluralism and diversity through the work of artistic renewal and semantic open-endedness. The essay was published the same year, but four months before, the first edition of *El ángel de Sodoma* had

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<sup>37</sup> Hernández-Catá’s affinity to morbid stories, the idiosyncrasies of human desire, and the eccentricities of the mentally and physically ill can be traced in his short story collections, from the first one published in 1909, *Cuentos pasionales*, to perhaps its highest expression in *Manicomio* (Insane Asylum; 1931). Also see Clavijo (1991) and Aragón (1996) for a detailed study on the social aspects of Hernández-Catá’s oeuvre.

finished printing at the Mundo Latino press, therefore it is possible that his philosophy on the creative process inspired the novel.<sup>38</sup> He writes:

A large part of the misunderstandings from all sorts of speculations stem from not re-evaluating the conceptual substance of things and departing from vague knowledge that laziness or vanity take as concrete. ... Distrust every school, every formula. ... If the same womb conceives a blonde person and another brunette, and a clear mind and another murky, and a generous character and another perverse; if the same education shapes two diametrical forms of consciousness, the same aesthetic theory will germinate flowers and fruit of diverse colors, forms, and flavors in every true artist.

Gran parte de los equívocos en toda suerte de especulaciones viene de no reevaluar el concepto sustantivo de las cosas y de partir de un conocimiento vago que la pereza o la vanidad toman por concreto. ... Desconfiad de toda escuela, de toda fórmula. ... Si el mismo vientre da un ser rubio y otro moreno, y una mente clara y otra turbia, y un carácter generoso y otro perverso; si la misma educación forma dos conciencias diametrales, la misma teoría estética germinará con flores y frutos de colores y formas y sabores diversos en cada artista verdadero. (141, 143)

In this excerpt, Hernández-Catá argues that it is important to scrutinize things in depth and not superficially. He emphasizes how knowledge is relative and subjective in a way that produces different results per individual in the same way that one womb or theory can germinate different beings or artistic renderings as opposed to an absolute totality. More important, he ties biological, moral, and philosophical binaries with aesthetics and expands them beyond their dualities into a theory of diversification. He postulates that aesthetical practice should distrust and surpass institutionalized and formulaic binaries that constrict variety. By espousing such a view, he also implies that binarial structures of thinking preclude ambiguity and he suggests that writing destabilizes them into a realm that breaks down their Manichaeian presuppositions. With *El ángel de Sodoma*, he essentially follows this philosophy by refusing to acquiesce to normative literary conventions (as seen in the epigraphic preface) and by portraying an individual who questions and resists binarial discourses on sexual regeneration. These factors lead me to consider *El ángel de*

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<sup>38</sup> According to the colophon of the first edition of *El ángel de Sodoma*, the book had finished printing at the press on 17 October 1928.

*Sodoma* as exemplary of the ways that Hernández-Catá's writing destabilizes the production of knowledge and world-making via a text that deconstructs itself.<sup>39</sup>

The work of deconstruction, in the Derridean sense, is to show that the meaning and purpose of things—texts, practices, traditions, beliefs—are indeterminable and indefinable. The moment in which the meaning and mission of an object or experience are constrained to a definition or label, they slip away. Deconstruction disrupts, destabilizes, expands, transgresses, and interrupts the boundaries and constraints of a unity: “Deconstruction is the relentless pursuit of the impossible,” that which is yet to come (Caputo 31-32).<sup>40</sup> However, as Derrida points out, it is not a method or tool that can be applied but rather “something which happens and which happens within,” which is why it is not an outright and complete rejection of what it deconstructs because in order to deconstruct one needs that which has been constructed (9). Rather, it seeks to expose the contradictions and internal oppositions of the constitution of things in order to reveal their complexity and uncontainability within one process, method, institution, or language. This is what Hernández-Catá tries to convey in his essay and through his representation of sexual inversion in *El ángel de Sodoma*. He intends to take the binarial construction of sexual inversion beyond its either/or iterations into the plurality of its exclusions and excesses, its presence and absence.

Hernández-Catá's ironic and antithetical writing style mediates between and inscribes inversion's economy and excess as a symbolic structure in the text that is imbricated with sexual inversion as a sex and gender category. Recalling the introduction to this dissertation, *inversion* in its most basic definition refers to “inverting something or the state of being inverted” (NOED). Second, in language it refers to the “reversal of the normal order of words, typically for rhetorical

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<sup>39</sup> Bejel points out that the text deconstructs itself on the basis of its reversal of the Oedipal nature of the protagonist (75).

<sup>40</sup> These are Derrida's own words that Caputo cites in his book.

effect but also found in the regular formation of questions” (*ibid.*). Finally, in psychology it refers to sexual inversion, as in “the adoption of behavior typical of the opposite sex” or homosexuality, a term that was adopted by sexologists since the late nineteenth century (*ibid.*). In *El ángel de Sodoma*, Hernández-Catá represents the last form of inversion in the way that he does in the epigraphic preface (as ‘*eso*’) upon employing the first two definitions of the term in order to take sexual inversion beyond a mere portrayal of sexual phenomena. In other words, he executes a *re-vision* of sexual inversion that encompasses the earlier and more basic meanings of inversion.

I semantically break down the relation between the terms *sexual* and *inversion* in the compound *sexual inversion* in order to return to the term *inversion* as it is defined on its own before being adopted by the sciences to describe a pathological condition. By doing this, I highlight the compound term as a symbolic construct that is problematic and limiting to the full spectrum of, not only gender and sexual expression, but aesthetic possibility. In other words, this deconstruction reveals the slippage of the term *sexual inversion* in its use by scientific discourse considering that what constituted an inversion of sex and gender roles and behavior was arbitrary and contradictory, thus leaving room for literature to use poetic license and take the lead in addressing the contradictions and ambiguities of being.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, Hernández-Catá’s perception of inversion as a moral and ideological concept draws from the literary and scientific discourses on sexual inversion as seen in the way the respondent in the epigraphic preface addresses the poetasters and the chemistry of the swamp. On the other, it is deconstructed to expose the discursive and ideological economy of gender and sexuality that projects the queer modern subject as “other” and that, consequently, reproduces heteronormativity. Finally, it problematizes the gender binary in order to reveal the complexity and ambiguity of masculinity and queer subjectivity, and the nuances of their artistic expression.

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<sup>41</sup> See Halperin (1991) and the introduction to Cleminson and Vázquez García’s *Los invisibles*.

*El ángel de Sodoma* is an example of how the process of both consolidation and deconstruction via symbolic inversion is brought to fruition, whereby the discourse of sexual inversion is aesthetically problematized in four key places of the text: (1) the epigraphic preface and the metaphor of the muddy swamp that it introduces; (2) the opening paragraph of the story where the tragedy of the Vélez-Gomara family is not attributed to José-María's sexual inversion but to his heterosexual brother's involvement in contraband in the Americas, and the implications of this on the heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine binaries in the novel; (3) the moment when José-María imagines life in the serenity of the swamp while contemplating a name change; and (4) when he commits suicide at the end of the story, not as a tragic defeat, but as an act of defiance against social repression and the refusal to live a life that is not his own. These four moments are significant because they exemplify the contradictory, yet ambiguous, nature of queer subjectivity and how Hernández-Catá's representation of sexual inversion draws from other symbiotic relations—or *symbolic inversions*—in order to sustain itself as a viable discourse in the text.

## 1.2. “Queering” the Novel: Problematizing Identity and Destabilizing Paradigms

Sexual inversion is the conduit through which Hernández-Catá addresses José-María's capacity to acquiesce to or challenge his own inclinations and the normative values of society in relation to other characters and situations that reflect similar struggles. On one end, sexual inversion is portrayed in *El ángel de Sodoma* as a hereditary, pathological, and social condition. On the other, it is a trope used to scrutinize José-María's conflictive relation to it, homosexuality, and his own subjectivity. By fictionally representing José-María's tumultuous (re)thinking and questioning of sexual inversion as both a biological and psychosocially constructed heteronormative concept, Hernández-Catá inverts the presuppositions that undergird the ways that a sex and gender identity were historically constituted, and by extension, how psychological circumstances and social

conditioning curtail an individual's capacity to independently decide how to be defined and live. In doing so, a relation is established between homosexuality and sexual inversion in the novel, and its psychosocial implications in José-María's character and within the historical context of Hernández-Catá's time period.

Hernández-Catá uses the characterization of the sexual invert together with symbolic inversion to place sexual inversion on an aesthetic plane that adds nuance to the ontology of the modern subject. Note that I do not qualify 'modern subject' with the word "invert" nor "homosexual" because *El ángel de Sodoma*, on the one hand, problematizes identity, therefore opening the door to the modern subject's *queerness*. The novel dismantles normative masculinity both at the individual level and as a symptom of heteronormative nationalism whereby identity is either unfixed or compromised. This is not to say that one cannot read parts of the novel as affirming homosexual identity or otherwise, but to ignore its tensions and limitations, without also considering the ambiguity of gender expression in the text, is to restrain the potentiality of queer subjectivity and critique. I, therefore, challenge the view that José-María's story adapts itself to a political agenda for social justice, even if it may be inspired by, or interlock with, the politics of sex and gender regulation in the early twentieth century. Instead, I contend that the novel is more concerned with portraying the reality of sexual inversion in relation to problems regarding identity, masculinity, agency, and the complexities of social non-conformity, its impact on human lives, and literature's ability to give it breadth and visibility. We can see this in how José-María vacillates between either affirming or negating his homosexuality and sexual inversion. As Cleminson and Vázquez García put it, "Hernández-Catá's novel presented a ... homosexual trapped between a male body and a female psyche" (235). Their interpretation needs more unpacking; however, these observations suggest that a queer interpretation of the text might align itself better with the novel's complex narrative.

Despite her quibbles about queer theory, Lisa Duggen describes it as follows:

Queer theorists are engaged in at least three areas of critique: (a) the critique of humanist narratives that posit the progress of the self and of history, and thus tell the story of the heroic progress of gay liberationists against forces of repression; (b) the critique of empiricist methods that claim directly to represent the transparent 'reality' of 'experience,' and claim to relate, simply and objectively, what happened, when, and why; and (c) the critique of identity categories presented as stable, unitary, or 'authentic.' (181)

Queer theory took off in the 1990s, therefore it would be anachronistic to say that Hernández-Catá is a queer theorist, but we can posthumously approach his literature from the lens of queer critique. By doing so we can detect that at the same time that *El ángel de Sodoma* may *not* adhere to the three types of queer critique that Duggen lists due to its non-queer elements, the novel also could follow them: (a) while it attempts to humanize homosexuality in light of its historic stigmatization, such a portrayal falls short from a gay liberationist narrative of progress by disclosing José-María's apprehension about his sexual inversion and bias against effeminate masculinity in relation to the haunting memory of his father's emasculation and his brother's sexual escapades; (b) while it reproduces empiricist (scientific) approaches to gender and sexuality it also destabilizes the social politics and science that support stigmas on sexual inversion and homosexuality; scientific discourse is often at the service of storytelling in the novel and it is oriented toward the uneven dynamics of power and hypocritical morality that dominate its narrative; and (c) while it endorses sex and gender identities as stable, unitary, and authentic it also critiques them in light of the crisis of masculinity experienced by Santiago and Jaime and how José-María is conflicted by his feelings about his mistaken body and desires toward men. Hernández-Catá accomplishes this by problematizing sexual inversion via the symbolic inversions that he employs in his narrative.

While they are closely related, sexual inversion presents the problem of the gender binary and the reversal of masculine to feminine behaviors (or vice versa) that does not *entirely* concern itself with the issue of sexual object choice that characterizes homosexuality. In fact, the term *homosexual* does not appear in the text, rather *invertidos* (sexual inverts), and the protagonist loathes

and scoffs at their effeminacy, which indicates that while he eventually accepts his attraction toward, and free pursuit of men, he has yet to reconcile his sexual inversion, or what may be considered today as transgender or intersexual. For example, when he is in Paris, he repulsively dismisses the promiscuity of gay culture and the prostitution of inverts there:

He was certain that a gesture he made in any show, in any boulevard, would have sufficed to accelerate his destiny. If someone would have told him: “You only need to go to *Empire* on Saturday or to *La petite chaumière* on any night to see hundreds of vain inverts and dozens of those shameful individuals, insults to every sex, like the one that went around prostituting the rose by touch alone,” he would have responded: “I figured as much.” But he wasn’t impatient, in the slightest. Is not to wait perhaps the most painful and specifically feminine part of voluptuousness? Undoubtedly, many of those lonely and well-dressed men belonged to the fatal sect of the victims of divine error, and only one mannerism, only one twinkle of the eye, would have sufficed to be recognized.

If in his city—the one which he now went several days without remembering in the slightest—one person recognized him, there, in the immense Paris, how easy would it be to find one hundred! Tenía la certeza de que le habría bastado un gesto en cualquier espectáculo, en cualquier bulevar, para acelerar su destino. Si alguien le hubiese dicho: «Basta con que el sábado vayas al *Empire* o cualquier noche a *La petite chaumière* para que veas cientos de invertidos ufanos y docenas de esos vergonzantes, ultrajes de todo sexo, como aquel que iba prostituyendo la rosa con tocarla nada más», habría respondido: «Me lo figuraba». Pero no sentía la menor impaciencia. Acaso el esperar ¿no es una de las voluptuosidades más dolorosas y específicamente femeninas? Sin duda muchos de aquellos hombres solos y bien vestidos pertenecían a la funesta secta de las víctimas del error de Dios, y un solo ademán, un solo relumbre de ojos, hubiera bastado para reconocerse.

Si en su ciudad—de la que ahora pasaba días enteros sin el menor recuerdo—lo identificó uno, allí, en el inmenso París, ¡cuán fácil hallar cien! (223-34)

José-María’s views on courtship are traditional and modeled after a chaste woman who saves herself for Mr. Right. Hegemonic masculinity is so ingrained in his psyche that, even amidst his sexual freedom in Paris, he is hard-pressed to give up his self-righteous attitude and snobbish demeanor due to his high-class and heteronormative upbringing.

José-María is a character with flaws that Hernández-Catá tries to humanize by showing his capacity for self-redemption in death. While he is unable to sustain the typical behaviors of a heterosexual man, namely attempting sexual intimacy with women, José-María also seeks and finds pleasure in doing the opposite in Paris, to the extent that he is willing to sacrifice his own life for it, regardless of what custom and tradition expect of him. However, even though José-María eventually affirms his homosexuality and is described as a selfless angel (an attribute that is implied by the

novel's title and described accordingly in its story), he also expresses his normative social prejudices against his sexual inversion, his family, and society. He struggles to make sense of his own conventional biases about gender conformity, which are heightened by his problematic socioeconomic status as an upper-class man who is simultaneously evolving as a person navigating adulthood. As such, one could argue that the novel is more so a subtle critique on the sociocultural and class values of certain individuals in Spanish society that is brought to light by a character who is faced with the ultimatum of following his desires or living a lie based on the encroaching expectations of his family and environment. What is more, he strives to resolve this conflict and execute his own agency in the midst of circumstances that are both under and above his control. He often has to decide whether to follow his own will or if such a tall order is a futile endeavor in a repressive social environment and in the brunt of his own mental and emotional turmoil.

In short, a symbolic revision of inversion leads to a critical reflection on a queer modern politics of sex and gender practices and identities brought to light by the portrayal of the sexual invert. At the same time, sexual inversion is but a channel to the literary staging of a family drama that takes a toll on José-María's life. The story is as much theirs as it is his. The figure of the so-called sexual invert is the vehicle that brings to the fore other conflicts such as the crisis of masculinity, as exemplified by the emasculated father figure and his rebellious brother, both respectively representing the failures of Spanish imperialism and oligarchical/bourgeois rule; the pressures of patriarchy, as represented by José-María's duty to marry his sisters to honorable men; and the repression of a heteronormative and religious Spanish society. *El ángel de Sodoma*, therefore, is not about José-María's struggle alone but also about a family and nation in crisis. At the same time, this does not give José-María a pass on facing his own demons, if not by death. Both a product of his environment and a reproduction of its heteronormative biases that he adopts against even his own femininity and the effeminacy of others, he sees suicide as the answer to life's impossibilities.

Whether he redeems himself from such prejudices after death is a question that cannot be answered by the story alone but by the epigraphic preface, where the writer creates beauty not just by vindicating homosexuality but also by throwing it in the mud, in the ugly and complex reality of transmodernity.

### **1.3. 'Reclaiming Sodom' or the Agency of the Autonomous Self?**

#### 1.3.1. Rereading Sodom

In his article “Reclaiming Sodom: Sexuality, Nation, and Difference in Hernández Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma*,” Mejías-López sheds light on how previous literary and queer studies on the novel have followed Marañón’s and Jiménez de Asúa’s leads in order to frame the story within their cautionary texts and, in turn, “read the tragic end of the protagonist as final proof of the text’s repressive stance” against same-sex sexuality. As a result, he suggests not constraining the text to closed, homophobic interpretations, but rather to open readings that “compel us to question concepts of gender and sexuality, and to reject notions of community and nation based on homogeneity, seclusion, and stagnant myths of the past.” He grounds these aims in the novel’s epigraph on Genesis where the patriarch Abraham questions God’s will to bring justice to the righteous dwellers that are among the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Mejías-López analyzes the biblical reference as an analogy that reclaims Sodom and its sinfulness against social repression and oppressed individuals, like José-María, and that fights against opposition to bring justice to marginalized people. He argues that Hernández-Catá’s novel ultimately asks the reader to take an ethical stance against the suppression of differences in gender, sexuality, and identity: “Weaving and probing religion, science, and law, the three pillars of sexual and national exclusions, *El ángel de Sodoma* deals from the start with the concept of justice and requires its readers to take an ethical stance regarding sexuality, nation, and difference.” He then concludes that the

novel can be read as a “critique of heterosexual norms and patriarchal laws” and that: “It is due time that we answer the epigraph’s question of justice, though this time regarding the novel itself, and reclaim the polysemic quality of *El ángel de Sodoma* and its power to talk back to those and other homogenizing forces.”

I would pause for a moment, however, to consider that the epigraph on Genesis is a question that goes unanswered, almost rhetorical, if you will. The epigraph ends without a response from God to Abraham. Furthermore, Hernández-Catá alters the biblical reference by only including specific parts of the two out of three verses that comprise the passage and he does not include ellipses to indicate this. The complete biblical excerpt should read as follows (the parts not shown in the novel are italicized):

*<sup>23</sup> And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (KJV)*

*<sup>23</sup> Y se acercó Abraham y dijo: ¿Destruirás también al justo con el impío? <sup>24</sup> Quizá haya cincuenta justos dentro de la ciudad: ¿destruirás también y no perdonarás al lugar por amor a los cincuenta justos que están dentro de él? <sup>25</sup> Lejos de ti el hacer tal, que hagas morir al justo con el impío, y que sea el justo tratado como el impío; nunca tal hagas. El Juez de toda la tierra, ¿no ha de hacer lo que es justo? (Reina-Valera)*

Hernández-Catá could have included the middle part of this passage in which Abraham takes an ethical stance against wickedness in order to save the innocent, and by even telling God how to act. However, this is not what we see in the epigraph but rather a question as to whether God will be unjust by destroying everyone, without an answer or resolution to follow it regarding justice for neither the just nor the wicked. Allegorically, the question is whether José-María, the innocent and chaste angel, will be counted among the wicked people that engage in sodomitic practices that “threaten” his Spanish hometown and that he experiences in Paris. The novel does not answer this question. Furthermore, God wants nothing to do with it, not only because José-María kills himself (in itself an ungodly act), but also because God abandons him, even when it seems like he is giving

up his own will to live righteously according to the province's traditional religious codes of moral and sexual conduct.

For instance, José-María thinks that by courting and marrying a woman he will combat the solitude that leads to “sinful temptations,” and he reasons with God to give him a wife and a child to do so: “He was deserving, for his resistance, of that prize, of that miracle. Right, God? But Heaven did not respond to his distressed question. Answers from God arrive late and painfully” (“Él era merecedor, por su resistencia, de ese premio, de ese milagro. ¿Verdad, Dios? Pero nada respondía el Cielo a su acongojada pregunta. Las respuestas de Dios llegan tarde y dolorosamente”; 169-70). What is more, when all he feels toward Cecilia's passion is coldness, he takes it as God's answer to his question, which he remembers by asking yet another question: “Is it that God wants to respond this way, with this prize for my faith in his mercy, to my questions from the other day” (“Querrá Dios responder así, con este premio a mi fe en su misericordia, a mis preguntas de aquel día”; 174). The text insinuates that he is not Christian when he refers to Cecilia as a believer, and it *inverts* God's repudiation of homosexuality and sexual inversion to justify their separation. He goes so far as to convince Cecilia that God was to blame for their separation and that he willed José-María's sexual condition: “You, as a believer, suppose that God would have put a sword of fire between us. ... Do you believe that it didn't cost me labor and tears to renounce you? It was to lose my last hope!... I wanted to, Cecilia, and He didn't want it... Him, God! Understand me” (“Tú que eres creyente, supón que Dios hubiera puesto su espada de fuego entre nosotros. ... ¿Crees que no me costó trabajos y lágrimas renunciar a ti? ¡Fue perder la última esperanza!... Yo quise, Cecilia, y Él no quiso... Él, ¡Dios! Entiéndeme”; 206-07; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ellipses in original).

Judging from the length of the novel from beginning to end, the answer to Abraham's question may well turn out to be a complicated one in which God is often absent and indifferent to José-María's plight. This could be an effect of anticlerical sentiments in the sociopolitical imaginary

of citizens and artists in Spain and other countries who saw the authority of the Church as a setback to the modernization and integrity of the nation. Such perceptions were personified in the figure of the priest whose chastity, or sexual repression, was contrary to the reproduction of the nation vis-à-vis the population. The priest's involvement in family affairs through his charity work with women and the education he provided to the youth—the “force for the renewal of a tired national spirit”—were perceived as threatening to the masculinized vitality of the imagined virile community. The former was seen as a disturbance of the patriarchal hierarchy within the family, thus displacing the authority of the father figure.<sup>42</sup> The latter was taken as a danger to the innocence of children and young people, since celibacy was thought to lead to perversions such as pederasty with young boys and among priests: “If the priesthood was the incarnation of all that was opposed to the imaginary national community, which was in turn identified with a strong dose of virility, it comes as no surprise to see that the Church was identified with the triumph of a weak, effeminate character, duplicity and deceit and unbalanced sexuality” (Cleminson and Vázquez García 199). We see these tendencies replicated in José-María, the chaste angel and *madrecita*.

Alongside Nature and Satan, José-María blames God for making him a man instead of a woman:

“Why am I to blame? If I were an addict, a vile person fallen by the lewdness of the sex’s rejection, I would deserve to be spat on! But inside I feel soft, feminine! Since I was a child I liked things that women liked! If Nature, God or Satan were going to make me a woman and, when the foundations of my being were already set, they repented and out of spite produced a man out of their *clay*, what am I to do? Perhaps she, my mother, wanted to have a daughter as her firstborn and her desire frustrated my destiny... Yes, it should’ve been that.”

«¿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! ¡Si desde niño gusté de cuanto las mujeres gustan! Si la Naturaleza, o Dios o Satán iban a hacerme mujer y, cuando ya estaban puestos los cimientos de mi ser, se arrepintieron y echaron de mala gana *arcilla* de hombre, ¿qué he de hacer yo? Tal vez ella, mi madre, quiso tener como primer vástago una hija y su deseo frustró mi destino... Sí, eso debió ser.» (117-18; ellipsis in original; emphasis added)

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<sup>42</sup> See Cleminson and Vázquez García, pp. 198-206.

It is important to note the reference to clay, which is reminiscent of the mud leitmotif from the mephitic pond that the writer in the epigraphic preface mentions. In the excerpt above it refers to the mud of masculinity versus femininity, the same one that the writer will stir based on, not only the contrast between gender expression, but of natural and divine origins: God/Satan and Nature/mother. Each unit of these pairs are also inverted in their own right.

God's creation is supposed to be perfect yet we see that as a deity he repudiates his own design in order to make José-María a man instead of a woman, as though from the start he had made a mistake in designing him as female. Satan also regrets his design, harkening back to his own story as a fallen angel, and thus establishing a parallel between himself and José-María as "a fallen angel" as well who should have been a woman instead of a man, particularly since his angelic nature correlates to his motherly qualities. The categories "woman" and "fallen angel" are put on the same plane, thus giving new meaning to the novel's title: "The [Fallen Woman] of Sodom," so to speak. This would place sexual inversion as the novel's main problem in addition to the one usually attributed to it—homosexuality. In addition, José-María links his femininity, on the one hand, to the biology of Nature, which is often personified as a woman; in his case, his mother. On the other, he deduces that the biology behind his mother giving birth is not responsible for his femininity but rather her *desire* for him to be a woman is to blame. It is almost as though she called it into being, which is not how Nature usually produces a person's sex in the scientific/biological sense. His mother is then like God who calls creation into being through the utterance of a word as described in the first chapter of Genesis.

In the excerpt above Hernández-Catá evokes two out of three images of the relation between nature and society that during the Renaissance was based on "the organic analogy between the human body, or microcosm, and the larger world, or macrocosm" (Merchant 5). They are: (1<sup>st</sup> image) "the innate character and disposition of people and animals and the inherent creative power

operating within material objects and phenomena”; (2<sup>nd</sup> image) the “active unity of opposites in a dialectical tension”; and (3<sup>rd</sup> image) the “benevolent, peaceful, and rustic, deriving from Arcadia, the pastoral interior of the Greek Peloponnesus” (6). As Merchant explains, these iterations of nature had social implications: “the first image could be used as a justification for maintaining the existing social order, the second for changing society toward a new ideal, the third for escaping from the emerging problems of urban life” (*ibid.*). Per the last excerpt from the novel cited above, the implication of the first iteration of nature is illustrated by the mud that Nature, God, and Satan use to reproduce a masculinity that is heteronormative, therefore preserving a hierarchical and patriarchal social order that keeps alive the medievaesque mythology and hereditary patterns of the Vélez-Gomaras’ past lineage. As for the second iteration, the dialectical tension between discourses of masculinity and femininity is heightened by the reversal of the trope of nature as female. Its logic is inverted because José-María blames his mother for not bringing balance and unity to his life, instead antagonism between his two gendered natures. On the one hand, he affirms his femininity and declares that he has the nature of a female. On the other, he reproaches his mother, the one to whom he traces his motherly (feminine) disposition, for impeding his birth as a woman; it is a contradiction to blame the woman, who gave him his feminine qualities, for not making him a woman. The third iteration is illustrated by José-María’s desire to escape from the province to a place of bliss, away from the turbulence of urban life and from mundane constraints (177).

We notice that by inverting the contradictory notions of nature and the masculine/feminine binary, the writer of the epigraphic preface delivers on his promise to stir the mud of the swamp in order to form the metaphoric clay that materializes the dual nature of José-María’s body from an alteration of his feminine traits to a heteronormative iteration of manhood. However, we learn that Mejías-López interpretation of the novel argues against the iteration, or repetition, of the sameness of patriarchal masculinity in order to advocate for the value of individuality and difference.

Nevertheless, this is not achieved by a reclaiming of Sodom because that would suppose that Abraham was seeking justice for *both* “the wicked” and the righteous when in reality he just wanted it for the latter, and he expected God to do the same.

A significant portion of Genesis 18 entails Abraham questioning and pushing God toward acting justly. In this sense, Mejías-López is correct to point out that justice is problematized. However, in the end, justice is served only for the “righteous” and not the “wicked,” as both Abraham and God intended. Like Abraham, José-María questions God, however the protagonist blames divine intervention for his “sinfulness” and no reparations are made on his behalf. This urges me to interrogate the conceptualization of justice and its existence as a practice in the novel that is tied to jurisprudence and law enforcement. My reading of the novel suggests that these entities, as both enforcers or imminent dangers, are not present in the fictional text, instead they take on a figurative, psychological meaning in José-María’s psyche that point more toward a problem of morality and an ethics of empathy as a result of social encroachment.

Mejías-López follows the traditional interpretation of Sodom and Gomorrah to argue that the repressive Spanish town in which José-María lives encompasses the wickedness of the two biblical cities and that the man the protagonist is scheduled to meet at the Javel metro station—his possible savior from death—represents the two angels that save Lot from the condemning fire and brimstone that destroys the sinful towns. But is this act of salvation a reclaiming of Sodom? I agree that the man at the bookstore could serve as José-María’s initiation and entry into the sexually free life that he yearns for, but should not the reclaiming be in favor of the “wickedness” of the city as well? If theological interpretations of the biblical story consider that the sin of Sodom was the homosexuality of the men that wanted to have sex with the angels protecting Lot and his family, would not this be the reclaiming that needs to be done, that is, of homosexuality? Mejías-López states, moreover, that Sodom is not only punished for same-sex acts but for “its greed, its disregard

for the poor, and its unwelcoming attitude to outsiders,” like the people of the town in *El ángel de Sodoma*. However, the overall consensus is that most of the people in the Spanish province are kind to José-María and his family, aside from a few isolated incidents at the beginning of the novel. Also, the town seems to be welcoming of foreigners, unlike the biblical cities.

As Mejías-López argues, “one of the central themes of the novel is that of the asphyxiating atmosphere of the provincial town, *its isolation from the outside world*, its obsession with preserving and perpetuating itself at the expense of the welfare of others” (emphasis added). He bases his analysis on the “insidious panoptic gaze” of the town under which the Vélez-Gomaras live, whose double morality constantly threatens José-María and his siblings and that casts an eye of egotistical indifference toward their hardship as orphans of a family falling into oblivion: (“In this way, the attempts of tyranny by various acquaintances and the assistant; of abuse by merchants; of intrusion by all, failed. And the city ended up accepting that miracle of venturous organization” (“De este modo, las tentativas de tiranía por parte de varios conocidos y de la asistenta; de abuso por parte de los comerciantes; de intromisión por parte de todos, fracasaron. Y la ciudad concluyó por aceptar aquel milagro de organización venturosa”; 64). Even when everyone tries to meddle in the financial affairs of the family, they eventually defer to the good fortune and stewardship of the children.

José-María plays the lead role in these reparations and he is recognized for it by Bermúdez Gil who speaks for the entire city when he says: (“—I am satisfied with your conduct, and if your father were still alive he would be too. You honor his name, indeed. *Everyone says it*” (“—Estoy satisfecho de tu conducta, y si tu padre viviese también lo estaría. Honras su nombre, sí. *Lo dicen todos*”; 113; emphasis added). Furthermore, his popularity and presence in the city is reminiscent of Jesus’ well-received entrance through the gates of the city of Jerusalem on a donkey: “All those that stopped him warned about the influx of that eager kindness to employ the most of his treasure in his native city. The blind beggars knew his steps and blessed him upon his approach. His arrival was

celebrated everywhere” (“Todos cuantos lo frisaban advertían el influjo de aquella bondad anhelosa de emplear en su ciudad natal el último filón de su tesoro. Los mendigos ciegos le conocían los pasos y lo bendecían al acercarse. En todas partes se celebraba su llegada”; 204-05). Based on this scene, it looks like José-María tries to rectify the corrupt and greedy image of the family that the father had projected onto the town and that it, in turn, admires him for, favorably looking upon his good nature. Although he has to put on a mask and hide his true feelings, one cannot lose sight of the fact that José-María himself is confused about his own ambivalence and that his sacrifice is a consensual, social contract to which he is bound in order to save his family from economic ruin and redeem its reputation.

Mejías-López offers a compelling interpretation of the religious overtones of the text, however, there are moments when he stretches too thin the parallels between the biblical references and the way he describes the Spanish province in *El ángel de Sodoma*. In addition, he does not place sufficient emphasis on the damaging roles that Santiago and Jaime play in the story and the onus of reparations placed on José-María as a result. For instance, there is very little, if any, textual basis to support the idea that the town in which the Vélez-Gomaras lived was ‘isolated from the outside world.’ From the very beginning, the city is characterized as one that is active in commerce and industry as well as one that is in contact with its periphery and foreigners. Of note is when Isabel-Luisa secretly tells José-María that their sister Amparo is flirting with a foreigner (148), and during José-María’s return home from Cecilia’s house, the narrator notes that the city in summertime is full of foreigners (188). In addition, the young acrobat from the circus that José-María lusts over is from an overseas traveling circus that arrives with his brother Jaime on Spanish ships. The text also mentions how foreigners, in conjunction with the townsfolk, could attest to the pride that his father brought to the city: “The entire city participated in the drama. *The foreigners* could attest to the fact that the noble giant constituted part of the pride of the town” (“Toda la ciudad participó del drama.

*Los forasteros* pudieron advertir que el noble gigante constituía uno de los orgullos de la ciudad”; 55; emphasis added). On the contrary, it is the Vélez-Gomaras’ monopoly on wealth that imply a disregard for the poor, and José-María’s disdain for the foreign daughter of the tamer of beasts and for Isabel-Luisa’s gossip about her sister’s involvement with a foreigner suggest an intolerance to outsiders.

Mejías-López’s attempt to make the parallelism between *El ángel de Sodoma* and the Sodom and Gomorrah story the main argumentative framework of his study does not coalesce due to what each story exclusively represents and the specificities that distinguish one from the other. For instance, the epigraph to his article on the novel cites Jonathan Goldberg’s opening about sodomy in his book *Reclaiming Sodom*:

‘Sodomy—that utterly confused category’: Michel Foucault’s memorable phrase sums up the fortunes of sodomy as a juridical category, the paramount role it has played in the West. But it also suggests the *productive* role that sodomy has played and can play as a site of pleasures that are also refusals of normative categories. It suggests thereby an impetus for reclaiming Sodom rather than assuming that the weight of tradition is entirely and monolithically a site of oppression. (1)

According to Goldberg, Foucault’s phrase refers to the juridical apparatuses of the West that considered sodomitic acts as sexual behaviors “besides married, heterosexual, procreatively aimed sex” (3). If this is the case, then one of the sins of Sodom was homosexuality despite the fact that Mejías-López intends it not to be with regards to the novel. Nonetheless, if a reclaiming of Sodom were to occur, then this would include reclaiming ‘the site of pleasures’ that refuse normative categories (such as heterosexuality and procreative sex) on behalf of homosexuality. As Goldberg concludes in his introduction to his aforementioned edited volume: “From the initial biblical story on, sodomy has been not merely one sexual act among others, but a paramount challenge to heteronormativity” (16). He also reminds the reader that Foucault’s interpretation of sodomy was not equated to homosexuality because historically it referred to a plethora of uncustomary sexual acts, mostly those that were not procreative, which could include same-sex sex as well as

heterosexual sex out of wedlock or of that between a human and an animal. In fact, when the men of Sodom and Gomorrah are refused sex with the visiting angels, Lot offers his virgin and unwed daughters instead, as though this were a more righteous proposition (Goldberg 6).<sup>43</sup>

Goldberg goes further by referencing Jonathan Ned Katz's introduction to his *Gay/Lesbian Almanac* in which he argues that, instead of being a substitute for homosexuality, sodomy must rather be

read along the diacritical axis of procreative/nonprocreative sex, with its ramifying connections to sociopolitical arrangements. For the colonists, *as perhaps too for the tribes whose history is told in Genesis*, nation-founding was inseparable from procreation, and the particular economic, social and patriarchal gender arrangements in the colonies was subtended by the crime of sodomy. Sodomy was, as Katz suggests, a crime against the family and state. (*ibid.*; emphasis added)

Very early on in the novel, José-María refuses to marry, which precludes him from procreating and perpetuating the family lineage. In addition to his failed attempts at sexual intimacy with women, José-María states in the novel's second chapter that he does not want to marry: “—I'll never marry,” he responded, in a tone so strange that Isabel-Luisa lifted her eyes from her labor” (“—Yo no me casaré nunca—respondió él, en tono tan extraño que Isabel-Luisa levantó la vista de la labor”; 67). Instead, he preferred to play the role of *madrecita* (little mommy) by taking care of his sisters when they were sick, sewing their dresses, and helping his brother with his schoolwork after failing in school: “And the people, before listening to him, but only by the sweetness of his expression and gestures, commented: —It's worth seeing!... He's truly a little mommy” (“Y las gentes, aun sin oírlo, sólo por la dulzura de sus ademanes y gestos, comentaban: —¡Hay que ver!... Es una verdadera madrecita”; 69). When he brings a spoonful of medicine to a convalescent Amparo, she tells him, “—Last night, when you were bringing me the spoonful of medicine, I was half asleep, and upon listening to you it seemed to me that it wasn't you, but momma” (“—Anoche, cuando me traías la

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<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that Lot's position is precarious because he is almost counted among the wicked if it had not been for Abraham's supplicant plea before God and the angels sent to take him out of harm's way.

cucharada, estaba medio dormida, y al oírte me pareció que no eras tú, sino mamá”; 70). Although he suffers from the shame he could bring to the family, much of it is triggered by his inability to reproduce the lineage untarnished: “He didn’t cry for himself but for his ancestors, for his siblings, for the children they could have to whom he would pass on a tainted name” (“No lloraba por él, sino por sus antepasados, por sus hermanos, por los hijos que pudieran tener, a los cuales iba a legarles un nombre sucio”; 104).

In various instances, the novel states that the enemy that José-María strives to flee from is himself, specifically when spring arrives and “the José-María from the circus woke up” (“el José-María del circo despertó”; 124). After work, he traverses the city and goes to the piers on an impulse, without reason. In-between the limit of the city and the sea, he recalls Jaime’s arrival with the daughter of the tamer of beasts and the acrobat he lusts over: “the loathed man, the cursed man!” (“el hombre odiado, ¡el hombre maldito!”; 126). He sees three sailors linked at the arms singing in merry debauchery and he stops, “full of infinite and delicious terror of a woman” (“lleno de un terror infinito y delicioso, de mujer”; *ibid.*). That terror makes him frightfully dash back home, his safe haven: “*That flight from the enemy that had not even paid attention to him*, that run toward the stretched-out guardian arms of people and places, to prove later on that he carried his swindle [a twister, as in sexual inversion] on himself and that only divine work would split the two hostile halves of his being, permitting one to escape from the other, constituted José-María’s only dynamic adventure for many months” (“Esa huída de un enemigo que ni siquiera había reparado en él; esa carrera de brazos tendidos hacia las personas y sitios tutelares, para comprobar después que llevaba su torcedor [su inversión sexual] en sí y que sólo un tajo divino podría escindir las dos mitades hostiles de su ser permitiéndoles escapar una de otra, constituyó durante muchos meses la única aventura dinámica de José-María”; 127; emphasis added). If the city seems like such a dire threat it is

because José-María partly imagines it as such. Otherwise, the enemy that he fears is the temptation to give in to his sexual urges and express his sexual inversion.

The harbor scene at the end of chapter five finalizes the first half of the novel from which it transitions from the sexually-charged José-María of the circus to the atavistic and sacrificial José-María of chapter six, the beginning of the novel's second half:

[José-María] thought aimlessly: "I will refute Amparo's expansive sensuality, try to extract that utilitarian, dry coldness from Isabel-Luisa's personality... I should put Jaime back on track... And, finally, simultaneous to the observation that all of these were only alien character flaws, that is, of what could be corrected, he remembered himself, and grimly said: "I'll have to also modify this physical constitution of mine that would be enough to denounce at anyone who looked at my body, the combat of insinuations and resistances that is continuously fought between my will and my flesh."

[José-María] vagamente pensaba: «Contrariaré la expansiva sensualidad de Amparo, trataré de quitar del carácter de Isabel-Luisa esa frialdad utilitaria, seca... Habré de reencauzar a Jaime... Y, por último, simultáneamente a la observación de que todas estas faltas ajenas eran sólo de carácter, es decir, de lo que puede corregirse, se acordaba de sí, y decía torvo: «Y tendré que modificar también esta constitución física mía que bastaría para *delatar* a cualquiera que observase mi cuerpo, el combate de insinuaciones y resistencias que se pelea de continuo entre mi voluntad y mi carne.» (128-29; emphasis added; ellipses in original)

The word '*delatar*' seems ambiguous in this passage, as in having more than one meaning. It could have legal connotations so as to denounce, inform against, or report anyone who looks at José-María's feminized body. In this sense, the agent in the sentence is understood, as in it is an unstated subject, like a law enforcer, who executes the action of denouncing someone who looks at José-María's body. The agent could also be José-María's feminized body that figuratively denounces or reveals another person's desire toward it, whether that be male or female. Whichever gender, it is an undesirable revelation. If so, the word could denote betrayal as in giving something away, like the disclosure of a secret. Therefore, it could be saying that José-María's body will betray anyone who looks at it because, at the sight of his body, their sexual reservations will flounder and their indecency will be disclosed. Alternatively, and a more plausible interpretation, could include the second half of the last phrase in the excerpt. The agent would still be José-María's body but the object would be the combat he experiences between his urges and inhibitions. In other words, he

needs to alter the femininity of his body, otherwise it could easily reveal to anyone his fight against his erotic yearnings and repression.

Once he is determined to suppress his femininity, he takes up habits to become more heteronormative and masculine: he exercises violently every day, learns to smoke, uses a walking cane, and goes three to four days without shaving (130-34). Sadly, his efforts to harness his sexual inversion are in vain: “and then all of his efforts to fall on his bed in surrender to sleep and to not allow his mind to rock him with a sway conclusively *diluting his will* in mistaken sensations, saw themselves *unjustly failing*” (“y entonces todos sus esfuerzos por caer en la cama rendido y no dar al pensamiento ocasión de mecerlo con un vaivén que concluía *diluyendo su voluntad* en sensaciones equívocas, veíanse fallidos *injustamente*”; 132; emphasis added). He is torn between the will of repressing his femininity and the will of acquiescing to it. This tension, nevertheless, defaults to the latter and he sees himself defenseless to his growing desires, depriving him of the justice that his efforts to appear “manlier” fail to give him:

His eyes and his hands, upon the smallest distraction, would turn to the fashion magazines, to the labors with scissors and needle that his sisters did; but he didn't go back to using his fingers for that. Whatever suspicious propensity moved his sympathy, was counteracted with rigor. ... Mocking his efforts, an inner voice would tell him:

—It's all useless. Your beard, your face covered in smoke, your work is less powerful than the soft feeling of unease that confuses you. The exercises week after week, the sacrifices for months are conquered by a half-day of the torment of involuntarily bumping into the colleague at the office, of the gaze impossible to sustain in the street. Do you remember the impression that that seller of trinkets made on you? It's not about something [sexual inversion/homosexuality] that you can acquire or give up, but of something that you “are” because you were born that way, because they conceived you like that. And sooner or later...

But his character responded with new precautions to this cynical irony, pressing on the impetus to complete the stages [of masculinization] without faltering.

Los ojos y las manos se le iban a la menor distracción tras de las revistas de modas, tras de las labores de tijera y aguja que sus hermanas realizaban; pero no volvió a poner los dedos en ellas. Cuanta propensión sospechosa movía su simpatía, era contrarrestada con rigor. ... Burlándose de esos esfuerzos, una voz interna le decía:

—Todo es inútil. Tu barba, tu cara envuelta en humo, tus trabajos, pueden menos que ese desasosiego *muelle* [blando] que a veces te turba. Los ejercicios de semanas y semanas, los sacrificios de meses, son vencidos por un medio día de tormenta por un tropezón involuntario con el compañero de la oficina, por una mirada imposible de sostener en la calle. ¿Recuerdas la impresión que te hizo ayer aquel vendedor de baratijas? No se trata de una cosa [inversión

sexual/homosexualidad] que puedes adquirir o dejar, sino de algo que «eres» porque naciste así, porque te engendraron así. Y tarde o temprano...

Pero a esta ironía cínica respondía el carácter con nuevas precauciones, ahincando el ímpetu para cumplir las etapas [de masculinización] sin desmayar. (133-34; emphasis added; last ellipsis in original)

The word '*muelle*' is a double entendre signifying both softness and a pier at a harbor, which in the passage above would allude to José-María's escape to the seashore where he encounters the sailors and remembers the alluring acrobat at the circus. It is a place that awakens the softness of his femininity that he so painstakingly hardens upon performing a masculine gender role that is not his authentic self. Judith Butler argues that, "If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction" (192). Butler has been criticized for not considering the biological constitution of gender as it relates to a person's sex within the contours of their physical body, which she has rectified in her later works such as *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Senses of the Subject* (2015). The novel's excerpt above emphasizes the biological significance of José-María's sex in relation to his gender expression when it states that he was born a sexual invert: a woman's soul in a man's body. Notwithstanding, Butler's words on gender performativity are ones that José-María's inner voice attempts to convey to him when he performs a strand of masculinity that is literally toxic (it affects his physical health) and that reproduces the cultural hegemony of the family lineage and the city, which even for him feels disingenuous. Performativity in the context of repeated acts through time, gives the illusion of a fixed identity, which José-María attempts to do in order to be perceived as virile. However, this "seemingly seamless identity ... will be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity* ... exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous

construction” (*ibid.*). Which is to say that José-María attempts to construct his gender identity based on the politics of his environment and his own misconceptions on inversion.

What is puzzling about these developments is that in spite of doing everything that according to a patriarchal system is socially and morally correct in the eyes of God, science, and society, he is abandoned by the Divine. He realizes that the sexual inversion that is supposedly against nature *is in fact* his nature, and despite his efforts to change, he is unable to. Instead, he is incessantly confronted by his inverted condition and is incapable of quieting the voice that derails him from his own self-denial and that challenges the logic of reason. This quandary leads me to consider the experience of inversion as the impossibility, the excess, the ambiguity in meaning that constantly escapes José-María; that which in my view is a result of the deconstruction of inversion in the formation of his selfhood and subjectivity and as an extension of the narrative construction of the text. We see this in the way that the images of the flowers and the swamp described in the epigraphic preface are repeated throughout the text from which, if we remember, purity will surface. We can recall that Hernández-Catá juxtaposes beauty with the grotesque in order to deconstruct the binarial logic of his interlocutor. The same occurs when José-María unsuccessfully attempts to stop the flower of his inversion from flourishing to the point that not even God can lend a helping hand. On the one hand, the religious irony is revelatory as both an aspect of the anticlericalism that characterizes modernist literature and of the uncompassionate nature of José-María’s environment. On the other, it brings to mind the stirring of the mud of the swamp as not a place of death but of life.

### 1.3.2. The Possibility of the Muddy Swamp: The Name Change and Willful Death of the Sexual

#### Invert

Literature plays a very important part in José-María's conceptualization and embodied construction of his gender identity, which makes Hernández-Catá's challenge of scientific discourse in the epigraphic preface all the more significant. Recalling the paratext, the author inverts the metaphor of the swamp by redirecting its ecological language to the merits of narrative fiction. Let us explore further the scientific and pathological underpinnings of the epigraphic preface as echoed in the novel's seventh chapter cited below and where the word *inversion* is mentioned for the first time:

That was possible! The science book that he read with embarrassments and terrors at the Municipal Library assured it. If others who had consented to expressing their bad instinct in vice had achieved descendants, he, who destroyed *the pestiferous flower* with the foot of the will, deserved more. Cecilia would be his girlfriend, his wife; she would resurrect against her bosom the one that, having received from another breast the first nourishment, repudiated with maleficent *inversion* the pillow propitious enough to assuage the sadness and ignite the genetic desires of man; and she would reconcile him, through the graces of a chosen woman, with the Woman and herself and the Universe. He was deserving, due to his resistance, of that prize, of that miracle. Right, God? But Heaven did not respond to his heartbroken question. Answers from God arrive late and painfully.

¡Eso era posible! El libro de ciencia que fue a leer una vez, con rubores y terrores, a la Biblioteca Municipal, lo aseguraba. Si otros que habían consentido plasmar en vicio el mal instinto habían logrado descendencia, él, que extirpaba con el pie de la voluntad *la flor pestífera*, merecía más. Cecilia sería su novia, sería su esposa; resucitaría contra su seno al que, habiendo ya recibido de otro pecho el primer alimento, repudiaba con *inversión* maléfica la almohada propicia a apagar las tristezas y encender los deseos genésicos del hombre; y lo reconciliaría en sus gracias de mujer elegida con la Mujer y consigo mismo y con el Universo... Él era merecedor, por su resistencia, de ese premio, de ese milagro. ¿Verdad, Dios? Pero nada respondía el Cielo a su acongojada pregunta. Las respuestas de Dios llegan tarde y dolorosamente. (169-70; emphasis added)

In this passage, José-María considers his dual masculine and feminine nature. Seeing that he is the one that would stomp on the pestiferous flower of inversion, it follows from this metaphor that he would be the agent to submit his femininity to the bonds of a heterosexual marriage to Cecilia. Be that as it may, the passage above succinctly encapsulates many of the main themes and discourses that run through the novel: the scientific grounding of a preferred heterosexuality, the pressure of submitting to heteronormative social conventions, the dichotomous gender and sexual identity of

the protagonist, the idea that inversion is hereditary, and the moral-religious baggage and stigma that accompanies all these elements. It is one among other portions of the text that delve into the same issues, thus representing the workings of the narrative and how inversion operates within it.

From José-María's first thought ("That was possible!"), we understand that he is working against impossibility, which in his mind is the impossibility of being homosexual and accepting his inverted nature. It is an idea that he substantiates with the scientific literature that he reads at the library, which confirms for him that he can choose to be straight. We are confronted, therefore, with the problem of the will/reason versus nature/destiny that is a constant struggle for him. On the one hand, it highlights a trait of the thesis novel because we have a character who is, to a degree, "predestined" to a fatal outcome: "His larval predestination had been occurring in the calm, in the housecleaning, in the safety of the weak beings [women]" ("En el sosiego, en la limpieza hogareña, en el seguro de los seres débiles [las mujeres] había ido larvándose su predestinación"; 97). On the other, we are given a character who is left without answers when seeking confirmation in scientific reasoning and validation from God. That prize, that miracle that he thinks he deserves of denying his femininity is not afforded him and he is faced with the impossible, that which cannot be, that is, his desire to conform to societal norms and extinguish the "flower of infection and disease of his inversion."

Pain and death, the ultimate leitmotifs of Hernández-Catá's writings, are recurrent themes that drive the narrative of *El ángel de Sodoma*. Undoubtedly, their effects intensify once José-María is awakened to his desire for the same sex, however, it is more so the death produced by becoming someone else that causes greater anxiety, desperation, and fear in him at the expense of his own happiness and freedom, as told in the passage below:

Whether Jaime returned or not, when the last names of his sisters were to be erased in their unity with the virile flow of other lineages, he would flee, take off the coat of arms, the responsibility of being the son of a father who heroically committed suicide; and one day, if only one day, faraway, free his soul and his mistaken bodily desire, and live one hour of happy *bliss* regardless if known or

unknown by those who admired him, or if only seen by the gods that made him ambiguous ... “If two lives were given to us, one for us and another for everyone else, one could choose; but it’s not like that, and we will never do what, from fear of others, we stop doing.” And he stood up in solitude as though a judge was holding him accountable for the sin not yet committed.

Viniese o no Jaime, cuando los apellidos de sus hermanas se hubiesen borrado al fundirse en el caudal viril de otras estirpes, él podría huir, quitarse el escudo, la responsabilidad de ser hijo del padre suicidado heroicamente; y un día, siquiera un día, lejos, libentar el alma y el gusto equivocados de cuerpo, y vivir una hora de *cieno* feliz no importa si conocida o no de cuantos ahora lo estimaban, o si sólo vista por los dioses que lo hicieron ambiguo ... «Si se nos dieran dos vidas, una para nosotros y otra para los demás, cabría elegir; pero no es así, y lo que dejamos de hacer por miedo a los otros ya no lo podremos hacer nunca.» Y se engallaba en la soledad, cual si un juez estuviera pidiéndole cuentas del pecado no cometido aún. (177-78; emphasis added)

The placement in the novel of the excerpt above is important because chapter eight, from which it derives, follows the previous citation in which José-María realizes that he cannot count on God to act for him, therefore dismantling the tragic predestined or predetermined fate that is presaged in the beginning and middle of the story (pages 73 and 97). It is also the chapter where he learns that Jaime has changed his name to Nicolás Smith in order to avoid being convicted for smuggling (175). José-María decides to emulate his brother and change his name in order to forgo his responsibilities to his family and his hometown in Spain.

Once again, we are reminded in the passage above of the image of the swamp that the epigraphic preface on *eso* depicts (‘las ciénagas’; ‘the swamps’). I have therefore emphasized the word *cieno* (mud), which harkens back to the mud that the epigraphic preface metaphorically illustrates and that Hernández-Catá stirs to produce beauty. If taken figuratively, *cieno* means “deshonra” (dishonor) o “des crédito” (discredit) (Real Academia Española). If taken literally, it means: “lodo blando que forma depósito en ríos, en lagunas o en sitios bajos y húmedos” (“soft mud that forms deposits in rivers, in lagoons or in low and humid places”; *ibid.*). Moreover, the words *cieno* and *ciénaga* are synonymous since mud can be found in swamps: “Mud signifies the union of the purely receptive principle (earth) with the power of transition and transformation (water). ... the typical medium for the emergence of matter of all kinds ... related, by analogy, with biological processes and nascent states” (Ciriot 222). At the same time, if pure water is mixed with earth then mud symbolizes “the

beginning of retrogression and degradation ... water which has become filthy and contaminated. All levels of cosmic and moral symbolism range between Earth brought to life by Water and Water polluted by Earth” (Chevalier 686). The swamp is also synonymous with the word *pantano*, which refers to a place where there is much vegetation and water is stagnant and immobile, thus symbolizing, according to Revilla, inert matter, the beginning of the feminine, and indifferentiation (566).

The various meanings of mud and the swamp parallel José-María’s inverted conception of himself in the excerpt from the novel cited above. As discussed earlier, he perceives himself as representative of the biblical metaphor of the creation of man from clay (the mixture of earth and water) but it is reversed to portray a man created with a mistaken body. In his mind, he has become the mud of dishonor, discredit, and degradation once the cleansing water of innocence and chastity is polluted by his earthly desires. It is a retrogression that stagnates the flow of giving up his responsibility as the firstborn male in his family. At the same time, the contamination of the mud is also seen as a substance of possibility in his life where the meaning of the murky matter, if stirred properly (like the change from old to fresh soil), can be reversed (*inverted*) to signify the *transitive* moment in which the inert matter of his femininity is *transformed* into a nascent state of becoming, where he emerges as a free soul basking in the bliss of his autonomy.

These symbolic meanings are all captured by the concept of inversion whereby the inertia of death is coterminous with José-María’s femininity. Indeed, his willingness to awaken the feminine parts of his being lead to his suicide. Therefore, according to the epigraphic preface, the swamp is a place of becoming and potentiality for both the sexual invert who will rise from its detritus as a being in search of purity and the writer who will unravel their story:

The fecund ooze of the marsh [synonymous with the swamp and the wetlands], and the in-between reality of murky water and dry, insular ground, is emblematic of what, to the ancient Egyptian, death represented: a state of hidden ‘becoming,’ a source of new life, purification and constant renewal, a ‘passing from one kind of time to another, from life yesterday to life tomorrow.’ ... The marsh

continues to be an apt metaphor for those developmental transitions or temporary passages within a larger process where consciousness experiences itself in the muck between the permanently dissolved and the yet to be, a space of extreme potential and extreme vulnerability, vital, slippery, unpredictable and emergent. And just as this happens more than once in a lifetime or an individuation, so for the ancient Egyptians the Field of Rushes signified not a single stage to be passed through and never entered again, but an entire cosmic circuit over and under the earth, where, as in the psyche, continuities of form incarnate in the specificities of being. (Ronnberg 120)

This excerpt echoes what José-María thinks in the previously cited passage. From a spatial standpoint, it is within the in-betweenness of the provincial city (the dry ground) and the seaport (murky water) that José-María encounters the reality of his condition. Ultimately, it encourages him to accept his ambiguity and sexual inversion as parts of what make him pure, that is, to become his authentic self and wash away the anxiety of being someone he is not. His encounter with death illustrates this transitive state of becoming.

The final scene of his death is emblematic of the passing from a life contaminated by stigma to another one of purity and bliss. It is worth citing it in length in order to capture the significance of its complexity, which is crucial to a more nuanced interpretation of the text's ending and the novel as a whole.

An instantaneous moral reflux destroyed all of his voluptuousness, all of his overworked manumissions; and he understood that after having lived those corrupting hours in Paris, he could no longer return to the city founded by his kin nor embark again on the dark life of secret disgraces and of the constant restraint of the beasts of his body that every day became more demanding.

The idea of returning to the hotel, of getting a visit from the journalist of his cousin's bank—without a doubt, the visitor from the previous day—also horrified him. And like one who resolves a problem with a long-awaited solution, he said to himself: Death, only death, can open a *pure* door for me! Death avoided everything, erased everything... But he couldn't commit suicide without a motive, leaving the smallest hint of suspicion about the true process that he himself nurtured, condemning himself to final punishment. It was necessary to proceed with caution, femininely... His father had been his example...

The image of his head destroyed by a bullet would cause the city, Claudio, his sisters for whom he had sacrificed so many years, incomprehensible pain, and, perhaps, Cecilia comprehension that needed to be avoided. The lineage of the Vélez-Gomara ended with him and he could not crown it with a dirty jewel. Death, yes; but not as a scheduled appointment, but as a casual encounter. Was not there in every coincidence a voluntary end piece held by God's hand? Now he would have that end piece.

The train stopped. "Javel" said the big plates of blue enamel. And his flesh obeyed the conjuring of the name in the final voluptuous aspiration. Oh, she [his flesh] no longer commanded him but rather his conscious! In place of the white lines on the station's nameplate, he saw the quarters of his elders' coat of arms.

He was the only one on the walkway, indecisive, in the traffic of the station. Every day the clumsiness of those unaccustomed to the terrible play of velocities and indifferences of the large city [Paris] caused accidents. There'd be one more.

When, shortly thereafter, two yellow eyes looked at the station from the depths of the tunnel, he approached the edge of the platform, slowly, with feminine furtiveness, that not even those most close to him suspected, and at the right moment he slipped on purpose.

A long noise of iron and shouts passed over his virgin and impure flesh.

Un reflujo moral instantáneo destruyó toda su voluptuosidad, todas sus trabajosas manumisiones; y comprendió que después de haber vivido aquellas horas corruptoras de París, ya no podría volver jamás a la ciudad fundada por los suyos ni emprender otra vez la vida oscura de secretas ignominias y de constante enfrenar las fieras cada día más exigentes de su cuerpo.

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. Y como quien resuelve un problema de solución largo tiempo buscada, se dijo: ¡La muerte, sólo la muerte, puede abrirme una puerta *pura*! La muerte lo evitaba todo, lo borraba todo... Pero tampoco podía suicidarse sin un motivo, dejando la menor pista de sospecha hacia el verdadero proceso que él mismo sustanciaba condenándose a la última pena. Era preciso proceder con cautela, femeninamente... Su padre había dado ejemplo...

La imagen de su cabeza destrozada por una bala llevaría a la ciudad, a Claudio, a las hermanas por quienes se había sacrificado tantos años, una incomprensión dolorosa, y, tal vez, a Cecilia una comprensión que era necesario evitar. La estirpe de los Vélez-Gomara acababa en él y no podía ponerle broche sucio. La muerte, sí; mas no en cita declarada, sino en casual encuentro. ¿No había en toda casualidad un cabo voluntario sujeto por la mano de Dios? Ahora ese cabo lo tendría él.

El convoy se detuvo. «¡Javel» decían las grandes placas de esmalte azul. Y la carne obedeció al conjuro del nombre en postrera aspiración voluptuosa. ¡Ay, ya no mandaba ella [la carne] sino la conciencia! En lugar de los trazos blancos, sobre la placa él veía ya los cuarteles del escudo de sus mayores.

Quedó en el andén solo, como indeciso, en el tráfico de la estación. Todos los días la torpeza de los no habituados al terrible juego de velocidades e indiferencias de la gran urbe [París] originaba accidentes. Habría uno más.

Cuando, poco después, dos ojos amarillos miraron a la estación desde lo profundo del túnel, él se acercó al borde de la plataforma, despacio, con un disimulo femenino, que ni a los más próximos infundió sospechas, y en el instante justo dio un traspiés.

Un largo estrépito de hierros y de gritos pasó sobre su carne virgen e impura. (76-77, emphasis added; all ellipses in original)

The word *pure* emphasized in the passage above harkens back to the epigraphic preface and the process by which the detritus brings out the purity of the water lilies in the same way that José-María will find the purity of becoming his true self. The last scene of the novel echoes the metaphoric elements of this process: José-María finds himself in the developmental transition or passage within a larger process where his consciousness is caught between the mud of his flesh's dissolution and the space of equally extreme, posthumous potential. It is a passage from the slippage of the constrained

meanings of sexual inversion to the vitality of the symbolic force of the will to live authentically even after death.

In his study on suicide in Cuba, Louis A. Pérez, Jr. charts that between 1920 and 1925 Spain had a rate of 5.6 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants (136; Woytinsky 226). One of the methods of suicide during the first half of the twentieth century was by throwing oneself onto an incoming train or trolley (157). Pérez concludes that one of the main reasons for committing suicide during that time period was to avoid responsibility, while other contributors were “the way that males learned to discharge the responsibilities of men, the way they were conducted into adulthood and its accompanying responsibilities in an environment of socioeconomic transformation” (158, 173). He also points out that households of Roman Catholic affiliation, like the Vélez-Gomaras, associated suicide with sin and shame, “a deed to be disguised altogether, a death to be passed off as an accident or as a mishap of one kind or another” (135).

Although Pérez focuses on Cuba, these trends are also pertinent to other modern and industrialized countries during that time period. As a diplomat and journalist, it is likely that Hernández-Catá was aware of the same phenomena in Spain during the late 1920s in order to write the novel, which urges me to question Zubiaurre’s assertion that homosexuals during that time period did not drown themselves in the sea nor throw themselves on the rails of a train track (xv). She argues that Hernández-Catá was not interested in the real experience of homosexuals by choosing a death in the novel’s ending that is unlikely to happen in real life. Instead, she sides with Álvaro Retana’s review of the text, which states that José-María commits suicide because he could not accept his homosexuality: “His novel [Hernández-Catá’s] is symptomatic—symptomatic of a feeling bound by a specific time period and place, fin-de-siècle Spain—which, with exquisite modernist style, he naturalistically delights in through what he reads and disseminates as pathology [i.e., homosexuality]” (“Es la suya [de Hernández-Catá] una novela sintomática—sintomática de un

sentir atado a una época y a un lugar específicos, la España de fin de siglo—que con exquisito estilo modernista se deleita naturalistamente en lo que lee y difunde como patología”; *ibid.*). Zubiaurre’s concluding remark insightfully underscores how the novel cannot be isolated from its geographical and historical contexts. Nonetheless, her evaluation of Hernández-Catá’s persona and approach to the novel’s topic is reductive seeing that the Cuban author experienced Spanish queer subculture and interacted with gay individuals. He did not write it solely based on what he read and he certainly was not interested in disseminating pathological teachings against homosexuality. The novel is also not only about the pathology of homosexuality as I demonstrate in this chapter and José-María does not take a defeatist approach to his condition.

While the social factors that prompted suicide are known, José-María’s death is also prompted by a desire to protect his individual becoming. In the first paragraph of the passage cited above, he realizes that he can no longer sustain the culture of silence that he had imposed on himself nor restrain the sexual urges that ravage his body and inner self (later I show how femininity is related to the bestial). He is caught in an ultimatum because he does not want to return to the repressive city founded by his ancestors nor to the hotel in Paris where he will be confronted by the emissaries from his brother-in-law’s office. All of it reminds him of the sacrifice and pain he suffered from having to hide his true self. He realizes that only death can bring him the purity, that is, the authenticity that he desires. It will be the agent to evade his troubling past. It is at this point where there is an ellipsis in the passage that separates the two meanings that death takes in the finale.

When he thinks, “Death avoided everything, erased everything... But he couldn’t commit suicide without a motive,” dying takes on two purposes: to avoid and erase. The death that avoids everything is based on his aspirations to annihilate his old self in order to become who he always felt to be: a sexual invert, both feminine and masculine and the trans-ambiguity of the in-between of this binary. In other words, he wants to avoid dying as someone he is not, before reconciling his own

being with who he genuinely is. Then there is the death that erases everything, which is carried out by the motive-based suicide. Even in the moment that he decides not to deny himself, he still sympathizes with everyone else's feelings. He could not take a bullet to his head because everyone would easily suspect that he shot himself and wonder why he would commit such an act. As far as Cecilia is concerned, he thinks the opposite, that she would know that he did it because of his same-sex attraction. He does not want her to think that he did it out of shame, which supports the idea that he was not ashamed of his sexuality and that it was not the motive behind killing himself. Instead, he would make it seem as though it were an accident and that the train is the agent that causes his demise.

Another reason why he commits suicide with a reasonable motive is to not tarnish the family name but, more important, because he knows that the lineage would end with him as a result. This tells us that he is more concerned about dishonoring the family than about ending its perpetuation. He knows that by killing himself, he is annihilating the Vélez-Gomara name. In a final standoff with divine intervention, he proves to himself that he can act on the power of his own will in order to use that voluntary end piece held by God ('un cabo voluntario sujeto por la mano de Dios') to accomplish preserving his family's honor and the image that others had of him so as to spare their feelings of sadness and grief. He also does it to end the family's negative and corrupt legacy, all the while maintaining his integrity as a person. Therefore, the metro station is appropriately named 'Javel,' which in French literally means "bleach," as in the chemical substance used to clean and purify. It is also currently the name of one of the neighborhoods of the 15<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in Paris, of the metro station Javel-André Citroën, and of the train station Gare Javel (*Le Grand Robert* online).

When he sees the name of the metro station, it conjures his aspiration to sexual purity after death ('postrera aspiración voluptuosa') as well as the image of his family's coat of arms. In other words, his family's reputation would also die at the station where he takes his life, simultaneously

purifying its tainted history of corruption as well as his own conscience. Although the last sentence of the novel states that he dies virgin and impure, it is referring to his skin, his physical body, which he relinquishes for a purer soul or consciousness. A closer look reveals that it is femininity that prepares and facilitates this process (“It was necessary to proceed with caution, femininely”), alluding to his father Santiago’s example. However, it is a feigned femininity that is performative and not the genuine kind that his mother embodied.

In the first chapter, Santiago is described as dependent on his wife whose industriousness was the real support of the house and family: “...without the wife’s industriousness, renovating daily the miracle of the bread and fish, the word privation would have had its deadly meaning more than once for them [the children]. ... Everyone [in the city] understood then that the big man had gone through life supporting himself on the wife’s little body” (“...sin la industriosidad de la esposa, que a diario renovaba el milagro de los panes y los peces, más de una vez la palabra privación habría tenido para ellos [los hijos] su sentido enjuto. ... Todos [en la ciudad] comprendieron entonces que el hombrachón se había apoyado para ir por la vida en el cuerpecillo femenino”; 49-50). In other words, his masculinity was based on the misappropriation of female vigor, which resulted in a distorted form of femininity, the authenticity of which only his wife possessed. In other words, his manhood is a façade. Following this fake model of masculinity, José-María proceeds with ‘*cantela*’ (‘caution,’ care, or prudence) when crafting his suicidal plan. The theatrics of the dramatic fatality is a performative staging of a death that he executes with feminine furtiveness (‘*disimulo femenino*’), that is, with enough deceit for it to be the most prudent of steps he could take to liberating himself from the lie he lived. He puts on an act that turns out to be a parody of Santiago’s masculinity seeing that the father’s grandeur was held up by the truncated body of a woman, whose industry he lacked.

Based on Aristotelian ideas of tragedy, Jeffrey Zamostny argues that José-María commits suicide as a result of the *tragic error* of not using a different name in Paris and not due to a tragic flaw

in his character, namely falling into misfortune because of his inversion. Had he changed his name, the concierge would not have known to give him Claudio's letter, which urges him to honor his duty and namesake. Zamostny writes:

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. ... 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. (283-84)

While I agree with this argument, it does not consider the agency that José-María demonstrates when deciding to take his life and the ownership he takes of the will to decide his own fate. It also sheds a negative light on suicide whereas in the final chapter of the story it is described as a courageous and heroic act that seeks to defy the onus of shame that the family name projects on him. Mejías-López also comments on José-María's death: "The virgin body of José María is deemed nonetheless impure in a foreshadow of the town's final accusative act as the news of his death arrives. José María will have died utterly in vain and this may be his saddest mistake. ... Like Abraham, the novel prompts us to save the innocent, José María, before condemning the city." He raises important points, however, his analysis on the death of the protagonist also looks negatively at José-María's demise that I believe is contrary to its liberating undertones. What kind of death takes place in the novel and how do we connect this to the meanings of the swamp and José-María's agency and willpower?

In my view, there is little textual evidence to suggest that the city explicitly or legally condemns José-María's inversion. In most cases than not, it is an internal battle that José-María fights within his mind and body due to a culture of silence that he has imposed on himself. There is no way to really know the gravity of the impact that the revelation of his homosexuality could have had on him, especially since the town admired him and the family had already downgraded to a lower status than it had been in the past. They only relied on their father's life insurance. In sum,

they had little to lose. As far as everyone else is concerned, they set the standard and tone for the rest of the town. This is not to say that the indirect influence on José-María of the repressive atmosphere of the town, as well as the outside and peripheral forces that surround it, are to be ignored because they are significant contributors to his turmoil. However, to cast the blame on these actors within a “good guy-bad guy” scenario, and portraying the acrobat from the circus and the man that José-María meets at the bookstore as angels that try to save him from these dangers (“Their physical resemblance and their liberating effect emphasize the possibility of their symbolic identity as the two biblical angels of Sodom”) would be to strip him of his agency and to simplify the complexity of his character as one capable of experiencing ambivalence and of acting on his own volition despite conflicting scenarios that he must also face as an individual and from which he must learn. For instance, the existential problem that José-María ponders about the possibility of having two lives, one that he could live and another for those around him, without having to compromise one for the other, gets to the core of the ultimatum he must eventually make at the novel’s end: relinquishing or empowering his willful agency. At such a young age, these are realities that he struggles to navigate. Returning to the metaphor of the swamp can help us make sense of this conflict.

### 1.3.3. The Crisis of Masculinity and Reclaiming Sodom on His Own Terms

Although it is not his article’s initial intent, Mejías-López’s reading of the novel blames José-María for making the mistake of not considering the Spanish town’s knowledge of Santiago and Jaime’s deaths when planning his own. Based on this reading, he concludes that José-María’s suicide was in vain because it was not worth sacrificing himself for a city that would not accept him for who he is and that would see his suicide as shameful, like the deaths of the men in his family: “José-María will have died utterly in vain and this may be his saddest mistake: not to remember the fate of both

his brother and his father. ... The novel, then, ends with yet another futile sacrifice for a town that is morally corrupt and, as such, reminds us of another notoriously corrupt town, the Sodom of the novel's title." However, a closer reading of the text reveals that, although the town knew of the father's contrived suicide, it does not know of the reasons for Jaime's death because Claudio warns against divulging this information, nor of José-María's because he makes it look like an accident at end of the novel. We cannot know for sure if the town finds out the real reason for José-María's demise, unless Claudio decides to tell what really happened. This is unlikely given that he did not want to disclose Jaime's disgraceful disappearance and unjustifiable death. Although the novel states that he had sent telegrams to journalists about José-María's stay in Paris and two of them visit him at the hotel there, the protagonist leaves the establishment before their arrival and they miss him. In addition, they only tell the doorman about their visit, a messenger who is not as self-compromising for José-María as the clerks who had received Claudio's letter, thus showing how they are disconnected to the climactic missive. This is to say that if José-María decides to not return to that hotel, it would be very difficult for the journalists to find him again in such a populous and bustling city. Moreover, any information they relay to Claudio would be confidential and he would not expose José-María's "shame" on pain of desecrating the family's reputation. Claudio is actually not interested in the prestige of the family name as much as he vainly wants its assets: "The entire letter breathed sufficiency, vanity. He [Claudio] suggested [to José-María] he distract himself, not be too economical, not forget ever, not so much his last name, but the representation of the house..." ("Toda la carta respiraba suficiencia, vanidad. Le recomendaba [Claudio a José-María] distraerse, no ser demasiado económico, no olvidar nunca no ya su apellido, sino la representación de la casa..."; 231). Claudio cared more about the social rapport and wealth that the house could afford him than the family name and the activities of his brother-in-law.

José-María's suicide is also not a mistake. He knew what he was doing and up against, therefore it is not only a defiant act against his hometown but also a way of putting an end to the shame that his father and brother put on the Vélez-Gomara name by killing the last of the men who could keep its reputation and lineage alive: himself. It is important to understand what is at stake when thinking of José-María's death, which critics up to now have interpreted as a tragedy. Indeed, it is sad, but not for the reasons that are often given, which take away from José-María's own humanity and autonomy after he has given up his life to protect Santiago and Jaime and secure the future of his sisters and girlfriend Cecilia through marriage.

Up to now, studies on the novel attribute the downfall of the Vélez-Gomaras to José-María's homosexuality, the eldest of the men. However, in the description of the Vélez-Gomaras' downfall in the first paragraph of the opening of the story the family's decomposition is 'above all else' a consequence of the actions of the *youngest* or last of them, Jaime, the heterosexual *par excellence* who despises the capitalist bourgeoisie:

And, as if its final demolition could not be placed, for example, at the side of the romantic of [*The Fall of the House of*]Usher, it is rich enough—above all else by the simultaneously offensive and heroic particularities *of the last of its boys*—to remove, in painful strokes, some *sympathetic readers from their obsessive egotism or indifference for a couple of hours*.

Y si su derrumbamiento final no puede ponerse, por ejemplo, junto al romántico de la de [*La caída de la casa*] Usher, es, sobre todo por las particularidades al par vejaminosas y heroicas del *postrero de sus varones*, lo bastante rico en rasgos dolorosos *para sacar de su egolatría o de su indiferencia, durante un par de horas, a algunos lectores sensibles*. (47-48; emphasis added)

At the same time, the sexual invert (José-María) is portrayed as being held back by his past and social biases while contemplating ways to free himself from them. For example, José-María feels obliged to use the money from his father's life insurance to pay off debts that his brother incurs from contraband and illegal gambling. He also blames the daughter of the tamer of beasts as enabling Jaime's delinquency, while wishing he were as strong-willed and courageous as his brother. When he receives a letter stating that Jaime had begun gambling, and that he and the traveling circus that

accompanied him had disembarked in Colombo due to a problem of honor, he thinks: “The suspicion that the woman, more than the adversity of gambling, was to be the cause of his brother’s fall, took away the letter’s value of sincerity. . . . It’s imperative, then, that we send him money, not only because of him, but precisely because of our name, for the sacred memory of papa” (“La sospecha de que la mujer del circo más aún que la adversidad de los naipes fuera causa del tropiezo de su hermano, quitaba valor de sinceridad a la carta. . . . Urge, pues, mandarle dinero, no sólo por él, sino precisamente por nuestro nombre, por la memoria sagrada de papá.»”; 139). We see then that the inversion of the gender paradigm is also attached to socioeconomic rank and class, which have also not been addressed at length in previous studies.

*El ángel de Sodoma* is not simply a tragic story of a repressed homosexual who has no choice but to commit suicide and accept his hopeless fate as it has been read in some studies published on the text as a result of Hernández-Catá’s naturalist style. Naturalism stressed the influence of the laws of biological heredity and determinism on a person’s behavior, forces that leave little room for the individual to willfully determine their own fate. Yet Mejías-López and Zamostny have demonstrated that there are instances in which José-María’s plight is a result of his own mistakes and resolve to obtain freedom than by scientific or external contingencies. Although I disagree with parts of their interpretations, they show that José-María had the option of choosing and directing his life. An analysis of *El ángel de Sodoma*, therefore, requires an approach and interpretation that comprehend the formulas that construct the text but that also capture the novel’s hybrid style in relation to the multifaceted complexity of its thematic content. Hernández-Catá’s concern about whether the text makes a moral argument against sexual inversion or homosexuality might have been secondary to underscoring the ways in which a person, even at the face of death, activates agency in order to respond to the demands of becoming one’s own being at the threat of mental and emotional subjection, and the lessons this process may afford when such aims are not attained.

The word *becoming*, in its gerund form, denotes a process that is in progress with regards to the formation of the individual. This is not to say that José-María will become someone completely new because he realizes that his condition is from birth and that he cannot escape his subjectivation by others and his environment. In discussing subjectivity and discourse, Butler explains that “there is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains ‘integrity’ prior to its entrance into this cultural field” (199). However, the rules that govern discursive signification—as “not a founding act, but rather a process of repetition” of rules and conditions—can be subverted once that repetition is broken, diverted, or varied (198). Agency arises from this divergence whereby the construction and effect of identity, as the signification of the self via discourse, is subverted. In this sense, the possibility of agency is paradoxically contingent on its foreclosure by fixed identities that are produced or generated by signification and repetitive acts: “Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible” (201). The critical task, as Butler affirms, is to subvert these articulations and intelligibilities from within, “presenting the immanent possibility of contesting them” (*ibid.*). This is the reason why José-María reproduces the hegemonic masculinity of his birthright and environment in an attempt to negotiate its internalization while combatting its restrictions.

As such, I am also critical of José-María’s marginalized status as a result of his noble position in society and his biases against “effeminate or decadent” expressions of masculinity, which is also a part of his environment that he internalizes even while experiencing a certain level of sexual freedom in Paris. As Mejías-López notes, “José María shows ... his internalization of normative discourses, the Foucaultian panopticon at work” (endnote 13). Insofar that *El ángel de Sodoma* is a critique of heteronormativity, it also is a critique of certain strands of homosexual expression that are grounded in the main character’s ambivalent views on masculinity and femininity and feelings towards his own sexual inversion. José-María attempts to save the family’s capital and the purity of its name by

performing a mode of masculinity that reproduces the father's hegemony, and that maintains the patriarchal power and economic leverage of the family over the province. At the same time, the family's financial stability is in jeopardy as a result of socioeconomic and historical circumstances. Like Spain's failed regenerationist attempt toward progress and modernization under a string of dictatorships, so too do the men fail at rebuilding his family's fortune and reputation, namely José-María's father and brother.

#### **1.4. The Angel of Sodom or of the Swamp? Reversing the Degeneration of Inversion**

##### 1.4.1. From the Degeneracy of Inversion to the Downfall of Heteronormativity: Santiago and Jaime

In the main narrative of *El ángel de Sodoma*, the echoes of 'eso,' or of that which dare not speak its name, the contempt of the unconfessed ("el vilipendio de lo inconfesable"; 108), and the mud in the swamp, resound as metaphors of the repudiation of sexual inversion and same-sex desire as seen in the way that José-María thinks about his own subjectivity: "In the swamp there are layers, and the most fetid, the one without remission, was the one that nourished the roots of his being..." ("En la ciénaga hay capas, y la más fétida, la de imposible remisión, era la que alimentaba las raíces de su ser..."; 115). Cuban writers often used the swamp as a metaphor of moral degeneration: "The smelly swamp portrayed by the lettered was not but a reflection of the economic dependence and the moral degeneration of Cubans" ("La ciénaga maloliente retratada por los literatos no era sino el reflejo de la dependencia económica y de la degeneración moral de los cubanos"; Naranjo Orovio 523). Naranjo Orovio is specifically referring to Cuba's economic dependency on foreign investments, especially from the United States after the island had become a Republic and had no longer been under Spanish rule. In the eyes of Cuban intellectuals and politicians, that dependency led to a devaluation of national traditions and cultural values, therefore a process of moral regeneration was needed in order to restore the country and reconstruct its national identity.

This process was similar for the colonized and the colonizer, who both had to reimagine their nationhood in the aftermath of independence. Decolonization in Cuba and other colonies meant that Spain also had to find a way to recuperate its moral high ground and wealth after losing its territories. National identity was therefore tied to finding its moral compass in tandem with augmenting economic and political power. As a result, it officially remained neutral during the First World War, allowing it to serve as a supplier of goods and armaments for both sides, thus experiencing an upsurge in its economy, but it did not last long. We see this history reflected in the novel when it mentions the War and a great economic boom that was short-lived (66, 67). After Santiago dies and after the First World War erupts, the children strive to maintain the three-story house to the point that the first two floors are emptied of renters and, as a result, José-María takes a banking job: “two years after the economic boom, money and goods simultaneously rose in price, two renters left the house, and they had to think about working” (“dos años después del gran auge económico, el dinero y las subsistencias encarecieron al par, se les desalquilaron dos pisos y hubo que pensar en colocarse”; 67).

These developments parallel the first sentence of chapter one where material wealth and spiritual corruption is pitied:

The fall of any material or spiritual structure held in high esteem for many centuries is always a pathetic spectacle. The house of the Vélez-Gomara family was very old and had many times been illustrious by the power of its men and by the treasured richness below its blazon. But with the wasting away caused by the scraping of the years, the laboring spirits weakened, and once again the wealth turned into the dust of anonymity, at the mercy of the claws of usurers and at the hands of caressing and clever women. Civility shined over one hundred heads of lineage here and there without royal consecrations, while the house of the Vélez-Gomaras languished. And, as if its final demolition could not be placed, for example, at the side of the romantic destruction of [*The Fall of the House of*] Usher, it is rich enough—above all else by the simultaneously offensive and heroic particularities of the last of its boys—to remove, in painful strokes, some sympathetic readers from their obsessive egotism or indifference for a couple of hours.

La caída de cualquier construcción material o espiritual mantenida en alto varios siglos constituye siempre un espectáculo patético. 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. Y si su derrumbamiento final no puede ponerse, por ejemplo, junto al romántico de la de [*La caída de la casa*] Usher, es, sobre todo por las particularidades al par vejaminosas y heroicas del postrero de sus varones, lo bastante rico en rasgos dolorosos para sacar de su egolatría o de su indiferencia, durante un par de horas, a algunos lectores sensibles. (47-48)

The opening of the novel above gives continuity to what the respondent of the epigraphic preface sets out to do in his response to his interlocutor. In the epigraphic preface, the respondent says that he will write about the taboo “*eso*” as he wishes, granted he stirs the mud of the swamp in a way that does not diminish the merits of his literary project. If taken as a referent of sexual inversion and homosexuality, one could say that the *eso* of the epigraphic preface is incongruent with the fall of the house of the Vélez-Gomara described in the first chapter cited above, especially since the meaning of *eso* is never explicit. However, the respondent’s friend refers to it as a plural entity, ‘asuntos ingratos’ (‘unpleasant subjects’), therefore admittedly revealing, perhaps inadvertently, that there are other prevalent issues of immorality at hand in addition to sexual inversion and homosexuality. These issues are taken up by the novel’s opening above, which attributes the fall of the Vélez-Gomaras to the weakening of men once strong and to their seduction by women who trick them into financial ruin. This is an indirect allusion to the financial irresponsibility of Santiago, the deceased father, as it is of Jaime as well, whose involvement with the daughter of the tamer of beasts coincides with his losses to gambling and contraband.

The last sentence is also a direct reference to Jaime, the last-born child and the heterosexual *par excellence* on whom the destruction of the household is placed, and *not* on José-María. For instance, when Bermúdez Gil, the steward of José-María’s father’s life insurance, visits the house, the children and him engage in conversation about their parents and the protagonist thinks: “Neither the laziness nor lack of ability of the suicidal giant, in no way, became part of his person: he hated alcohol, he had the energy for daily chores, he repudiated his father’s explosive violence, he loved order, cleanliness, and resourcefulness” (“Ni la pereza ni la desmaña ambizurda del gigante suicida

entranaban para nada en su persona: él odiaba el alcohol, era capaz de la energía cotidiana, repugnaba la explosiva violencia, amaba el orden, la limpieza, el ahorro”; 116). Both Santiago and Jaime exhibit these behaviors that contrast José-María’s, a restraint that he shows even in uninhibited Paris. Consequently, Hernández-Catá accomplishes what he sets out to do from the very beginning: to invert the stigma on social taboos and redirect it from the repudiation of the sexual invert to other entities and factors.

The epigraphic preface states that the writer of *El ángel de Sodoma* subverts normativity by stirring the mud of gender and sexual non-conformity, however, this mud turns out to be thicker than expected. The interlocutor focuses on the unpleasantness of sexual inversion and homosexuality, while the respondent reverses it by illustrating how the sexual invert is the pure element that will rise from the wretchedness of the swamp. This subversion continues in the epigraph on Genesis 18, which interrogates punishing the wretched as equally as the righteous. As Mejías-López notes, the text is steeped in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which takes Scripture and divine revelation as absolute truths. Meanwhile, the certainty of accepted truths is questioned in the biblical epigraph in the same way that in his essay cited previously Hernández-Catá contests absolutism. One of these truths, which other critics espouse, is not aligned with the opening paragraph of the novel: that the downfall of the Vélez-Gomara is caused by the sexual invert, or José-María, and not by the last of the offspring, Jaime, the heterosexual. However, this is the misconception that is contested from the start.

What is more, such a story will snap readers out of their egocentrism. Here an *undramatized* narrator introduces the novel without being seen and without using the first person, contrary to a *dramatized* narrator (Herman and Vervaeck 19). I interpret the undramatized narrator as Hernández-Catá, which is similar to his alter ego in the epigraphic preface in the way that he conceals his identity. In the story, he extends himself through the narrative voice via metafictional techniques,

namely by addressing the readers who will read his book and by describing the collapse of the Vélez-Gomaras as a “sad spectacle,” as though it were a show of theatrical proportions, ready to be seen. Spectacle can be interpreted as a real event with eyewitnesses or as a dramatic or campy performance watched by an audience. Since the book was published in Madrid and its story mostly takes place in Spain, then its audience is mainly a Spanish one. The undramatized narrator refers to the Spanish readers of the story as egotistical and indifferent, in conjunction with a story described as a sad spectacle set in Spain. It sets the tone for Hernández-Catá’s implicit critique of the tarnished values of Spanish society as exemplified by the Vélez-Gomara family, but not by its first-born who eventually is freed from the burden of the family name. Instead by the youngest child, Jaime, the only one able to continue the family’s lineage seeing that the sisters marry and take their husbands last names and that José-María is not interested in neither marriage nor keeping the family name.

Despite being described as a Levitical city, one that is governed by religious standards, the Spanish town does not hide very well its hedonistic proclivities. Modernity as a movement towards progress does not fare well in it due to an imbalance in consumption spawned by irresponsible workers and corrupt dealers. In the first chapter, such corrosion is tied to the consumption of bodies and sexual pleasures as represented by ‘caressing and clever women,’ that is, prostitutes. For instance, as powerful noble landowners, the Vélez-Gomaras had more wealth than others until the financial irresponsibility of the father, Santiago—fooled by lenders and prostitutes—causes them to gradually lose it. As a result, civility reigned everywhere else in the town except in the house of the Vélez-Gomaras, which is to say that, although they enjoyed the privilege that others did not, it was short-lived and precarious:

They could hardly construct the physical image of the suicide, but the soul, on the other hand, took the form of the figure of a mysterious vengeful creditor to whom they had to pay in painful currency. They did not sell nor were they excessively saddened when, two years after the great economic boom, money and subsistence simultaneously rose in price, two renters left the house, and they had to think about working. José-María said with motivation:

—I will work since I didn't have the brains for school. What matters is that Jaime finish his schooling and that, when it's time, you marry well.

Apenas si podían reconstruir ya la imagen física del suicida, y el alma en cambio, tomaba la figura de un misterioso acreedor vengativo a quien habían de pagar en dolorosa moneda. No vendieron ni se entristecieron demasiado cuando, dos años después del gran auge económico, el dinero y las subsistencias encarecieron al par, se les desalquilaron dos pisos y hubo que pensar en colocarse. Animoso, José-María dijo:

—Trabajaré yo que no tuve cabeza para estudiar. El caso es que Jaime acabe su carrera y que vosotras, cuando sea tiempo, os caséis bien. (66-67)

The swamp, like Sodom, is rather a symbol of the degenerate unrighteousness and hypocrisy of Spanish society. For instance, the text often mentions a group called “Todos” (“All”) to refer to and include all the characters and everyone in the city as participants or spectators of the Vélez-Gomaras’ “drama.” This occurs when Santiago is emasculated in comparison to his industrious wife: “Then *all* understood that the great hulk of a man would go through life resting on the support of that frail, female body” (“*Todos* comprendieron entonces que el hombrachón se había apoyado para ir por la vida en el cuerpecillo femenino”; 50; emphasis added). It also occurs when Santiago commits suicide and the city becomes part of the dramatic event: “The entire city participated in the drama” (“*Toda la ciudad* participó del drama”; 55).

Santiago’s addiction to alcohol aggravates the children’s misfortune and the only solution he finds in order to salvage the family name is to commit suicide in order to leave his children with his life insurance. The insurance, however, will not be enough because the fluctuations in the national economy will force the children to find other sources of income. According to economic historians, Spain’s economy in-between wars was very dependent on agriculture, which delayed industrialization in comparison to its acceleration in other European countries such as Italy. Foreign investment was decent between 1924 and 1928, “contradicting Primo de Rivera’s nationalist rhetoric.” State protectionism played a part in depreciating financial gains, and it was not strong enough to quell private investments and profit from external sources. On the one hand, foreign commerce favored the Spanish economy during the 1920s, particularly between 1922 and 1925 than in the following

five years, which explains the economic boom that preceded these years while confirming how after 1925 the economy began to decline. On the other, remittances sent by emigrants declined, as did profit from imports as a result of the development of navigation outside the country, which strengthened legislative measures against external commerce (Comín 133-38).

Against this contextual backdrop, the sodomitic city gradually seeks redemption in the sacrifices that José-María makes to save himself and his siblings from dishonoring the family name. As Mejías-López rightfully argues, the city needs the Vélez-Gomara name in order to keep its status of high repute: “so much of its identity resides in the survival of the Vélez-Gomara family name ... The town needs the family to keep its delusion of grandeur,” despite the social inequity caused by its concentration of the wealth as landowners. He cites the following passage, which highlights well the hypocritical behavior of the city dwellers and their double moral and ethical standards:

Even though Captain Bermúdez Gil was the guardian, it can be said without hyperbole that the entire city constituted the family counsel. It only took one person to find the little orphans in the street, *forget their individual faults*, and frown and say, while wagging a finger, like a cane ready to grow in size for punishment:

—You must be serious and walk straighter than candles, ok? The name of your father and what he has done for you requires it. And if not...!

Without this diffuse threat and without the admiration that the father’s demise and his incomprehensible heroic lesson added to the lackluster coats of arms, *they would have been completely happy*.

Aun cuando el tutor fuera el capitán Bermúdez Gil, puede decirse sin hipérbole que el consejo de familia lo constituyó la ciudad entera. Bastaba que cualquiera hallase en la calle a los huerfanitos para que, *olvidando sus faltas individuales*, ensombreciese el semblante y dijese agitando el índice a modo de bastón presto a agrandarse para el castigo:

—Es preciso ser serios y andar más derechos que velas, ¿eh? El nombre de vuestro padre y lo que ha hecho por vosotros, lo exige. ¡Y si no!...

Sin esta amenaza difusa y sin la admiración que el fin del padre y su incomprensible lección heroica añadía a los blasones deslustrados, *habrían sido por completo felices*. (59-60; ellipsis in original; emphasis added)

The last phrase of this excerpt denotes that the children would have been completely happy if they did not have to deal with the legacy of their father and the false pretense of the people in their town. They were aware of the town’s pretext of honor for their own selfish gain, such as those who wanted to buy their house as soon as they received the news that the parents had died. Nevertheless,

as explained previously, the town eventually accepts the resourcefulness of the children and no longer attempts to take advantage of their wealth.

Although José-María feels obligated to uphold the reputation of his native city in honor of his father, he does so in consideration of his siblings' wellbeing above all else. He is not interested in marrying in order to perpetuate the family name and he eventually accepts his sexual inversion. Moreover, the city dwellers become less of a problem than his brother's illegal activities. It is not until Jaime's delinquency and "dishonorable" death that the urgency of preserving the family's reputation intensifies. That is why José-María decides to flee the Spanish province and change his name, like his brother. As such, the collapse of tradition brought on by the effects of modernity takes a toll on a family whose moral reputation and class status are jeopardized as a result of the unbridled consumption of its heterosexual male members at home and abroad.

Jaime virtually inherits the failed legacy of the father. Both suffer the consequences of alcoholism, involvement with women, and illegal financial dealings. Jaime participates in contraband trade in the Caribbean as explained in the letter that José-María's brother-in-law Claudio sends him from the Jamaican consulate. Since the eighteenth century, Jamaica was the largest source of illicit commerce, especially for England's South Sea Company. Private individuals often filled ships with cargo that they sold in Jamaica and Spanish America in order to smuggle goods from these lands in exchange for exports such as silver, half of which went unregistered on its journey back to Europe, according to the company's servants (Brown 178, 179). France and Holland, nations that were industrializing at a much faster pace than Spain, were also big competitors against Spanish trade. Spanish goods were not of the same quality, therefore, in order to supply the demand of the Spanish American market, they had "to purchase manufacturers from its enemies in order to meet American requirements" (Sanders 60). The exchanges between the Jamaican and Spanish American harbors also facilitated the trafficking of black slaves. Illegal trade spilled over Spanish America, therefore

Jaime's adventurous spirit, described as both offensive and heroic, is grounded on the politics of transnational and transatlantic imperial economies, which is intertwined with economies on sex and gender in the novel.

A version of this argument is made by the narrator of *El ángel de Sodoma* in the transition from chapter two to three wherein the fragile youth and blissful innocence of José-María and his two sisters are vulnerable to their sexual awakening, existential misfortune, and Jaime's life choices:

They were satisfied with closing the door [of the house], forgetting Jaime for a while, isolating themselves from the city that was obstinately recording their orphanage with excessive obligations of lineage, fooling time by countering the words and gestures of yesteryear in order to conserve that childlike fortune. They laughed, and their laugh was foam under which the deep sea of the passions remained invisible.

They ignored that, hidden in the innermost part of the fruit of their youth, the worm of disgrace had already started to wriggle, from the inside out, its little black, inexorable path. [Beginning of chapter three.] The first symptoms were almost imperceptible and were engendered, without doubt, in that barter of features between the two girls. Jaime brought the second ones from his trip to remote lands by indomitable contraband bought and hidden in his soul, until then docile, in one of those ports where the races and the vices of various continents converge. And José-María had the latter revelation—a volcano suddenly open over a shady and flowery mountain—that night in which, dragged by the younger brother, he went to the circus.

Bastábales cerrar la puerta [de la casa], olvidar un poco a Jaime, aislarse de la ciudad obstinada en gravar su orfandad con excesivas obligaciones de estirpe, engañar al tiempo contrahaciendo las palabras y los gestos de antaño, para conservar aquella dicha niña. Reían, y era su risa espuma bajo la cual el mar hondo de las pasiones permanecía invisible.

Ignoraban que, oculto en lo más interno de la fruta de su juventud, el gusano de la desgracia había empezado a horadar ya, de dentro a fuera, su caminito negro, inexorable.

[Comienzo del capítulo tres.] Los primeros síntomas fueron casi imperceptibles y se engendraron, sin duda, en aquel trueque de facciones entre las dos muchachas. Los segundos los trajo Jaime de su viaje a tierras remotas, a modo de contrabando indómito comprado y escondido en su alma, hasta entonces dócil, en uno de esos puertos donde confluyen las razas y los vicios de varios continentes. Y la revelación postrera, volcán abierto de improviso sobre una montaña umbrosa y florida, la tuvo José-María la noche aquella en que, arrastrado por el hermano menor, fue al circo. (74-75)

Jaime's external affairs alter the course of his siblings' lives because whenever he returns from nautical school, they are obliged to receive him at the port that, according to the narrator, is the place where the races and vices from foreign lands mix. The place where the Vélez-Gomaras' house is located is marked by slights of paganism near a port where sailors, looking for sexual gratification, disembark (48). They satisfy their pleasures in the shacks of the suburbs in the periphery of the city

(‘casucas del suburbio’), a clear reference to prostitution. It is on his trips to other lands that Jaime meets the daughter of the tamer of beasts : “Although nothing can be done in those cursed Spanish ships, because the captain cared more about morality than bad climate, he [Jaime] was able to see her [the daughter of the tamer of beasts] once in tights” (“A pesar de que en los malditos barcos españoles nada se puede hacer, porque el capitán se cuida más de la moral que del mal tiempo, él [Jaime] había logrado verla [la hija del domador de fieras] una vez en mallas”; 83-84). These are the same ships on which he would return after his travels to meet his siblings and he returns accompanied by the daughter of a tamer of beasts and other members of a traveling circus, including the acrobat that awakens José-María’s same-sex desire.

Jaime is not concerned about maintaining a standard of puritanical morality and rebels against the traditions and corruption of Spanish bourgeois culture. The fact that the captain of the ship was concerned about morality implies that it was not upheld by sailors as uninhibited as Jaime. Not only is this mentioned in the excerpt cited previously about the paganism of the city. It also comes up towards the end of the first half of the novel, in chapter five, when Jaime leaves again, and in his absence, José-María is tempted to go to the ship docks at the pier, where he runs into three drunk sailors: “Three sailors held by the arms came staggering to the rhythm of an alcoholic and lubricious song” (“Tres marineros cogidos por los brazos venían tambaleándose al compás de una canción alcohólica y lúbrica”; 126). It is there where he remembers Jaime’s departure. It is also when he decides to fight against his sexual urges.

As Mira explains, the metropolis was the place where sexual liberalism became most apparent, particularly in places like Madrid and Barcelona, cities with which Hernández-Catá was well acquainted. The latter more so for being a port city: “The underworld of the Catalan capital is described as extremely rich due to its character as a port city ... characterized by practices that are *contra natura* ... The urban jungle is explicitly described as a refuge of perversion” (“Se describe el

submundo de la capital catalana, extremadamente rico debido a su carácter de ciudad portuaria ... caracterizada por las prácticas contra natura ... La jungla urbana se describe explícitamente como abrigo de la perversión"; 55).

When José-María acts on the impulse to go to the docks, he is reminded of Jaime's arrival and the tamer of beasts, and the narrator describes the meshing of the urban and peripheral spaces in this scene like a mythic jungle:

Upon leaving the office, on the verge of twilight, José-María could not obey the voices of folly that advised him to lock himself in his house. The city, amphibian, duplicated the lights that deepened a mysterious dimension in the asphalt. It smelled like humid soil, and in the air, electrified by the tempest, its chest became wider and more weightless. ... The limit between the city and the sea had been erased. An orgy of lights between which the crude violet of the voltaic arches, the spectral whiteness of magnesium, the yellow of the funereal lanterns, and the red-blues and greens of the ships, feigned in the water an inexistent rainbow in the black sky of the storm, and it borrowed from even the most familiar places the novelty of adventure. Something of childlike Venetian celebration would have cheered up his mood if an unknown of murkiness, of nebulousness in the bodies and the intentions, had not imparted to every tremulous step a sense of risk...

Al salir de la oficina, al filo último del crepúsculo, José-María no pudo obedecer a las voces de sensatez que le aconsejaban ir a encerrarse en su casa. La ciudad, *anfibia*, duplicaba las luces que ahondaban en el asfalto una dimensión misteriosa. Olía a tierra húmeda, y en el aire, electrizado por la tempestad, tornábase más ancho e ingrátido el pecho. ... El límite entre la ciudad y el mar habíase borrado. Una orgía de luces entre las cuales el crudo violeta de los arcos voltaicos, la blancura espectral del magnesio, el amarillo de los fúnebres faroles y los rojos azules y verdes de los buques, 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. Algo de pueril fiesta veneciana habría alegrado su ánimo si un no sé qué de turbio, de neblinoso en los cuerpos y en las intenciones, no diese a cada paso trémulo sentido de riesgo... (124-25)

It is the porous boundaries between the house and the center, periphery, and external territories of the city that instantiate the various dimensions of José-María's conflicts. The house itself, as both a refuge against the outside world but situated in-between the lewd periphery of the harbor and the repressive atmosphere of the city center, exacerbates his internal struggle. Luis Navarro-Ayala would further argue that José-María's experiences of oppression are heightened by his own shameful self-reclusion: "At first glance, the house seems to provide a shelter from the city, but his feeling of security quickly dissolves as José-María begins to analyze his own situation ... José-María enters into a new and more dangerous semiotic space: his own mind and body" (75). The house of the Vélez-

Gomaras symbolizes the children's isolation from the outside world (not to be mistaken for their separation from it), which Jaime personifies. Their reclusion is adjacent to Jaime's absence, while the maleficent symptoms caused by the worm of disgrace are tied to his presence. It presages the tragic end of the Vélez-Gomaras as not solely caused by José-María's homosexuality as is often thought. Instead, the economy of gender and sexuality is grounded on the crisis of heterosexual masculinity and patriarchy in connection with the processes of modernity, which diminishes the socioeconomic status of the family in the midst of modern changes.

The place where the Vélez-Gomaras' house is located is described as a Levitical city ("ciudad levítica"), that is, one that is concerned with rituals and rules, codes of conduct, like the biblical book of Leviticus and its admonishments to the people of Israel to follow God's laws (48). However, the city is also described as lacking in charity and as pagan in character due to the influx of sailors and foreigners that frequent its ports and provincial areas (*ibid.*). As a result, the city's threat of retaliation for dishonorable behavior is untenable. Henceforth, the transition in space and time from the Old Testament's Sodom to the Spanish house of the Vélez-Gomaras parallels the discursive transition from the traditions of centuries past (all the way back to biblical times) to its erosion in modern Spain. The sacred tenets of religion are, therefore, inverted and questioned at the onset of the story's narration, a trend that takes on spatial dimensions from the beginning of the novel's opening paragraph, delineating the symbiosis of space and text, not only in physical terms, but symbolically as well.

From its title to its epigraphic preface, and from its second epigraph on Genesis to the first paragraph of chapter one, symbolic inversions intertwined with sexual, religious, and spatial connotations in *El ángel de Sodoma* alter the reader's conceptual frames: an angel from the sinful city of Sodom, a chaste invert that is tarnished by the mud of the swamp, a God who is unjust, and a prestigious family brought down by the egotism and indifference of its heterosexual males as

opposed to its female/inverted members. In his own thought process and in no more than a page's length, José-María redirects the shame of his feminine nature to a questioning of the primacy of the male figure as the epitome of strength. He presents his own parents as examples, for it is the mother who is described as active and industrious while the father is slow and unproductive (49). What is more, he identifies with the industriousness of his mother in a 'protest against the demarcations of Nature.' In other words, José-María is moved to reconsider the ways in which the constitution of human nature is compartmentalized and separated into categories with regard to sex and gender as a way to revise and reevaluate his self-loathing towards an attitude of acceptance.

#### 1.4.2. Destabilizing Masculinity in the Feminine Beauty of the Swamp

The delimitations of sex and gender difference and ambiguity prompt José-María to rethink and dismantle the heteronormative model of the gender binary. This happens toward the end of chapter six when the statuesque image of Jaime (the prototypical heterosexual male) that appears in José-María's dreams merges with that of a woman's and then with the man at the circus, thus inverting the sexes and meshing them into one another on the basis of a parallelism between the losses and gains of Jaime's reckless consumption in a way that harkens back to the beauty of the swamp:

He sent the money to Jaime, and, for a few days, the image of a convict burned alive by debts of honor alternated in his dreams with the figure of a woman that, resplendently coming out of a dark cloak, swung between the beasts and transformed little by little into a young and herculean man at the moment of falling into the arms of a tiger. When this metamorphosis occurred, the sensation was so strong that he awoke sobbing. ... And in the dream, at the turning of the statue's sex, the beast, which had Jaime's features, became weaker, whiter; it pumped its smooth chest, and acquired under the reddened and threatened gleam in its pupils of frightened green the fragile beauty of a flower...

Envió el dinero a Jaime, y, durante unos días, la imagen de un reo quemado vivo por deudas de honor alternó en sus sueños con la figura de una mujer que, saliendo resplandeciente de un manto oscuro, se columpiaba entre las fieras y se transformaba poco a poco, al caer en brazos de un tigre, en un hombre joven y hercúleo. Cuando esta metamorfosis ocurría, la sensación era tan fuerte que se despertaba entre sollozos. ... Y en el sueño, al cambiar la estatua de sexo, la fiera, que tenía las facciones de Jaime, hacía-se más débil, más blanca; bombeaba el pecho terso, y adquiría bajo el fulgor

de las pupilas de asustado verde una belleza frágil, como ruborizada y amenazada, de flor... (146-47; last ellipsis in original)

In his dreams, Jaime is like a shapeshifter that turns into the daughter of the tamer of beasts, and she turns into a herculean man, which is an allusion to the acrobat that José-María obsesses over at the circus. The figure goes through two transformations, first from heterosexual male to heterosexual female. Then it transforms into a virile representation of the homosexual male when it falls into the arms of a personified tiger, as though the animal were a person standing upright and catching the woman. When the female figure turns into the herculean man, the tiger, who has Jaime's features, becomes tamer and whiter, acquiring the beauty of a flower beneath its pupils. The scene is a mythic rendering of Jaime's delinquency that José-María attributes to the daughter of the tamer of beasts, hence their convergence in his dream. Similarly, the woman converges with the herculean acrobat since it is at the circus where José-María meets them both.

Dreams are phenomena of the unconscious that bear symbols of an individual's experience. Freud stated that the interpretation of dreams "is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind" (604). He theorized that the majority of the dreams of adults "deal with sexual material and give expression to erotic wishes" (406). Despite this generalization, his claim aligns with José-María's dream as it is often at night that his sexual yearnings are awakened. The dream is full of typical binaries—conscious/unconscious, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, dark/light, man/beast, and strength/fragility—that parallel the opposition between his masculinity and femininity, except that in his unconscious these opposites converge, thus metamorphosing into his sexual inversion. Metamorphosis often symbolizes the instability of forms and the mutability of entities as well as the fluid interaction and indistinguishability between them. As such, the opposites no longer contradict each other but morph into another sexual and gendered unity that is paradoxically ambiguous in its materiality but that psychologically renders Jaime's bestial virility weak by the fragility and beauty of a femininity imbued with queerness.

The use of color and synesthesia is a very significant aspect of modernist literature that heightens the symbolism of the cited passage above, especially in the transitions from one color to another. These techniques are used to illustrate José-María's transformation into an invert who ultimately embraces his femininity. For instance, the woman comes out of a dark cloak (black) and into the light of her voluptuousness (white), meshing the threat of Jaime's conviction by the law with the danger of her bestiality. The primitiveness of bestiality is associated with femininity like the archetypal interaction between the biblical Eve and the serpent, the diabolic beast of evil. José-María believes that the daughter of the tamer of beasts seduces Jaime into wrongdoing, attributing her sexuality to his criminality and spirit of rebellion against his family, just like Satan, the fallen angel who acquired dominion over the beasts of hell as a result of his prideful dissent from God and seduction of Eve—and she of Adam—into eating the forbidden fruit. However, the darkness of these negative connotations seems to dissipate as soon as Jaime's image metamorphoses into the woman's and then hers into the herculean acrobat in what can be interpreted as a transfer of femininity to Jaime via the beastly tiger that serves as its intermediary medium. Seeing that the acrobat is portrayed as José-María's avatar, that transfer extends to him as well.

The tiger's embrace of the woman represents its embrace of her femininity and that of the acrobat's based on José-María's projection of homosexuality onto him. As a result, its bestiality becomes more docile, showing the tenderness and nurturing traits of the female. The tiger is said to have Jaime's features, which seems to be different from the image, or statue, of Jaime that turns into the daughter of the tamer of beasts. This could mean that the tiger with Jaime's features is in the presence of the initial statue of Jaime that had transformed into a woman-turned-acrobat. It could also be that the circus trio (Jaime, woman, and acrobat) converges into the beast, becoming one entity since it has Jaime's features. Jaime is then the beast that catches the woman-turned-acrobat who is then a projected representation of femininity and same-sex desire. Therefore, the once

heterosexual male (Jaime) turns into the homosexual/feminine male (José-María), inverting the protagonist's glorification of his younger brother's virility, and thus, reversing the heteronormative, binarial gender paradigm on which José-María models his identity.

In effect, the beast-turned-homosexual/invert is no longer a threat because once it acquires its femininity/inversion it becomes more docile and whiter. White symbolizes innocence, new beginnings, and initiation (Ronnberg 660). The beast also has green pupils ("an intermediate, transitional color" between cold and warm ones), like José-María's eyes, and they have a reddened gleam and acquire the beauty of the flower, another archetypal symbol of the female (Cirlot 52). Both red and green, the former a symbol of blood and the latter of plants, represent life. As such, José-María's white skin (his body) and his eyes (the windows to his soul) metamorphose into a beast, no longer a primitive renegade, but one that inducts him into the beauty of inversion via the life force that turns him into a flower no longer pestiferous but pleasant, like the beauty that Hernández-Catá evokes from the swamp in the epigraphic preface. It is a transformation that repeats itself (the use of the imperfect verb 'ocurría' denotes repetition) in a recurring dream. What is more, it is based on José-María's payment of Jaime's illegal debt in order to preserve his family's honor, which is to say that his brother's redemption is paid by José-María's change to a sexual invert. This conversion also inverts his efforts to become more masculine, contrary to how he initially intended to redeem his family's name.

The dream and its outcomes contrast José-María's earlier perceptions of his gender and sexuality in relation to his brother, the woman, and the acrobat. His first encounters with them occur at night when he goes to the circus with his brother. When they return to the house after the show, they sleep next to each other and, for the first time, José-María contemplates and sexualizes Jaime's virile body in contrast to his feminine one, to which he reacts with anger and repulsion:

José-María sat up and, in the moon [mirror] of the wardrobe, he saw his countenance and thorax with ire as though it was, until then, an unknown enemy. His prepubescent skin, his turgid forms

completed the image that his thought had already anticipated. An ambiguous halo of flesh and indecisive forms between the two sexes differentiated his torso from Jaime's hairy one. Equivocal looseness refined his features: his mouth meshed with his sisters' in the violet bags under his eyes; *his green eyes had an abnormal ray of light, sad*. And, through that sadness, loathing changed little by little into pity. *He would have wanted to duplicate himself*, return to the rest of his poor soul the best of him, in order to caress and console himself. But no: that angst of consolation and caresses was feminine too! He'd triumph with rigor over all unhealthy weakness.

José-María se incorporó y, en la luna del armario, vio, con ira, cual si se tratara de un enemigo desconocido hasta entonces, su faz y su tórax. La piel impúber, las formas túrgidas completaban la imagen ya anticipada por el pensamiento. Un halo ambiguo, de carne y de formas indecisas entre los dos sexos, diferenciaba su torso del velludo de Jaime. Equívoca dejadez afinaba las facciones: la boca participaba de algo de la de sus hermanas en las violetas de las ojeras, el verde de los ojos tenía un rayo anormal, triste. Y, por esa tristeza, el odio se fue trocando poco a poco en lástima. Hubiera querido desdoblarse, volver sobre el resto de su pobre ser lo mejor de sí, para acariciarse y consolarse. ¡Pero no: esa ansia de consuelo y caricia era feminidad también! Triunfaría de toda flaqueza malsana con rigor. (101-02; emphasis added)

In the excerpt above, we see the contrasting parallelism to the dream he later has, as was discussed above. The medium to his thoughts in this instance is a mirror, which opens up his conscious, instead of unconscious, mind. The mirror is a symbol of reflection and self-contemplation, leading to the observer's ambivalence in the moment that its image is contained and absorbed by the object (Cirlot 211). In the passage it is described as lunar, therefore denoting its passivity seeing that the moon receives light from the sun.

The correlation of passivity with femininity illuminates this portion of the text as José-María loathes his ambiguous body in a looking glass that reflects the darkness of the night, the darkness of his inversion. The object is also attached or built into the wardrobe. In a passage after this incident, José-María thinks about the gendered meanings of his clothing:

Every time he had to buy clothes, his repugnance upon entering the store and his fear that Isabel-Luisa and Amparo would buy them in soft fabric, were in conflict several days. Relying on that capacity to feign, wherein he recognized a new feminine stigma, he purchased two pieces of coarse cotton and inner garments of accordion-shaped warp under the pretext that they were gifts. But these precautions, and surveilling even the slightest mannerisms to angle them and extirpate any delicate affectation, were useless when the magic of spring transformed the lead of the sea into cobalt and the earth became a germinative sponge, and they mixed in the gentle breezes of invisible gardens.

Then the same ordinariness of the clothes made him feel his flesh, irritated, in a manner of protest. And in the middle of his calculations of interest or of the clauses of a Special Power, he surprised himself trying to gather the first characteristics of his misfortune in the remoteness of his memory, or overtaken by the terror of the proximity, sensible only to him, of energetic hands and of

a herculean thorax that pretended in vain to extract the passion from the tight-fitting attire of fresh, vegetable colors...

Cada vez que había de comprarse ropa interior, su repugnancia a entrar en la tienda y su temor a que Isabel-Luisa o Amparo se la comprasen de tela suave, pugnaban muchos días. Recurriendo a aquella capacidad de fingimiento en la cual reconocía un nuevo estigma femil, llevó, atribuyéndolas a un regalo, dos piezas de algodón burdo y unas prendas interiores de acordonada urdimbre. Pero estas precauciones, y el vigilar hasta sus menores ademanes para angulizarlos y extirpar cualquier blando amaneramiento, nada servían cuando la mágica primavera transformaba el plomo del mar en cobalto y se esponjaba germinativamente la tierra, y se mezclaban a las brisas hálitos de invisibles jardines.

Entonces la misma ordinariéz de la ropa le hacía sentir la carne, irritada, en una presencia de protesta. Y en medio de los cálculos de interés o de las cláusulas de un Poder Especial, sorprendíase tratando de recoger en lo remoto del recuerdo los primeros rasgos de su desventura, o sobrecogido de terror por la proximidad, sólo para él sensible, de unas manos enérgicas y de un tórax hercúleo que en vano pretendía desapasionar el ceñido traje de frescos colores vegetales... (158-60; ellipsis in original)

Clothing triggers José-María's affinity for fashion and delicate garments, which heightens his femininity and effeminate demeanor. In this sense, his gender expression is not only biological but performative as well. The words 'Cada vez' ('Every time') indicate a repeated action that delimits his performed gender behavior, which unfortunately leads to the suppression of his femininity, albeit unsuccessfully since it is based on feigning a masculinity to which his own flesh negatively responds. Clothes also mask his feminine nature upon buying garments that are more "macho" due to their rigidity and rough fabric, urging him to angle his mannerisms in contrast to their fluid movement, like that of a woman's. In effect, the passivity of the lunar mirror and its reflection of his feminized body is fused with the clothes that accentuates his effeminate features and behaviors. As a result, and contrary to the dream scene, his green eyes are dispassionate and sad above violet bags instead of gleaming with beauty, and the different parts of his being are dividing instead of converging with the sexual passion of the herculean man and the daughter of the tamer of beasts. Green symbolizes (e)volution, however his becoming is brought down by the violet baggage under his eyes, another color symbolizing the passage to death, or (in)volution, like the deteriorating swamp (Chevalier 1069).

Notwithstanding, in the passage above he is also unable to completely suppress his sexual inversion and femininity. His flesh protests against it and he is frightened by the possibility of being stripped of his sexual yearning and gender inversion, making his recollection of the origins of it surprising. It is surprising because he is slow to remember it and because he understands that deep down his maleness and female qualities are inextricable to his motherly nature and feminine subjectivity. Although his condition produces anger, immediately after the dream he realizes that his femininity is his essence: “He immediately thought of Jaime, from whom he again had not received a letter in the past six months; and, ultimately, his ideas—like stones from a slingshot—continued to fall again on him with a pity that, upon recognizing his essence of feminine virtue, turned to wrath” (“En seguida pensaba en Jaime, de quien no había vuelto a tener carta hacía más de seis meses; y, al cabo, sus ideas—piedras de honda—volvían a recaer sobre sí mismo con una piedad que, al reconocer su esencia de virtud femenina, cambiábase en ira”; 149).<sup>44</sup>

Granted, José-María follows stereotypical portrayals of gender that preclude gender ambiguity and sexual fluidity; however, they make an impression on José-María that reminds him of the false hegemonic masculinity he feels pressured to emulate. For instance, in chapter seven, Amparo tells José-María to look at how Isabel-Luisa embroiders the family’s coat of arms on a garment and José-María responds in a paternal tone:

[Amparo] Look, José-María, how she embroiders the coat of arms that not even papa wore anymore. Immutable, the narrow and blonde mouth [Isabel-Luisa] responded sarcastically:  
 —When coats of arms cannot be honored properly, they should be suppressed; but when they can be worn as should be...  
 José-María intervened:  
 —You do it perfectly, my dear. The coat of arms is ours, *and no one, no one has stained it!* If they [suitors] are going to give you riches, you’re going to give them an illustrious, clean name; don’t forget it. Not even the smallest stain! Not even a shadow! ... And when he stopped, *the idea of salvation was already incrusting in his brain...*

[Amparo] Mira, José-María, cómo está bordando el escudo que ni siquiera papá llevaba ya en la ropa.

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<sup>44</sup> An interesting biographical note that I mention later in this chapter: As a kid, Hernández-Catá used to play with his friends pretending to be a Cuban revolutionary fighting against them, Spanish colonizers, and his weapon of choice was a slingshot.

Sin inmutarse, con sarcasmo, la boca estrecha y rubia [Isabel-Luisa] repuso:  
—Los escudos, cuando no pueden honrarse bien, deben suprimirse; pero cuando van a poderse llevar como es debido...

José-María intervino:

—Haces perfectamente, hija. El escudo es nuestro, *y nadie, ¡nadie!, ha echado una mancha sobre él.* Si ellos [pretendientes] van a darte riquezas, tú vas a darles un nombre ilustre, limpio; no lo olvides. ¡Ni la menor mancha! ¡Ni una sombra! ... Y cuando se detuvo, *ya la idea de salvación estaba incrustada en su cerebro...* (161-62; 1<sup>st</sup> ellipsis in original; emphasis added)

Although José-María acts like a righteous patriarch, the irony is that not even Santiago cared for the coat of arms, as Amparo highlights. Furthermore, the sarcasm in Isabel-Luisa's response indicates that she is not entirely convinced herself that the coat of arms should be respected, triggering José-María's more serious intervention. Her response shows that she was aware that their father did not honor the heraldic symbol because when Amparo mentions Santiago, Isabel-Luisa, in a generalized indirect comment, alludes to how the gigantic man dishonorably smeared it and that it was up to them to clean it of any stain. Perhaps José-María, during his sister's attempt to dress up the inconsistency with a newly embroidered coat of arms, noted the holes in her rebuttal and interposed to redirect the argument. His interpolation demonstrates that he was aware of the loophole that his father had created and felt obliged to set the record straight by lying about the unblemished family legacy. It is hypocritical of him to do so, however, he does it in order to maintain the pretense of decorum and rectitude and to set an example for his sisters as their older brother.

He also does it because he had convinced himself that it was his responsibility to save his siblings from disgrace, not merely by micromanaging their behaviors and steering their sexual impulses, but even more so by repressing his own feminine inclinations. In chapter five, when Bermúdez Gil visits the house, José-María reiterates his plan of salvation after questioning whether he is capable of repressing his desires:

I've been a good son, good brother... I've been a good man! But since today? This tranquility that now mesmerizes me, will it continue when spring breaks ... and jasmines smell like a dream and the geraniums in passionate action? Honor his father, save the coat of arms from stain! Yes, yes, that's what he wanted. He'd take care of Jaime, his two sisters and, even more so of himself ... —We should honor him. What papa did for us...

—And your mother too—said the friendly voice [Bermúdez Gil]

He sido buen hijo, buen hermano... ¡he sido hombre! Pero ¿y desde hoy? Esta tranquilidad que ahora me tiene como adormecido, ¿seguirá cuando la primavera raye ... y huelan los jazmines a sueño y geranios a acción apasionada?» ¡Honrar a su padre, salvar su blasón de toda mancha! Sí, sí, eso quería. Cuidaría de Jaime, de las dos hermanas y, todavía más de sí mismo ... —Debemos honrarlo. Lo que hizo papá por nosotros...

—Y a tu madre también—dijo la voz amiga [Bermúdez Gil]. (114, 115; 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ellipses in original).

José-María is about to argue against Bermúdez Gil's interjection about the woman to whom the protagonist attributes his sexual inversion, that is his mother, but a knot in his throat keeps him quiet because at that moment he is reminded of the active hands of the industrious woman that are identical to his, and to his voice, gestures, and mannerisms:

He felt more, infinitely more than his two sisters, heir of her [his mother], as though by a demonic parody of the mystery of the incarnation his mother would have conceived him without contact with a man. And for that reason, a bitter protest solidified in his soul against the womb that didn't know how to make him completely man or completely woman. ... he'd stop sometimes and, facing an invisible eyewitness, he said: Why am I to blame? ... But if inside of me I feel soft, feminine! Since I was a child I liked the things that women like!

Sentíase más, infinitamente más que sus dos hermanas, heredero de ella [su madre], cual si por demoniaca parodia del misterio de la encarnación su madre lo hubiera concebido sin contacto de hombre ninguno. Y, por eso, una protesta amarga se cuajaba en su alma contra el vientre que no supo hacerlo por completo varón o por completo hembra. ... deteníase a veces y, encarándose con un testigo invisible, decía: ¿Qué culpa tengo yo? ... ¡Pero, si dentro de mi me siento blando, femenino! ¡Si desde niño gusté de cuanto las mujeres gustan! (117)

In the excerpt above, José-María's feelings compete with his duty as a "savior," stressing his inverted nature via identification with his mother. From the previously cited excerpt on pages 49 and 50, we can recall that it is the mother who miraculously kept the children from going hungry and who maintained the house in the same way that José-María takes care of them. The scene cited above, however, portrays the gender ambiguity that he struggles to assimilate by underlining his duplicity, as though he were talking with another person about himself. He admits that he is not to blame for feeling feminine and for identifying with women. Although he refers to it as a demonic parody of the incarnation, he debunks the role that his father could have had in his conception, instating his mother as his sole progenitor. While he protests against the womb that conceives him, he realizes

that his femininity is an essential part of his nature at the same time that he resents his mother for deviating his possible fate as a man.

José-María's resentment, however, does not completely lean toward the denigration of his femininity nor to the exaltation of hegemonic manliness. In the paragraph following the passage cited above, he refers to his father as a parasitic spiritual presence in the house that is oppressive and pressures him into sacrificing himself for the sake of the family:

Due to this resentment and the idea that the duty of savior obligated him to venerate his father, portraits of him [Santiago] repeated his big face of a giant with half a soul in every room, while the only photograph of the little woman with incessantly active hands [the wife/mother] remained sequestered in the album with velvet covers and protective corner pieces of copper. And the father, a parasite even after death, filled the house with his spiritual presence, demanding interests of sacrifice for the act of killing himself after arranging an insurance policy and upon having taken a heraldic surname from his ancestors.

Por este resentimiento y por la idea de que un deber salvador lo obligaba a venerar a su padre, retratos de éste repetían su caraza de gigante con media alma en todas las habitaciones, mientras la fotografía única de la mujercita de manos siempre activas [la esposa/madre] quedó secuestrada en el álbum de pastas de terciopelo con cantoneras de cobre. Y, parásito hasta después de muerto, el padre llenó la casa con su presencia espiritual, exigiendo intereses de sacrificio al acto de haberse matado después de concertar un seguro y al haber recogido de sus ascendientes un apellido heráldico. (118)

Patriarchy takes a more prominent and demanding role in José-María's life. Every room of the house has a portrait of his father unlike the absent presence of his mother who remains hidden in a family album. The value of each progenitor is attached to the objects that personify them. While the mother is represented by a photograph—an artistic medium that in the 1920s was associated with the modernization of technology, the quotidian, and science—, the father is reproduced in painted portraits, a much more traditional medium that takes longer to produce. Paintings were held at a different standard than photography, which was an art form that was relatively newer, albeit becoming more popular at the turn of the nineteenth century. For that reason, it had more mass appeal and greater utilization, whereas paintings were less accessible for mass consumption. These factors correlate to the personalities and representations of each parent. Whereas the father represents the past tradition and wealth of his ancestors as evidenced by the material value and

quantity of his self-portraits, the mother and her industrious hands represent the activity of modernity and progress. These attributes also correlate to their perceived sex roles whereby the father's active masculinity is transposed to the mother's productive nature, rendering the father a passive parasite and, by extension, the family lineage as well, which is falling into oblivion due to his irresponsibility and corruption.

The artistic portrait, on the one hand, is more prone to deterioration if it is exposed to the elements, like Santiago's self-portraits. The photograph, on the other, is preserved longer if kept from the light, like the album that keeps the mother's photo protected. While the omnipresence of Santiago's portrait contrasts the enclosure of the mother's photograph—denoting the control that the spiritual affect of the panoptical, materialized embodiment of the father has over José-María's femininity—the mother's presence is still patent in the protagonist's soul, like the velvet and copper album that envelope her photograph. The phrase “on velvet,” for instance, means “in an advantageous or prosperous position” and copper represents the “fundamental element, water, the vital principle of all things; and also, light, which radiates from the copper helix wrapped around the Sun” (NOED; Chevalier 234). As such, the mother—a photograph of active progress and modernization—is the life force that conceives and feeds José-María's being (like the earth, water, and plants of the swamp), while the father—a parasitic portrait of passivity and apathy—is the force that corrodes his son (the rotten roots of the swamp's detritus), leading his son to his annihilation, although his suicide serves another purpose as explained previously.

The juxtaposition of his mother's vitality and his father's suicidal spirit reappear in the last chapter of the novel when José-María meets his fate in Paris. Previously it was stated that José-María's femininity is what helps him to commit suicide in a shameless way, therefore, the contrast in the juxtaposition of his parents is to a degree complementary because the femininity that José-María employs is a displacement of the father's, who in turn relies on the femininity of the mother in order

to be viable. It is ultimately the mother's femininity in relation to José-María's inversion that predominates in the last chapter, bringing together the variety of metaphors and representations of it aforementioned in the paragraphs above. The first of these is the clothes he packs for his trip to Paris.

The first thing he does when he arrives in the city is to check into a hotel and open the luggage that his sisters used for their nuptials. What appears inside the borrowed suitcases is the masculine clothes that he used to wear and he realizes that they do not represent his authentic self, his inverted nature: "Upon opening the suitcases that Amparo and Isabel-Luisa gave him, an embalmed smell emerged from them ... and he left ready to buy garments that would end once for all his stupid asceticism" ("Al abrir las maletas cedidas por Amparo e Isabel-Luisa, emergió de ellas un hálito embalsamado ... y salió dispuesto a comprar prendas que terminaran de una vez su ascetismo estúpido"; 218). He travels determined to use clothes that are more fitted and that reflect his androgyny and not the dull kind that represent a mummified version of his old self. That is why when he goes to a store to buy new attire he responds with anger at their insistence to personalize them with his initials: "But I don't want to wear any mark! I have come to suppress my last names, idiot!" ... All of Paris had entered his heart" ("«¡Pero si lo que yo quiero es no llevar ninguna marca! ¡Si he venido a suprimirme los apellidos, idiota!» ... París entero se le había metido en el corazón"; 219). José-María makes it very clear that he has left behind the onus of the family name in order to live out his individuality. For this reason, he decides to go to a tailor to order clothes more to his liking.

While he waits for his clothing to arrive, he returns to the hotel to take a bath, and the sun beaming in the bathroom and the water with which he washes his body are erotically personified, harkening back to the life forces that nourish his inversion: "and a ray of sun refreshed itself in it [the lukewarm water], *opening itself with pleasure* in the lights of magnificent colors. ... That wasn't a

cleansing bath: *it was the joy of feeling light* [not heavy] in the fragrant transparency and of discovering, furthermore, that *the water didn't always deserve being famous for its chastity*" ("y un rayo de sol se refrescaba en ella [el agua tibia] *abriéndose de placer* en luces de colores magníficos. ... No era aquel el baño de aseo: *era un goce de sentirse liviano* en la olorosa transparencia y de descubrir, además, que el agua *no merece siempre su fama de casta*"; 220; emphasis added). This passage comes after the scene at the clothing store, therefore, the sensual and carefree spirit of Paris already dwelled in José-María's heart and he experiences it for the first time in the bath. As stated before, water symbolizes new beginnings and initiation as well as renewal, and the light from the sun represents a new state of consciousness. In this passage, the elements of the natural world sync with human nature, imparting new ontological understanding and harmony in José-María's life whereby he can be as transparent with the pleasure that he wants to explore, and no longer hide it, like the translucence of the water that has escaped from the limelight of chastity.

The joy of experiencing life anew overpowers his fear of calamity: "And the jubilation of debuting life superimposed itself on every accident" ("Y el júbilo de estrenar la vida sobreponíase a todo accidente"; 220). This is a foreshadowing of his accidental suicide, stressing that he had come to terms with his newfound hope and acceptance of his inversion to the point where he overlooks whatever vestige of guilt was left in him and in other people he could have encountered in the Parisian metropolis: "Perhaps every one of those souls, many for sure, had not only inevitable passions hanging over their conscience, but crimes too, and they lived!" ("Cada uno de aquellos seres quizás, muchos de seguro, tendrían sobre su conciencia no sólo pasiones inevitables sino crímenes, ¡y vivían!"; 221). Although he is sure of himself, José-María cannot entirely break away from his repressed mindset but his outlook changes and begins to widen when he surmises that others with similar experiences as his are still able to live unapologetically.

After this realization, the clothes he ordered arrive and he becomes a new person reconciliated with his body and sense of self:

When they arrived, he went up to his room and transformed, marveling at the magic. He was someone else! But not only because of the clothes: he was already another person when he took off the plush robe, not daring to look face to face at the immense mirror of the wardrobe. He saw himself whole, the smooth and turgid body that so many times he had been ashamed of, his face illuminated by his smile. . . . And, meanwhile, the fortune of not feeling the weight of the stony coat of arms of his house, of finally contemplating himself clearly in the mirror, and of feeling, as a way of anticipating every caress, that of the fine clothing, sufficed.

Cuando llegaron subió a su cuarto y se transformó, maravillándose de la magia. ¡Era otro! Pero no sólo por las ropas: lo era ya cuando, al despojarse de la bata de felpa, sin atreverse a mirar cara a cara la inmensa luna [espejo] del armario, se vio íntegro, terso y túrgido el cuerpo de que tantas veces se había avergonzado, la cara iluminada por la sonrisa. . . . Y, mientras tanto, bastábale la dicha de no sentir pesar sobre su alma el pétreo escudo de su casa, de contemplarse ya sin rebozo en el espejo, y de sentir, a modo de anticipo de todas las caricias, las de la ropa fina. (221-23; 1<sup>st</sup> ellipsis in original)

José-María experiences yet another transformation, but this time it is real and not in his dreams. It is one that inverts all the negative feelings he had about his body in chapter seven. The same word used to describe his body negatively ('túrgido')—meaning swollen, as in voluptuous—is now used to accept the sensuality of his physique. At first, he does not look at the mirror because the light illuminating his face is his smile as he looks at himself with his own eyes. His self-affirmation no longer depends solely on the arresting image that the mirror could reflect, nor on what he wears but, even more deeply meaningful, on his own positive perception of himself. That is what makes him another person different from the one he was back in Spain. It is not until he internalizes this that he is then able to look in the mirror, and the reflection is clearer than ever in anticipation of the caresses that he could feel, this time not of the clothes, but of another man.

The elation of fulfilling his desires is a presage to the encounter with the man at the bookstore. Before then, however, José-María expresses how he does not want to be counted among the effeminate men of Paris in order to remain anonymous (224). Nor does he want to be identified among the promiscuous inverts because he prefers to wait for Mr. Right (*ibid.*). It is expressed in a

thought that alludes to the figurative statement he made before about his mother's immaculate conception:

If in his city—the one which he now went several days without remembering in the slightest—one person recognized him, there, in the immense Paris, how easy would it be to find one hundred! He didn't want to. He was sure that at the drawing near of the decisive moment, he'd feel the emotion of the annunciations.

And it [the emotion] made his temples beat one afternoon on his return from the Bois de Boulogne, where he always liked to find the pleasure of consuming a little bit of delayed spring.

Si en su ciudad—de la que ahora pasaba días enteros sin el menor recuerdo—lo identificó uno, allí, en el inmenso París, ¡cuán fácil hallar cien! No quiso. Estaba seguro de que al aproximarse el instante decisivo, sentiría la emoción de las anunciaciones.

Y ésta [la emoción] hízole palpitar las sienes una tarde, de vuelta del Bosque de Bolonia, en donde él gustaba hallar siempre el placer de consumir un poco de primavera rezagada. (224-25)

Again, we notice José-María's apprehension of being discovered on pain of being recognized by his last names by someone affiliated to his hometown. At the same time, he desires to be found by Mr. Right, and when this happens he will feel the emotion of the annunciations. According to the Christian tradition, the Annunciation refers to the moment when the Archangel Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive and give birth to Jesus Christ, signaling His Incarnation. José-María alludes to this miracle, which he previously described it as a demonic occurrence in which his mother's conception of him was a curse because it made him female. In Paris, he sees it instead as a blessing whereby, upon being noticed by Mr. Right, his feminine nature would awaken, a moment that he associates with the pleasures of spring in the forest Bois de Boulogne.

The Bois de Boulogne is the second-largest national park in Paris and was part of the ancient forest of Rouvray. The forest symbolizes “the female principle or of the Great Mother ... the place where vegetable life thrives and luxuriates, free from any control or cultivation. And since its foliage obscures the light of the sun, it is therefore ... regarded as a symbol of the earth. ... the forest is a symbol of the unconscious” (Cirlot 112). Indeed, the spring is when the José-María of the circus comes out and the symbolism of the forest complements this persona as a place associated with femininity, motherhood, the fertility of land (the swamp), and the release of erotic inhibitions that

defy reason and logic; the unconscious at work. Then it comes as no surprise when José-María describes the man that he meets at the bookstore as “tall, herculean ... who reminded him of another face seen only two times in his existence” (“alto, hercúleo ... que a él le recordaba otro rostro visto sólo dos veces en la existencia”; 226). The other face he is referring to is that of the acrobat at the circus. We come full circle back to what started his repressive silence and internal vituperation but this time it is another man who he finds, in a bookstore no less, or the place where literature meets sexual inversion or homosexuality, thus paralleling the literary swamp of the epigraphic preface from which Hernández-Catá extracts the beauty of *El ángel de Sodoma*.

Mejías-López interprets the man at the bookstore and his resemblance to the circus acrobat as representations of the two angelic outsiders in the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah that save Lot, his children, and the righteous city dwellers from God’s wrath. Thus, the two men in the text, also outsiders (one a foreigner and the other Parisian) save José-María from the Spanish city’s harmful environment. The interpretation of the men as angels is based on the allusion to the Annunciation discussed recently. In the same way that the Archangel Gabriel announced Mary’s conception of the incarnate Jesus, the men in the novel brought José-María “self-awareness and planted the seed of his escape from [or neglect of] the town” (Mejías-López). This is a plausible interpretation. The caveat, however, is that the allusion to the Annunciation in the novel does not focus on the angel’s role but rather on that of the mother’s and her conception of a female instead of a male baby, thus referring to the birth of José-María’s inversion.

Without speculating into Jesus’ gender role or sexuality, religious tradition has it that Jesus sacrificed his life for the redemption of mankind, and his mother Mary remained by his side from his capture by the Roman authorities to his resurrection.<sup>45</sup> The role of José-María’s mother can be interpreted as an allegory of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She represents the femininity that follows

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<sup>45</sup> See Shoemaker (2011) for a detailed study on the role of Mary in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

José-María from the beginning of the novel to its end, which is the moment when he needs her vigor and industriousness to annihilate the hegemonic masculinity of the Vélez-Gomara name.

Therefore, there is an inversion in his desires from when he initially wants to annihilate his feminine nature in the bed scene with his brother, which reads as follows:

He didn't want to succumb, he didn't want to dishonor the name nor stain the coat of arms engraved in stone by his ancestors! Neither did he want to, for admiration of the sex to which she had been a happy slave once her destiny as a woman had been completely fulfilled, dishonor *the manly appearance* entrusted to his care! He would fight, stomp with his will that abominable, already tyrannous newborn being. He'd drown his bad instincts in his work. He'd strip *that invader María* from his name, and he'd be José, only José forever!

¡Él no quería sucumbir, él no quería deshorrar el nombre ni manchar el escudo grabado por sus antecesores en piedra! ¡No quería, tampoco, por admiración al sexo del que habría sido esclava feliz de haberse cumplido su destino de hembra por completo, deshorrar *la apariencia de hombre* confiada a su responsabilidad! Lucharía, pisaría con la voluntad hasta exterminarlo, aquel ser de abominación recién nacido y ya tirano. Ahogaría en el trabajo los malos instintos. ¡Quitaría de su nombre *aquel María invasor*, y sería José, José nada más para siempre! (102-03; emphasis added)

The slave that José-María thinks about is his mother, who was an honorable woman, but he refuses to identify with her. He wants to get rid of the María part of his name, his inverted nature. However, at the end of the novel, this formula is reversed, and it is the José part of his name that he annihilates.

As discussed in section three of this chapter, José-María realizes that he cannot continue to carry on the 'manly appearance,' the façade of virility, that he carried back in the Spanish province. Therefore, on a paradoxical reversal of parental sex roles, José-María, in order to end the family lineage without staining it, relies on his father's femininity to rid himself of the José of his name, in the same way that Jesus was not conceived by Joseph but by immaculate conception. That femininity, however, is one that he acquired from his wife. Therefore, it was necessary for José-María to kill the man who feigned manliness by also committing suicide and redeem the femaleness that his father had desecrated, that is, his own inversion. Like Jesus, who before his death ensured

that his mother had a son and the son a mother, so too does José-María die with his femininity intact.<sup>46</sup>

### 1.4.3. In Summary

In this chapter I examine the epigraphic preface as a fictional paratext in which the respondent, in his role as writer, takes on the challenge of drafting a novel about social taboos (*‘eso’*), which he compares to the mud of the swamp so as to bring out its purity with the bold artistic chemistry of his pen. I interpret the respondent as Hernández-Catá’s alter ego, that is, the writer that will write about the swamp of sex and gender non-conformity. I observe how the swamp is an inverted metaphor that symbolizes both the ugliness and beauty of sexual inversion in order to argue that Hernández-Catá inscribes the practice of sexual inversion in a wider symbolic domain composed of four discursive plains that constitute the novel’s narrative construction and that account for its multidimensional scope: the literary, the scientific, the (trans)national/transatlantic, and the subjective. I show how these domains implicitly converge in the epigraphic preface and how its paratextual properties instantiate their continuity in the main narrative via the various configurations of masculinity in tandem with the discursive and aesthetic transitions of the text, the portrayal of the pathos of an ambiguous subject, and the exploration of his redemptive qualities.

In *El ángel de Sodoma* we see the deterministic elements of naturalism at work in a way that controls the fate of José-María, while that same fate is managed by Jaime’s decisions to engage in contraband abroad, therefore converging with the modernist emphasis on free will and the individual’s capacity to change their environment. Thus, the metaphor of the swamp and the fall of the household is not so much caused by José-María’s sexual inversion as much as it is a consequence of willful human actions, such as Santiago’s irresponsibility, which Jaime emulates in his exploits in

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<sup>46</sup> See the book of John 19:25-27.

foreign lands. In the same way that Hernández-Catá inverts the tall construction of a material and spiritual entity to its downfall, the text deconstructs the gender binary and, thus, redirects the reader's attention away from a binarial perception of sexual inversion and onto a broader, more complex understanding of the agency and will of the modern subject.

Now, the references to science in the epigraphic preface, Hernández-Catá's affinity to this discipline, and his proximity to and relationship with figures of the intellectual and political establishment, such as the authors of the prologue and epilogue to the novel's second edition, is more complicated and requires more elaboration. For instance, the metaphoric representation of the swamp, as well as its allusions in the narrative, seem to make a case against gender and sexual non-conformity, thus corroborating the scientific, moral, and legal arguments of the prologue and epilogue. I problematize this interpretation in order not to reiterate homophobic readings of the novel, but to trace how such a representation is part of a wider sociohistorical apparatus at work in the text.

In the next chapter, I examine how the representation of gender and sexuality in the novel is a critical allegorical reflection of the social, scientific, and political ideas and historical conditions that constituted the Spanish nation in the early twentieth century. I trace various connections between the verisimilitude of the novel and the social reality that inspired it, as well as the ways in which the novel challenges the conceptual presuppositions of various ideologies and practices set to regulate sex and gender expression in various sectors of Spanish society. In this way, I will explore an alternative allegorical reading of the novel that adds more perspective to its interpretation and that of the history of Spain in relation with the Other.

**CHAPTER TWO. “The Death of the Invert”: Alfonso Hernández-Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma* as an Allegory of Resistance to Hegemonic Masculinity and Dictatorial Rule**

**1.1. The Vélez-Gomara Name: An Allegorical Deconstruction of Hispanism and Masculinity**

The historical underpinnings of the representation of gender and sexuality in *El ángel de Sodoma* should be explored further because José-María’s struggles are prompted by factors that have as much to do with his own sex and gender constitution as with circumstances that obligate him to reflect and act on his own becoming as a person, his evolving subjectivity, and his own sense of self amidst growing sexual desires and life challenges. Since Hernández-Catá highlights José-María’s conflicted gender and sexuality—his flesh is described in the last sentence of the novel as both “virgen e impura” (“virgin and impure”)—the protagonist struggles with the idea of immoral impurity as a result of the personal biases he internally wrestles with and the repressive environment he inhabits. However, seeing that the novel portrays his condition as both virgin and impure, it might be worth looking past resolving the moral matter of his piety versus his impurity and focus, rather, on the evolution and ruptures of his search for freedom from personal and social constraints and traditions in conjunction with overcoming personal and external biases. In order to achieve this, it is worth examining more closely the novel’s sociohistorical context in order to know at a deeper level why Hernández-Catá might have felt so compelled to stir the mud in the swamp to the point of writing a novel about it.

In 1898, the Spanish monarchy had lost the last three of its main colonies: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. However, this did not stop it from redirecting its colonial gaze to North Africa in order to salvage its crumbling empire. As mentioned in the introduction to this

dissertation, Hernández-Catá was born just seven years after the end of the Ten Years War in Cuba (1868-78) and spent most of his childhood in Santiago de Cuba during the two subsequent wars of independence against Spanish rule. He was born into a military family with divided allegiances: mostly, his father's side was pro-Spanish and his mother's anti-colonialist. For instance, as a kid he would pretend to be a *mambí* (a Cuban rebel fighting against the Spanish army), as his friend, Cuban critic Antonio Barreras Martínez Malo (1904-73), points out in his notes to Hernández-Catá's autobiographical short story "La Quinina" (La Habana, 1926):

In 1930, while strolling with his notebook through the street of San Tadeo—among others—, he stopped in one of the slopes of its terrain and said: "Here, through this street and those neighboring it, I played Spaniards versus Mambises with my childhood friends, when the war of emancipation was in full swing. I took my role so seriously that on more than one occasion I punished the apparent gallantry of my enemies with a primitive slingshot—infallible weapon—that I handled marvelously...

En 1930, paseando Hernández Catá con el anotador por la calle de San Tadeo—entre otras—, se detuvo en uno de sus declives y le dijo: "Aquí, por esta calle y las alledañas, jugué con mis compañeros infantiles, a españoles y mambises, en plena guerra de emancipación. Tomaba tan en serio mi papel que en más de una ocasión castigué la aparente bizzarria de mis enemigos, con la honda primitiva—arma infalible—, que manejaba a maravilla..." (*Memoria de Hernández-Catá*, 256; ellipsis in original citation; emphasis added)

After his father's death in 1908, Hernández-Catá was sent away from Cuba to Toledo, Spain at the age of 14 in order to attend the Colegio para Huérfanos de Militares (a school for orphans of military families). However, he staunchly disliked military education, which translated later into an aversion for militarism in his role as diplomat in Latin America and Europe.

From the Spanish metropole, Hernández-Catá demonstrated his disapproval of Spanish colonialism, both after the Spanish-American War and the First World War. In referencing Dorothy Schneider Gardner's dissertation on the writer, Uva de Aragón has noted: "although love, hate, jealousy, fear, sentiments of culpability and pain are recurring themes that have always existed in Catanean literature, the Cuban writer relates these emotions to the historical period in which he lived, and he sees them as manifestations of an era of hate, violence and war ... 'caused by the First World War and its aftermath'" ("aunque el amor, el odio, los celos, el miedo, el sentimiento de

culpabilidad y el dolor, temas recurrentes en la obra catiana, han existido en todos los tiempos, el escritor cubano relaciona estas emociones al período histórico que le tocó vivir, y las ve como manifestaciones de una era de odio, violencia y guerra ... ‘causados por la Primera Guerra Mundial y sus consecuencias’; 100). The end of the First World War coincided with Spain’s disastrous defeat against North African tribes in the Battle of Annual in 1921, exacerbating what had already been regarded as ‘the Disaster’ after the loss of its colonies in 1898. As aforementioned, Hernández-Catá was exiled to Le Havre (his second stay there) after publishing a series of fourteen articles entitled “Crónicas de Hernández Catá” in the Cuban newspaper *El Mundo* from July to October of that year, which addressed the emancipation of North Africans from Spanish rule. Displeased with his critique, the Spanish government, in lieu of his removal as consul, transferred him to the French city.

References and allusions to these historical events are included in the fictional narrative and paratexts of *El ángel de Sodoma* and they are important to a deeper understanding of the novel’s reception and significance. As such, the fall of the Vélez-Gomaras can be seen as a microcosm of this crucial time in Spain, whereby the symbolic inversion that Hernández-Catá employs in the novel to invert perceptions about modern subjectivity is the same one that he utilizes to alter readers’ perceptions of a historical period. The fact that the novel refers to its readers as indifferent and egocentric hints at the abulia (apathy) and navel-gazing that was said to plague Spain during the early twentieth century. Such a crisis was often portrayed in sexed and gendered terms in conjunction with racial, classist, and nationalistic tropes. Hence, I argue that the novel’s treatment of sex and gender non-conformity brings to the fore an allegorical re-envisioning and revising of Spain’s history at large, seeing that it was a transnational and transatlantic issue that created volatile paradigmatic shifts in the ideological and institutional management and regulation of difference and identity across subjectivities and sociopolitical economies. In this sense, the novel offers a pedagogy of

ethics that brings a social problem out of the shadows and into the consciousness of a public struggling to reimagine and reconstruct itself in the midst of change and uncertainty.

To further highlight the historical underpinnings of the novel, Mejías-López makes a very illuminating connection in his article on *El ángel de Sodoma* between the house and the father figure, Don Santiago:

Spanish readers of the novel must have noticed that the father's name is that of Spain's patron saint Santiago *matamoros* [killer of moors], and the last name, Vélez (de) Gomara, to which the town so desperately clutches, is near identical to the Peñón de Vélez de Gomera, one of Spain's military enclaves in Morocco. Furthermore, *El ángel de Sodoma*, came out in the final year of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship with its ties to the colonial wars and its emphasis on restoring an old social order based on a glorious past.

The Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera is a rock-fortress that, after a couple of takeovers from pirates and Ottoman soldiers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has been administered by Spain with direct governance from Madrid since 1564. It parallels the fortress-like depiction of the Vélez-Gomara house, as though it were a military stronghold, with its coat of arms engraved in its door to represent its dominance and prominence in the city: "Made entirely of rock, founded in a dignified city ... it had valued for many years the coat of arms engraved in the main block of stone on the middle of the door, like an optimal doorbell" ("Toda de piedra, enclavada en una ciudad prócer ... había estimado muchos años como timbre óptimo el escudo ahondado en el sillar clave del medio punto de su puerta"; 48-49). It is connected by sand to the northern coast of Morocco, it is the gatekeeper of the city of Bâdis, and it is a territory whose occupation has been disputed up to recent times. For instance, on 29 August 2012 seven Moroccan activists from the Committee for the Liberation of Ceuta and Melilla placed flags of Morocco on the military enclave in order to protest Spanish colonialism. Yahyia Yahyia, senator and mayor of the Moroccan town of Beni Ensar or Ait Nsar, participated in the incursion stating, "¡Ya es hora de que España descolonice!" ("The time has come for Spain to decolonize!"), and that similar demonstrations would occur in other Spanish-occupied areas (Cembrero).

The territory of the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera is representative of the tenacious history of Spanish hegemony, or “a type of political and ideological leadership that is obtained mainly, but not exclusively, by articulating a generally accepted value system or worldview” (Torfing 245). Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci is credited with reformulating hegemony in order to consider how coercion and consent play into relations and forces of domination and resistance between dominant groups and subaltern subjects. In his view, the dominant group does not establish hegemony through blatant force, rather they wield their influence through ideas, modes of communication, and common-sense actions that persuade the dominated to consent to its rule. This interplay suggests that the dominant power is shifting and is not immutable. In his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-35), Gramsci explains that hegemony is dynamic and not static, “a continuous interplay ... between economic, legal, and political forms of power, on the one hand, and the dynamics of exchange and cultural and ideological conflict, on the other” (Aguirre 167). This complex interrelation of forces and elements not only allows the dominant group to exert power but it also makes room for subaltern and marginalized subjects to decentralize its concentration and influence, even redirect its course of action.

Hegemony moves along the lines of Foucault’s conceptualization of power as mobile and existing everywhere. To him, power is

the multiplicity of force relations ... which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them ... forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another. ... the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social *hegemonies*. ... it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (93; emphasis added)

If we consider the different forces and actors during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the causes and effects of his actions, we notice that power is not concentrated in him but is instead multilateral, particularly between him, the movers behind regenerationism, and subaltern subjects.

The hegemony of his leadership was the result of a series of events prior to his military coup that solidified the regenerationist movement, which he espoused as the “iron surgeon,” leading many Spaniards to believe in its “redemptive” mission and to which they consented via nationalist fervor. He used the law, the treasury, banks, Catholicism, cultural symbols, political speeches, among other coercive measures to either support or quell various practices and sectors of Spanish society. However, the Moroccan War put Spain’s hegemony to the test considering that it created a wedge between the general public, government leaders, and the military. As a result, “the best and the worst” of Spanish power and society was put on the line all for the sake of maintaining hegemony based on a nationalism that prejudiced and suppressed the Other, one that North African alterity challenged in return.

Degeneration and regeneration were the moral frameworks to parallel these extremes in that the former characterized everything wrong in Spain and the latter how it could make that better. The process of regenerating Spain, or of maintaining its hegemony, therefore, took on gendered, sexual, and racial dimensions based on passive (feminine/inferior/degenerate/North African) versus active (masculine/superior/regenerative/Spanish) roles that were to determine the progress of the nation-state in critical times. That the Vélez-Gomara family in *El ángel de Sodoma* is tied to a geographic area that is symbolic of Spain’s imperial power and decline is telling of how its realization and agency is contingent on the nation’s consent to, or resistance of, hegemonic masculinity, and thus, to monarchical rule. The tensions between these attitudes and behaviors, particularly in the male characters of *El ángel de Sodoma*, is revelatory of how they were reflected in Spanish society and government, specifically during Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship. We do not have to look further than the epigraphic preface to the text and the first paragraph of the fictional story in order to begin to see how narrative discourse allegorically (de)constructs this framework.

As explained in section two of the previous chapter, the epigraphic preface establishes that *El ángel de Sodoma* is not only about sexual inversion and homosexuality. The interlocutor insinuates that this particular social taboo is part of the ‘asuntos ingratos’ (the *many* ‘unpleasant matters’) that the writer-respondent will address in the novel he writes. In other words, addressing gender and sexuality is attached to a host of other concerns. Thus, from the get-go, before even turning to the first page of the fictional story, the reader is predisposed to think that the novel will not only be about the sexual invert, José-María, but also about the water lilies’ rotten roots and the detritus of the swamp. Whereas in section two I argued that purity would ensue from the swamp, it still holds true that the swamp is a reference to degeneracy and that the putrid flora found in its murky waters is not singular, as in referring to just one plant or flower (i.e., only to the sexual invert, José-María), but plural, as in referring to the many rotten roots that give rise to degeneration. In other words, the swamp is Spain from whose mud Hernández-Catá intends to extract beauty and purity via the creative process of writing itself.

After the epigraphic preface, the fictional paratext that follows is the epigraph on Genesis 18 in which Abraham asks God if he will smite the righteous together with the wicked in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The epigraph does not include a response from God nor an answer to whether he will bring justice to his people. Instead, the epigraph instantiates an existential crisis where justice against wrongdoing and in favor of what is right is questioned with no given solution.

Uva de Aragón explains:

It is interesting to note that the sensual mysticism of Hernández-Catá’s first short stories turns, throughout the years, into religious propositions tormented by anguish that contradict the declarations that he would make in private about being atheist, or at least agnostic. Many times, these themes bring him close to interrogations that are existential in nature, which prove, not only that other face of modernism, profound and essential, but also the modernity of the author’s themes.

Es curioso anotar que el misticismo sensual de los primeros cuentos de Hernández-Catá se convierte con los años en planteamiento religiosos transidos de angustia que contradicen las declaraciones que hacía en privado en las que se decía ateo, o al menos agnóstico. Estos temas lo acercan muchas veces

a interrogaciones de índole existencial que comprueban no sólo esa otra cara del modernismo, profunda y esencial, sino también la modernidad de los temas del autor. (107)<sup>47</sup>

In this sense, Hernández-Catá is posing an existential question to his reader, particularly the Spanish ones who are experiencing an existential crisis in their own country. As mentioned previously, the respondent in the epigraphic preface is a characterization of Hernández-Catá's alter ego expressing how he will address the ugliness of the swamp. The epigraph on Genesis is his first stab at it whereby he prefaces a story that is a (re)vision of Spanish history via a biblical reference that presents two groups at odds with each other: the righteous and the wicked, or the Spanish province in the story (Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism) and the sexually perverse Other (the "sinful" pagans of Sodom and Gomorrah). In an apocalyptic scene symbolizing man's fall from grace, God burns the biblical cities, however, in *El ángel de Sodoma* the fall is not of the wicked, that is the sexual invert, but of the Vélez-Gomara household and the Spanish town that its coat of arms represents and that, in turn, it depends on to maintain its repute, as told in the first paragraph of the story.

The placement of the epigraph on Genesis immediately before the beginning paragraph of the novel is strategic because Abraham's question is followed by it, as though it were a response to his inquiry:

The fall of any material or spiritual structure held in high esteem for many centuries is always a pathetic spectacle. The house of the Vélez-Gomara family was very old and had many times been illustrious by the power of its men and by the treasured richness below its blazon. But with the wasting away caused by the scraping of the years, the laboring spirits weakened, and once again the wealth turned into the dust of anonymity, at the mercy of the claws of usurers and at the hands of caressing and clever women. Civility shined over one hundred heads of lineage here and there without royal consecrations, while the house of the Vélez-Gomara languished. And, as if its final demolition could not be placed, for example, at the side of the romantic destruction of [*The Fall of the House of*] Usher, it is rich enough—above all else by the simultaneously offensive and heroic particularities of the last of its boys—to remove, in painful strokes, some sympathetic readers from their obsessive egotism or indifference for a couple of hours.

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<sup>47</sup> In footnote 25 of her study, de Aragón states that on many occasion, her grandfather's daughter (de Aragón's aunt), Waldina (nicknamed Uva, no less) would tell her that her father often said that he was 'ateo, gracias a Dios' ('atheist, thank God') and that he would never attend religious services despite his daughters' (Uva and Sara) schooling by nuns (59). As stated before, Hernández-Catá was a man of contradictions. Although his statement seems contradictory, it makes sense to think that because of God, or thanks to him, one is atheist. This says as much about Hernández-Catá's disbelief as it does about the untrustworthiness or infidelity he perceives God and/or religion to possess.

La caída de cualquier construcción material o espiritual mantenida en alto varios siglos constituye siempre un espectáculo patético. 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. Y si su derrumbamiento final no puede ponerse, por ejemplo, junto al romántico de la de [La caída de la casa de] Usher, es, sobre todo por las particularidades al par vejaminosas y heroicas del postrero de sus varones, lo bastante rico en rasgos dolorosos para sacar de su egolatría o de su indiferencia, durante un par de horas, a algunos lectores sensibles. (47-48)

In the first sentence, we transition from the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah to early-twentieth-century Spain. This is accomplished by the word ‘any,’ as in the material and spiritual fall of the biblical cities serves as an allegorical prototype to speak of any other kind of downfall, in this case, the house of the Vélez-Gomaras. Nevertheless, the narrator states that it can be seen as a ‘material *or* spiritual’ fall, which gives us the option of adopting either one or both. They can also be interpreted as symbiotic, as though one depended on the other whereby material and spiritual ruin are not mutually exclusive, both equally feeding (or depriving) each other. This does not mean that they are the same. In fact, the conjunction ‘or’ unites as well as isolates them as alternatives, an important factor to allegory that I discuss shortly.

While the ‘material’ denotes what is beholden to time and space, the ‘spiritual’ transcends them and reality. Furthermore, the word ‘structure’ leaves us to consider any kind of physical (material) or existential (spiritual) entity that can range from tangible objects to frameworks of thought and (metaphysical) experience that have existed and been venerated for centuries. The general exposition of the sentence tells us that the fall of these entities could be about any kind that happened in history as designated by the word ‘any’ and ‘always.’ The word *always* denotes that collapse has forever been a part of history and that history repeats itself, in the same way that the causes and effects of ‘the Disaster’ that *befell* Spain had begun before 1898 and was ongoing throughout the twentieth century. The sentences of the first paragraph build on each other in the same way that they build on the epigraphic preface. By stirring the mud of the swamp, Hernández-

Catá's writing will be the medium through which the fall will be told. Its description as a 'sad spectacle' has a hint of sarcasm that denotes the critical approach that Hernández-Catá takes to write the story, which is also seen in his critique of poetry in the epigraphic preface. Therefore, the material and spiritual structures mentioned in the story can also refer to the institutions and discourses that he will criticize in the novel via allegory.

In *El ángel de Sodoma* there are various types or aspects of allegory, from the traditional to the "postmodern." English literary critic and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) thought of allegory as 'a translation of abstract notions into a picture language ... an abstraction from objects of the senses' (Tambling 78). In this conception of allegory, the difference between the abstract and its embodiment as a sensorial figure, via visual art or language for instance, is blurred. This conception of allegory can be connected to the New Testament. According to the Apostle Paul, New Christians are to read the Old Testament allegorically in order to understand its meaning from the time of the patriarchs to their contemporary timeframe post-Jesus' resurrection: "Old Testament people are figures, types, patterns, and as used by St Paul, they yield typological or figural allegory, in that one event or person *becomes a picture of another*, with the Old Testament Israelites being pictures, or figures, or types, of New Testament Christians" (16-17; emphasis added). The epigraph on Genesis 18 and the first paragraph that follows it accomplish the same task that St. Paul gave to Christians by indirectly urging its readers to consider the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a typological allegory of the fall of the Vélez-Gomara family, whereby one story is put in place of another. However, this traditional form of allegory, where A equals B, is not totalizing in this instance and there are ruptures in meaning from the biblical story to *El ángel de Sodoma* in relation to time and space.

As aforementioned, Hernández-Catá inverts the premise of wickedness in the biblical story when translating it to the sexual invert whose typical representation of sinfulness is instead given to

the heterosexual males whose involvement with women and illegal transactions cause the house's downfall. In this way, *El ángel de Sodoma* fulfils the second function of allegory, which is to offer other or more meaning that "conceals a secret significance, in that it may persuade readers to probe for another meaning, it may enrich the meaning that has been given, or it may draw attention to a split between the surface meaning and what is underneath. ... Allegory describes one thing under the image of another, or speaks one thing while implying something else" (Tambling 6). We see the split when the novel departs from the traditional interpretation of the biblical story to the Spanish context. This transition also reveals the hidden meaning underneath the Vélez-Gomaras' downfall as allegory of the apathy and decline of Spain. The wasting away of the years and the men's diminished power in the family is an allegorical allusion to the degenerative loss of its hegemony and masculinity.

The shame of Sodom does not completely go away, however, because José-María also internalizes hegemonic masculinity in order to suppress his femininity. It is like an 'other' that he projects onto his scorn of other effeminate homosexuals. What he refuses in himself is projected onto an external figure, like the pestiferous flower of his sexual inversion, or onto another person, like the rouged effeminate man he runs into when he goes out looking for a woman that would make him a "real" man, just before meeting Cecilia, his soon-to-be girlfriend:

In a sordid neighborhood, he had a terrible encounter, repugnant, that made him live the prodigious misfortune of finding himself before a mirror whose moon, instead of returning his real image, gave him that of a laughable and vile being who he could turn into if he let his instincts run free: a grotesque effeminate man, smeared with makeup, gay and repulsive who, with a flower on his ear, passed from one door to the next facing with jovial cynicism the whistling of the prostitutes positioned at the doorsteps.

[E]n un barrio sórdido, un hallazgo terrible, repugnante, que le hizo vivir el mal prodigio de hallarse ante un espejo cuya luna, en lugar de devolverle su imagen real, le diera la del ser risible y vil en que podía llegar a trocarse si dejaba libres sus instintos: un afeminado grotesco, pintarrajeado, jacarandoso y repulsivo quien, con una flor en la oreja, pasó de una puerta a otra afrontando con cinismo jovial la rechifla de las mujerzuelas apostadas en los umbrales. (166-67)

What José-María experiences is similar to the Freudian concept of projection, a process in which “qualities or feelings which the subject refuses to recognize in the self become aspects of another person or thing. ... as a defence mechanism ... *An allegorical personification* of the monstrous, or disgusting ... a way of removing blame from the self, transferring it to another” (Tambling 48; emphasis added). His femininity, then, is like the ‘other’ that he struggles to assimilate into his masculinity, thus straddling between restraint and transgression: “If evil qualities must be personified, allegory becomes a way of showing, or discussing, the forbidden, or the excessive: it shows the ‘heterological,’ the other” (47). Allegorical alterity as mediating between restraint and transgression permits seeing José-María as also infringing on the moral principles of hegemonic masculinity and exploring his own becoming as an individual. The same can be said about his brother, Jaime, and his rebellion against the family upon changing his name in order to determine his own fate. The first paragraph describes his actions as both offensive and heroic because, while they cause the downfall of the Vélez-Gomaras, this also portends the disintegration of hegemonic masculinity, as does José-María’s contemplation of a name change and his escape to Paris.

Exceeding society’s expectations via a name change and coming to terms with the excess of the monstrous ambiguity of gender and sexuality is another allegorical disruption or undermining of meaning that not only defies the stability of identity but of sociopolitical structures. As Tambling suggests, “Perhaps allegory ... is a way of considering what cannot be named,” or of subverting that which gives something a name so as to contain it (93). We see this in the epigraphic preface when the respondent refuses to constrict the ‘eso’ under discussion into a static entity or taboo. The same occurs in the epigraph on Genesis whereby judgment is withheld from the wicked. Subsequently, we are given a story that challenges the constriction of masculinity within heteronormative and patriarchal codes and behaviors. As Walter Benjamin would have it, “allegory always symbolizes its own transience, its own disappearance, its lack of definite existence” (122). According to him, it

starts manifesting itself as melancholia that leads to death, like the absence pertinent to deconstruction, or the 'sad (melancholic) spectacle' of the ruins of the Vélez-Gomara house. Henceforth, the loss of masculinity as analogous to the death of the males in the family: Santiago, Jaime, and José-María: "Allegory, then, comes out of absence, but it also turns the objects that it represents into 'non-being' (129). All the Vélez-Gomara men essentially live conflicted lives, ways of being that they agonize over and that lead to their demise.

In *El ángel de Sodoma*, allegory ruminates on the ruins of fragmentation that depart away from the totality of meaning and experience in order to arrive at the incompleteness, deconstruction, or absence of signification and being. Therefore, the downfall of the Vélez-Gomara house is a story against the unity of organicism, "which licenses talk of organic unity within the nation, and which dwells on natural relationships, permits the exclusion of whatever cannot be assimilated into such unity" (Tambling 130). As such, the novel demolishes the unity of the material structure, the house of the Vélez-Gomaras, symbolized by the historic Peñón Vélez de Gomera and the traditional spirit of regenerationist hegemonic masculinity that held its walls in place as an emblem of Spain's power. It dramatizes the sad spectacle of Spain's decline as a nation.

Based on these premises, I interpret *El ángel de Sodoma* as an allegory of these historical events and social processes by examining how its characters develop their subject position in society via the negotiation of the advantages and disadvantages of their masculinity and femininity. I argue that such a negotiation reveals the ambiguity of gendered and sexual identities in the same way that they developed historically, thus problematizing the heteronormative and patriarchal standards that structured the hegemony of Spanish nationalism during the 1920s. Special attention is given to the scene in the fifth chapter of the novel when José-María both admires and repulses at a military authority figure giving a speech at a café in relation to the negative and positive views the

protagonist has on the dual-gendered nature of his sexual inversion, and how this is connected to the viability of his family's legacy versus his autonomy.

In order to set up the novel's allegorical representation of Spanish erotic decadence in conjunction with Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, I provide a survey of the history of sex and gender in Spain as a lead-up to a summary on sexual reform. This will explain the origins of regenerationism and hegemonic masculinity prior to 1898 and its manifestations before and during Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. I explain how hegemonic masculinity was propagated by the concept of the "new modern man" and how it was exemplified by the dictator. From here, I begin to draw allegorical parallels between the hegemonic masculinity of the dictator and that of Santiago, the father figure in *El ángel de Sodoma*. I pay special attention to their relation with Morocco and how the war with the Riffians destabilized notions of heteronormativity and patriarchy in the national imaginary as a result of the tensions between Hispanism and Orientalism. This is where I draw from the scene in chapter five where José-María questions the role of the military figure he observes at a café based on conflicting conceptions of gender and sexuality. My close reading of this passage is followed by a discussion on the failures of hegemonic masculinity in Spain as reflected in both its history and the death of the novel's protagonist.

## **1.2. (Re)Defining Masculinity at the Turn of the Century**

*El ángel de Sodoma* concerns itself with the broader experiential and ideological parameters of sex and gender conformity, to include not just the portrayal of sexual object choice of same-sex desire but the possibilities of transgender expression and identity, as seen in José-María's internal conflict with sexual inversion. For example, José-María is characterized as exhibiting feminine traits and behaviors before discovering his sexual attraction to men. He is described as "la madrecita," the little mother that took care of his siblings, and as an additional female that, along with his two

sisters, made a trio of “angelical sisters” (72). José-María is characterized mostly as a sexual invert while his homosexuality—a term not used in the text and referring to sexual object choice—is treated as an added result of his gender dysphoria. Even after that discovery at the end of chapter three, the next chapter immediately sets off a monologue in which he questions his gender and sexual identity revolving around gendered tropes of inversion in order to explain his same-sex desire:

Now that childlike isolation, that entertainment with dolls and china, that sewing of buttons and delicate mending, that enjoyment of girls’ company at school, that flight from violent games with boys, acquired the value of a spring *from which pestilent waters were being born that, suddenly let loose, threatened to drown him*. A hundred questions loaded with both disgust and pity crisscrossed in his mind as though a critical part of it, free still from *the androgynous contamination*, wanted to figure out *when and by what means that fistula of instinct* had subverted and deviated the course of his life...

Ahora aquel retraimiento infantil, aquel entretenerse con muñecas y vasijitas, aquel coser botones y zurcir primorosamente, aquel complacerse en la escuela con la compañía de las niñas, aquel huir de los juegos violentos de los chicos, adquirirían valor manantial *donde nacían las pestilentes aguas que, sueltas de súbito, amenazaban abogarlo*. Cien interrogaciones henchidas de asco y de lástima al par, se entrecruzaban en su mente, cual si una parte crítica, libre aún de *la contaminación andrógina*, quisiera averiguar *cuándo y por qué medios aquella fistula en el instinto* había socavado y desviado el rumbo de su vida... (96; ellipsis in original; emphasis added).

The ‘pestilent waters’ and ‘fistula of instinct’ refer to his homosexuality, which is also labeled in gendered terms as ‘androgynous contamination,’ therefore aligning very well with the ‘contrary sexual feeling’ experienced by the sexes that Westphal described, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. Moreover, the androgyny of the pestilent instinct of his same-sex attraction is set up by gendered stereotypes about the effeminate man who might have acquired his sexual inversion (or the reversal of his masculinity for “girlish” tendencies and behaviors) in early childhood. The entire monologue is also driven by a psychological interrogation of the sexed self, whereby same-sex desire is relegated to a questioning of “his” sex and gender constitution. The questioning of his masculinity is inscribed within a stereotypical view of the effeminate homosexual and the male fear of the feminine, which is, furthermore, based on accepted forms of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Hence, homosexuality is conceptually framed by gendered considerations and forms of sexual inversion.

*El ángel de Sodoma* inscribes inversion in the medical, psychiatric, and degenerative theories of sex and gender in vogue during Hernández-Catá's time and it closely aligns with Marañón's theory on intersexuality along with notions of hermaphroditism, sexual inversion, and compulsory heterosexuality. According to Adrienne Rich, *compulsory heterosexuality* calls for the enforcement of heterosexuality as a political institution that shifts from a female to an oppressive male-centered sexuality. Although she has been criticized for "naturalizing women-centered identity" and replacing a hierarchical structure with another, "the idea of heterosexuality as compulsory continues to be important to theorizing about how power and privilege are embedded in extant institutions" such as marriage and the family (Ryersbach 127-28). In the excerpt below, compulsory heterosexuality is reinforced by a degenerationist discourse that refers to José-María's sex and gender as the result of a collection of unhealthy symptoms that he inherits at birth and acquires at puberty, thus harkening back to Juarros, Lafora, and Marañón's theories on hermaphroditism and intersexuality explained in the introduction to this dissertation. It is a passage that is centered around the institution of the family and the inherited traits of its ancestry.

While the term *inversion* is not used until chapter seven of *El ángel de Sodoma*, this passage from chapter four alludes to it. It immediately follows José-María's discovery of his attraction to men at the circus and it is the beginning of the middle section of the story (chapters four to seven) that narrates the development of José-María's battle with, and questioning of, sexual inversion:

The signs already turned into *symptoms* in the first memories of puberty ... His larval *predestination* had been occurring in the calm, in the housecleaning, in the safety of *the weak beings [women]*. The sweet cohabitation with his sisters, the domestic hours of stews and needlework, of arrangements, of soft enjoyment between laces and ribbons, of skilled copying of patterns published in fashion magazines, now took, in memory, *unhealthy* density. The same virtues extolled by popular voice: his meticulousness, his spirit of orderliness, showed—brightened by the sharpened light—a *repugnant reversal*. All of him was like a false, *gilded medallion in reverse* that fooled his believers, whose *opposite side* betrayed the vile metal! *From which ancestor did his degeneration come from?* Or had it burst out of him by some bad miracle, investing him with the fatal dishonor of the head of a lineage with a spurious sex, dizzy from *the ambiguous hermaphroditism of Nature?* ... Would he become one of those *abject beings, living castoffs similarly foreign to a woman's fragile beauty and masculine attractiveness*, from whom one flees and who are *cited as a statistic of derision?* ... If he should have been female, why not be born completely as such: another Isabel-Luisa, or better yet, Amparo? *And if he should have been male, the man needed to govern the*

*house and subject the passions of the others, why not give him the musculature and the level-headedness of the one there, next to him [Jaime], that almost insulted his insomnia with his undisturbed sleep?*

Ya en los primeros recuerdos de pubertad, los indicios se convertían en *síntomas* ... En el sosiego, en la limpieza hogareña, en el seguro de *los seres débiles* había ido larvándose *su predestinación*. La dulce convivencia con sus hermanas, las horas domésticas de guisos y costuras, de arreglos, de suave goce entre encajes y cintas, de hábil copia de los patrones publicados en las revistas de modas, tomaban ahora, en el recuerdo, densidad malsana. Las mismas virtudes ensalzadas por la voz popular: su minuciosidad, su espíritu de orden, mostraban, alumbradas por la vivisectora luz, *un revés repugnante*. ¡Todo él era cual *falsa medalla dorada en el anverso*, para engañar a los confiados, cuyo reverso delataba el metal vil roído de carroña! *¿De cuál antepasado le venía la degeneración?* ¿O habría brotado en él por mal milagro, invistiéndole del funesto deshonor propio del cabeza de una estirpe de sexo espurio, mareada por *la Naturaleza con la ambigüedad del hermafrodita?* ... ¿Llegaría a ser *uno de esos seres abyectos, andrajos vivos por igual ajenos a la belleza frágil de la mujer y a la hermosura masculina*, de quienes se huye y a quienes *se cita como cifra de escarnio?* ... Si debió ser hembra, ¿por qué no haber nacido completa: otra Isabel-Luisa, otra Amparo, mejor? *Y si debió ser hombre, el varón necesario para regir la casa y sujetar las pasiones de todos*, ¿por qué no haberle dado *la musculatura y el temple* del que allí, junto a él [Jaime], casi insultaba con el compacto sueño su insomnio? (97-100; emphasis added)

This passage describes the male-female duality of inversion that José-María experiences as starting from birth and as a form of hereditary hermaphroditism that he might have inherited from an ancestor. Its comparison to a medallion, and how its good and bad sides can be reversed (*inverted*) in order to play the role of an angel that fools others, illustrates the economy of gender and sexuality in the text and its amplification by the pathological discourse of sexual inversion. Notwithstanding the negatively charged language, José-María produces these thoughts in his mind in order to understand, and also question, the origins of his conflicted nature. On the one hand, José-María fools himself by posing as a reputable banker who sacrifices his own happiness in order to pass as heterosexual, negate his sexual inversion, and deny his same-sex desire. On the other, he capitalizes on the money he earns later in the story in order to escape the pressures of his home environment and invest in finding his true self through his own sexual awakening in Paris. In addition, the use of the metaphor of the two sides of a coin is not gratuitous. It is a clever allusion to José-María's involvement in accounting and banking, which gives continuity to how the economy of sex and gender and its binarial portrayal is connected to his socioeconomic status. In other words, the dual complexity of

sex and gender is already at work in what is perhaps the most compelling excerpt in the text of José-María's turmoil and the turning point at which he must decide how to cope.

There are other factors that contribute to José-María's confusion. He contrasts himself with his sisters and brother in order to ponder the construction of his own gender. These models of heterosexuality are reinforced by the obligation to marry his sisters and his brother's affairs with the daughter of the tamer of beasts, whom José-María fears is the culprit of his brother's delinquency and the trigger of his homosexuality. Aside from the ghosts of his parents, his brother Jaime is the one who compels him to pursue women at the circus, yet this experience, compounded by the awakening of his homosexuality, instills in him a fear of the feminine that skews his perception and treatment of his sisters, the daughter of the tamer of beasts, his mother, his girlfriend Cecilia, and other male inverts. The excerpt is also a continuation of the gendered tropes of the effeminate invert discussed previously but with more emphasis on the relational and social ramifications of his departure from normative masculinity. These traits are tied to the crumbling of the family unit and traditional models of maleness that were institutionalized via sexual reform in Spain.

José-María's ambiguous and unstable sexed and gendered body is rendered unintelligible by society, institutions, and his environment. Robert Phillip states that transgendered bodies, "especially when viewed as physical bodies in transition, defy the borders of systemic order by refusing to adhere to clear definitions of sex and gender. The abject can thus serve as a cleaving point of abstruseness and unease—separating, pathologizing, and psychologizing trans subjectivity" (20). What is more, José-María's sexual inversion is a mystery to himself as well because in order to maintain the simulacrum of heteronormativity against his inversion, he must identify with the abjection that he rejects in his own person. Like heterosexuals who want to protect their normativity, he also internalizes the abjection that accompanies hegemonic masculinity. Later, we will see how this manifests even in his perception of other inverts.

### 1.2.1. Regenerationism as a Pathway to Dictatorial Rule

The institutionalization of eugenics and sexual reform were two offspring of regenerationism, “a movement of opinion” that sought to save Spain from political incompetence and corruption, “backward ideology,” and the “continued stability of the ruling order dominated by the landed oligarchy” (Graham and Labanyi 26-27). It is a notion that dovetails from degeneration in order to counter its effects. Although regenerationism became a national concern after the loss of Spain’s remaining principal colonies (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines) in what became known as ‘the Disaster of 1898’ (‘the Disaster’), precedent was established decades earlier at the beginning of the Restoration of the monarchy during the reign of Alfonso XII in 1874. Don Alfonso did not want to be an absolute, if not absolutist, monarch but rather form a government that brought together the liberalism of his time with the catholic values that characterized the past monarchy, and that held at bay and controlled the power of the military (Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell 159). Thus, a sociopolitical plan was promulgated in the Sandhurst Manifesto, which asked for the integration of all Spaniards under the aegis of a common constitution.

During this time, scientists and philosophers who followed Krausism began to integrate positivism and evolutionism in their thought by incorporating empirical and observational praxis in their concerns over social matters. Joaquín Costa (1846-1911) was one of the most prominent of Krausist thinkers and the leading voice in regenerationist literature that succeeded works published by his predecessors, such as *España tal como es* (1885; Hernández-Catá’s birth year) by Spanish politician, journalist, and lawyer Valentín Almirall (1841-1904) and *Los males de la patria* (1890) by Spanish writer and geologist Lucas Mallada (1841-1921). Positivism and liberal Krausism dovetailed with Costa’s regenerationist approach to Spain’s problems as he sought to marry scientific methods with moral idealism in a process that would revive the country’s zeal for reparation. In his book *Oligarquía y caciquismo* (Oligarchy and Caciquism; 1901), he proposed a “cirujano de hierro” (“iron

surgeon”), a temporary authoritarian governor controlled by parliament and the judiciary who would put the nation on a path toward healing based on the daily practice of liberalism, the stripping of power from the oligarchy, and the elimination of despotism. He proposed a “política quirúrgica” (“surgical politics”) that would get rid of the politicians: “let them retreat so that the anonymous, the people, the healthy may govern” (“que se retiren para que gobiernen los anónimos, el pueblo, los sanos”; Casals 146). Conservative politicians, however, later co-opted his ideas in order to set in place regenerationist leaders whose governance was much more repressive, such as that of Antonio Maura (1853-1925), who from 1919 to 1923 turned against the liberalist government of the Restoration in order to pursue a nationalist, far right-wing politics that would appeal to the ‘neutral masses’ (Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell 222-23). His unpopularity after the First World War prepared the way for Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, while the latter inherited from Maura another war with the Moroccans that would prove to be more devastating for Spanish hegemony.

As mentioned before, Spain experienced an upsurge in its economy during the First World War, however, it was short-lived. We can recall from the plot of *El ángel de Sodoma* that the father, Don Santiago, dies before the First World War ends. After the war and the economic boom, the Vélez-Gomara children struggle to maintain the three-story house, especially when renters vacate the first two floors. As a result, José-María takes up a banking job:

*During the war*, and with the increase in prices, the financial vultures disrupted around the pyre of ruins, and a Company hoped to buy their house at a profitable price; ... But the house wasn’t sold. That frequent reminder of heroism, of the paternal exceptionalism—deforming the real memory—created a solemn, demanding, almost surly image of the diseased father and their obligation to him, which constituted the only shadow projected against their lives. They could hardly reconstruct the physical image of the suicide victim and his soul, in turn, took the shape of a mysterious, vengeful creditor, who they had to pay in painful currency. They did not sell nor were they too saddened when *two years after the economic boom*, money and sustenance simultaneously rose in price, two renters left the house, and they had to think about stability. Emboldened, José-María said, “—I will work since I never had the brains to study. What matters is that Jaime finishes his career and you [i.e., his sisters], when it’s time, marry well.”

*Cuando la guerra*, encareciendo todo, alborotó en torno de la inmensa pira de ruinas los cuervos financieros, una Compañía pretendió comprarles la casa en precio ventajosísimo; ... Pero la casa no fue vendida. Esa frecuente recordación de la heroicidad, de la excepcionalidad paterna, deformando

el recuerdo real, creaba del muerto y de sus deberes para con él una imagen solemne, exigente, adusta casi, que constituía la única sombra proyectada contra sus vidas. Apenas si podían reconstruir ya la imagen física del suicida, y el alma en cambio, tomaba la figura de un misterioso acreedor vengativo quien habían de pagar en dolorosa moneda. No vendieron ni se entristecieron demasiado cuando, *dos años después del gran auge económico*, el dinero y las subsistencias encarecieron al par, se les desalquilaron dos pisos y hubo que pensar en colocarse. Animoso, José-María dijo: —Trabajaré yo que no tuve cabeza para estudiar. El caso es que Jaime acabe su carrera y que vosotras [i.e., sus hermanas], cuando sea tiempo, os caséis bien. (66-67; emphasis added)

This excerpt mentions the passing of two years after the economic boom, which places the story circa 1921, the time when Maura led Spain, when the crisis in Morocco intensified, and when Primo de Rivera's coup d'état was imminent (it occurred in September 1923). Although Spain experienced a boom in its economy during the war, this was mostly due to the European post-war recovery and its aftermath, which produced an increase in prices that favored the foreign more than the local economy, causing a rise in social tensions after 1919 that led to fractured relations in Spain between the right-wing and liberal political parties (Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell 242).<sup>48</sup>

These circumstances facilitated General Primo de Rivera's unconstitutional, yet unrivaled transition into power amidst the pressing need for national change and little opposition from the military who saw him, the 'iron surgeon,' as a comrade and that the dictator recruited to his cabinet upon taking leadership.<sup>49</sup> The citation above depicts the haunting image of the father, Santiago, as an oppressive authority figure reminiscent of Costa's 'iron surgeon,' which I interpret as an allegory of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship not too long after the economic boom. Like the regenerationist dictator who was thought to save Spain from further decadence, so is Santiago portrayed as the exceptional patriarch who will save his children from ruin as they feel obligated to solemnly revere him, and to whom, in turn, they are indebted, after inheriting his life insurance.

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<sup>48</sup> Carr (2000) clarifies that "productivity and per-capita income rose sharply, probably a reflection of the European post-war recovery rather than the result of imposed autarky" (242).

<sup>49</sup> According to Carr, Primo de Rivera's coup abolished the constitution of 1875 "and put the old political class out to grass," while he "ruled Spain advised by a military directorate of his fellow generals" (2000: 241). Generals administered central government, brigadiers the provinces, and captains the municipalities (Carr 1982: 575).

### 1.2.2. “Made for Each Other”: Primo de Rivera and Don Santiago Vélez-Gomara

In the first chapter of *El ángel de Sodoma*, Santiago is described as a cyclops, “with a small head for a gigantic body, sluggish, dreamer of not fruitful, but futile dreams” (“de cabeza chica para su gigantesco cuerpo, lento, soñador de sueños no multiplicadores, sino de resta”; 49). The cyclops, as a creature having just one and not two eyes, symbolizes a lack of awareness, understanding, and intelligence, given to one-sidedness and producing “a loss of apprehension of certain dimensions and relationships. . . . Left to their own devices and without spiritual direction, they cannot but play a destructive role in the universe and in the human person” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 270). Given to alcoholism, Santiago is unable to fulfill his duties as head of household and it clouds his mind with self-indulgent grandiosity and avarice: “The *current* head of the Vélez family, Don Santiago—only active and happy when the mist of alcohol surrounded him with *absurd views about gold*—was content with only . . . boasting about *his scrolls and his stature*” (“El *actual* jefe de la familia de los Vélez, don Santiago, sólo activo y alegre cuando la bruma del alcohol lo rodeaba de *absurdas perspectivas de oro*, se conformaba con . . . ufanarse de *sus pergaminos y de su estatura*”; 50; emphasis added). The stress on the word ‘current’ denotes a distinction between Santiago and heads of household that came before him. The latter were more responsible and valued their fortune while Santiago rested on a vacuous notion of grandeur and on what perhaps are the scrolls of the titles of ownership of the house or other documents of business deals and assets he acquired.

Although there is no way to prove that Santiago’s character is based on Primo de Rivera, the parallels between them are striking and very similar to other dictators in Europe and Latin America who came from rural backgrounds and served in the military. According to historian Gerald Brenan, Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja (1870-1930) was an Andalusian landowner from Jerez: “the province where a hard-drinking, whoring, horse-loving aristocracy rules over the most starved and down-trodden race of agricultural labourers in Europe” (Carr 1982: 125). Although Primo de Rivera

was seen by some as optimistic and benevolent to the poor, he indulged in the other activities that characterized Jerez and it was the landowners of Andalusia and the Catalan bourgeoisie that supported his coup in order to avoid a Bolshevik revolution (Carr 2000: 240). Yet, he had no government experience and his bohemian habits made him undisciplined and irregular, given to women and debauchery when not “erecting before himself the image of the dedicated and austere saviour under Providence” (Carr 1982: 566). Students discredited his government by disseminating clandestine literature. For example, the first letters of each line of a poem spelled ‘Primo is a Drunk’ (584). Brennan paints a vivid picture of his routine and habits:

He sat up talking every night in clubs or cafés till three or four in the morning ... every now and then he would have a good *juerga* or drinking about. He and a few friends (including women) would shut themselves up in a country house, disconnect the telephone and let themselves go for a couple of days. ... His most troublesome vice was over-eating. ... His last days in Paris, days of physical prostration and of bitterness, were passed between the church and the brothel. (127).<sup>50</sup>

If we recall, the fall of the Vélez-Gomaras is attributed to drinking, ‘caressing women’ (prostitutes), and Santiago’s egotism.

Politically, Primo de Rivera’s platform was founded on recovering the losses from ‘the Disaster’ and he followed a regenerationist agenda focused on returning the nation to a state of “normality” and ridding the government of *caciquismo* (caciquism; despotism), even though this became the modus operandi of his appointees at the local and state level. Although his policies brought economic growth, accelerated infrastructure, and increased foreign trade, exorbitant public spending dependent on loans from the Bank of Local Credit led to inflation, even for public works such as the improvement of roads, electricity, and hydraulics and sewage systems. In addition, he neglected agrarian reform out of fear of dealing with the powerful landowners of the oligarchy. He was obsessed with nationalizing imports in order to claim ownership, such that he wanted to

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<sup>50</sup> In Andalusia, a *juerga* involved gathering at an establishment or party to sing, drink, and dance flamenco (DAE).

establish an autarky whereby every good and commodity would be produced or grown in Spain, “regardless of production costs ... hence his attempt to create a national car industry” (580). Carr highlights that he was “much praised by the Automobile Association for bringing Spain into the motor-car age” (2000: 241).<sup>51</sup>

Like Primo de Rivera, Santiago is unable to exert authority and sustain his household as the family patriarch, yet he expects it to posthumously produce capital via his children. He spends his time in cafés while being inundated with debts, alcoholism, and an obsession with cars, eventually buying his own, which he forbids the children to touch: “The hypothesis of a hypocritical suicide consolidated itself when it was known that Don Santiago had recently drawn up a life insurance contract for his children who he always pushed away from the automobile, saying: ‘You can’t touch this, you know!’ as though it were a weapon” (“La hipótesis de un suicidio hipócrita consolidóse cuando se supo que don Santiago tenía un seguro de vida contratado poco tiempo antes, a favor de sus hijos, a quienes apartaba siempre del automóvil diciéndoles: «¡Eso no se toca, ya lo sabéis!», cual si se tratase de un arma”; 55). That same vehicle, however, drives him to his catastrophic death.

In chapter one of the novel, we get a glimpse of the ramifications:

The selling of land, the mortgages, the documents, and the bad memory of alcohol came. In reality, the children wished to see him inebriated because his happy, hazy, suddenly extravagant, and hopeful drunkenness was preferable to the scowling impotence, to the prophesies of nocturnal days filled with coldness and hunger, to the beatings. On two occasions, the intent to set aside the scrolls and *to hunch* over work wanted to solidify itself in his will; *sterile humiliation*. Then there was talk about a car show; there were long table conversations at the cafés, in front of the small glass of moonshine clouding the glass of water...

Vinieron las ventas de tierra, las hipotecas, los expedientes, y el mal olvido del alcohol. En verdad los hijos deseaban verlo ebrio, porque su embriaguez sonriente, brumosa, con esperanzas y prodigalidades súbitas, era preferible a *las impotencias ceñudas*, a las profecías de días nocturnos llenos de frío y de hambre, a los golpes. Dos veces el intento de echar a un lado los pergaminos y de *doblar la estatura* sobre el trabajo quiso cuajársele en la voluntad. *Humillación estéril*. Se habló luego de una representación de automóviles; hubo largas pláticas ante las mesas de los cafés, frente a la copita de aguardiente enturbiadora de la copa de agua... (51-52; emphasis added)

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<sup>51</sup> According to Carr (2000): “the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture fell to under half, from 57 per cent to 45 per cent. The beginnings of an industrial revolution were reflected in the beginnings of a consumer society. The 18,000 cars of 1923 became 37,000 by 1929, the 63,000 telephones, 212, 400” (242).

Santiago's aggression, impulsiveness, and mismanagement runs parallel to the description of Primo de Rivera as "having little education, inconstant, sometimes given to impulsive reactions and almost incapable of being persuaded. The essence of his program was born from *regenerationist* motives that connected very well with the mentality of the period ... The inconvenience of this disposition resided in its derivation from no less than an imprecise mentality, threatened by incoherence and contradiction" ("poco formado, inconstante, a veces proclive a las reacciones impulsivas y casi nunca capaz de dejarse convencer. La esencia de su programa nació de una voluntad *regeneracionista* que conectaba muy bien con la mentalidad de la época ... El inconveniente de este talante reside en que procedía poco menos de una mentalidad imprecisa, amenazada por las incoherencias y contradicciones"; Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell 264; emphasis added).

Primo de Rivera's philosophy on leadership was based on 'intuitionism' instead of intellectualism. He was known to be a "café politician," "aspiring to save his country by making himself its ruler" (Brenan 125). He despised specialists, politics, and politicians because he thought these entities cost Spain its reputation and prosperity and that they had not acted on the country's best interest. Seeing that university students were both academically inclined and politically active, he curtailed access to higher education by, for instance, closing universities, such as the Ateneo Científico, Literario y Artístico de Madrid (Scientific, Literary, and Artistic Athenæum of Madrid), causing students "to riot in the streets" and smash "busts of the king" (Carr 2000: 242). This created a vacuum of good ideas that the Catholic Church attempted to fill in order to steer Spain toward "progress," without the expertise of intellectuals and specialists. Hence, Primo de Rivera allowed only Catholic private universities to confer degrees, reflecting the tunnel vision and poor intelligence of the cyclops (Carr 1982: 583).

Intellectuals such as Spanish writers and philosophers Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) and eventually José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955)—as well as Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa—were

staunch critics of Primo de Rivera's regime, not only because of his anti-intellectualism, but also because of his circumvention of jurisprudence that he inherited from Alfonso XIII, who together with the military pushed for an illegal antiparliamentary and counterrevolutionary autocracy. With the king's backing and the armed forces' plans for a coup, a state of exception bound by the manipulation of the rule of law was created that made possible Primo de Rivera's appointment, much like the oppressive exceptionalism of Santiago in *El ángel de Sodoma* (Casals Meseguer 173). Although he loathed politics, Primo de Rivera created his own party that became political, the Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union), which eventually turned against him toward the end of his leadership.

Primo de Rivera's dictatorship was paternalistic and suffocating, thus weighing on Spanish civic life in the same way that Santiago's phantasmatic presence oppressively dictates the lives of his children and the reverential deference they are obliged to show to the patriarch in every life decision they make: "Primo's regenerationist action was more rhetorical than real and it materialized in an asphyxiating interventionism by the State in all spheres: from the local government to matters of justice, through to the economy and public works" ("La acción «regeneracionista» de Primo fue más retórica que real y se concretó en un intervencionismo asfixiante del Estado en todos los ámbitos: desde el gobierno local hasta la justicia, pasando por la economía y las obras públicas"; Casals Meseguer 179). Its priorities were "Nation, Church, and King, *in that order*" (Carr 1982: 566).<sup>52</sup> Therefore, he limited freedom of the press and censored detractors: "Primo was in everything, opined on everything and imposed his critiques on everything ... he turned into a kind of chief editor with his notes and censorship of the country's daily newspapers. ... As a dictator, Primo rejected all criticism" ("Primo estaba en todo, opinaba sobre todo y en todo quería imponer sus criterios ... se convirtió en una suerte de redactor-jefe de los rotativos del país con sus notas y su

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<sup>52</sup> On 15 February 1913, Primo de Rivera published his own newspaper, *La Nación. Diario Monárquico Independiente* where he states: "el patriotismo se practica en todos los actos de la vida, y quien sirve a su Patria sirve a Dios" ("patriotism is practiced in all acts of life, and whomever serves the homeland serves God"; Casals Meseguer 153).

censura. ... Como dictador, Primo rechazó toda crítica”; Casals Meseguer 180-81). Primo de Rivera was a conservative Catholic and he always invoked the order of the monarchy’s period of Restoration in order to legitimate and promote his nationalist agenda. The repression of Catalanism is a case in point.

Catalans supported Primo de Rivera’s coup in exchange for national autonomy, however, the dictator was averse to regionalism and went back on his promise by forbidding the use of the Catalan language in public, official correspondence, and schools. He also forbade the use of the flag and Catalonia’s national dance, the sardana (Brenan 132). Furthermore, he hindered assembly and political organization by dissolving and outlawing the *Mancomunitat*, or Commonwealth of Catalonia in 1925, the main organ of Catalan governance that began forming in 1911. Catalan industry was also jeopardized in spite of the public works projects and infrastructural preparations that, for instance, went into the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition. The Exposition was larger in scale than the Ibero-American International Exposition in Seville occurring that same year, although both had the purpose of improving relations between Spain and other countries. However, the one in Barcelona was a façade that did little to cover up Catalans’ resentment toward the dictatorship. In addition, the cost of the world fairs “produced a false sense of prosperity, caused the public debt to rise from 15,000 to 20,000 millions of pesetas and led to the economic crisis of 1929, when the peseta fell from 33 to the £ to 47. This was a level it had not reached for half a century” (Brenan 130).

The collapse of the peseta had actually begun in 1928, before the stock market crash the following year, and its effects “were concealed from the country by the fraudulent device of the Extraordinary Budget” (Carr 1982: 588). The finance minister, Calvo Sotelo, made state purchases of pesetas in the London Market in order to prevent further devaluation of national currency. Antonio Flores de Lemus (1876-1941), the most respected economist in Spain at the time, criticized Primo de

Rivera's economic policy in his report on the gold standard, or the monetary system by which each unit of currency is valued and could be exchanged for a fixed quantity of gold. However, "once internal and external price levels were out of joint only devaluation remained" (589). Carr emphasizes: "When his public works programme ran into financial difficulties, plans to reform the tax system were overwhelmed in what his finance minister called an 'avalanche of gold'" (Carr 2000: 242).

Santiago's preoccupation with his 'pergaminos' (scrolls) and 'absurdas perspectivas de oro' (absurd perspectives of gold) are reminiscent of Primo de Rivera's anxiety over regenerating Spain and bringing it back to a socioeconomic state of "normality" spearheaded by fervent patriotism that beckoned a glorious national past but offered a pot of gold with cracks. The Vález-Gomara house, as a microcosm of Spain, is described in similar brushstrokes: "Since times not seen by its current inhabitants, the house nurtured itself with nostalgias, prestige, and debts" ("Desde tiempos no vistos por sus actuales moradores, la casa se nutría de nostalgias, de prestigio y de deudas"; 49). At the same time, the dictatorship—meant to last only as long as it was capable of helping Spain recover from 'the Disaster'—brought about dissent between Primo de Rivera and the king, the military, intellectuals, and other groups after only three years into his term; virtually, every sector that initially supported him or showed indifference to his assumption of power. The Union Patriótica competed with military control and constitutional measures, the Catalans fought against intense repression, students were attacked for demanding better services and rights, intellectuals went into exile, and the Moroccan War caused backlash.

### 1.3. 'Dis-Orienting' Inversions: Africanism, Effeminacy, and the Vélez-Gomaras<sup>53</sup>

#### 1.3.1. Morocco as the Test of Spanish Hegemony

From roughly 1890 to the 1930s, writers explored in many ways the regenerationist idea of creating solutions to cure Spain of the sociopolitical ills and economic setbacks that deterred social progress and modernization. It found expression in the works of the fin-de-siècle generation of writers such as Azorín, Pío Baroja, and Unamuno and other modernists after them, such as Hernández-Catá.<sup>54</sup> Such sentiment was exacerbated by 'the Disaster,' but it resurfaced when Spain set its orientalist imperial gaze on North Africa, entering into a number of pernicious conflicts with the Moroccan monarchy and its rebels during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Mejías-López notes:

Hernández Catá had lived through Cuba's independence from Spain and resided in Spain at a time when the long-coming end of its empire was finally, if slowly, hitting home. Spain (where the novel [*El ángel de Sodoma*] seems to take place and where the concept of 'purity of blood' had been, and perhaps for some still was, a national obsession) was after 1898 still holding on pathetically but violently to its 'glorious' past, especially in Morocco.

The conflict with Morocco presented a challenge to the 'Nation, Church, and King' paradigm for both Primo de Rivera and the Riffians. The latter—longing for independence, non-Catholic, and ruled by a sultan—wanted autonomy while Primo de Rivera used the conflict as a political football that he threw between Africanists who wanted to colonize Morocco and *abandonistas* (defeatists) who wanted to relinquish the occupied territory. The former appealed to Africanist soldiers and the latter to Junteros (the military sector stationed in the Peninsula), although they used it as leverage to obtain the same privileges as Africanists who enjoyed better salaries and quicker promotions. The Riffian rebellion against Spanish and French colonization was ongoing since 1909, but after the major

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<sup>53</sup> I take Martín-Márquez's book title, "Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity," as inspiration for this section's heading.

<sup>54</sup> For further discussion on the likes of these authors and the literary groups and movements to which they belonged, see Pedraza Jiménez, volume three, and Mainer, chapter one.

Spanish defeat at the battle of Annual in 1921, neither Alfonso XIII nor vengeful Spanish soldiers wanted to let their guard down. Primo de Rivera vacillated between the Africanist and abandonista approaches based on whichever suited his own political interests and drive for power. The dictator-general initially took a semi-abandonment approach to Spanish concentrations there seeing that it required too much effort to maintain the North African protectorate, enough to at least be profitable. He also maintained that Spain occupied part of its territory from pressure by the English who did not want the French to seize it (Carr 1982: 573).

After his dismissal as captain general of Cádiz in 1917, Primo de Rivera lost more faith in politicians, but once his uncle Fernando Primo (1831-1931) was named Minister of War in Spain, the Junteros became better acquainted with the Primos to persuade them toward a military government. In 1919, Primo was appointed lieutenant general and aligned himself with the Junteros of the Juntas de Defensa Militares (Juntas of Military Defense) that grew out of Barcelona since 1916, before Annual, given that there were revolutionaries and separatists in the Catalan capital that were enemies of the state: “Thus, a polarity between Junteros and Africanists was generated that would vex political and military life since then and ... it was a decisive factor in the triumph of Primo’s coup” (“Se generó así una polaridad entre junteros y africanistas que crispó la vida política y militar desde entonces y ... fue un factor decisivo en el triunfo del golpe de Primo”; Casals Meseguer 156). Francesc Cambó i Batlle (1876-1947), the founder and leader of the right-wing political party of Catalonia, the Lliga Regionalista de Catalunya (Regionalist League of Catalonia), later said: “the Spanish dictatorship was born in Barcelona and its environment was created there, where syndicalist demagoguery had intolerable intensity and chronicity” (“la dictadura española nació en Barcelona y la creó el ambiente de Barcelona, donde la demagogia sindicalista tenía una intensidad y una cronicidad intolerables”; 162).

His assertion is true insofar that it might have explained how the Junteros aligned with an authoritarianist style of government that could help them achieve their coup; however, there was a lack of uniformity among the different factions in Catalonia that also contributed to its realization. At the same time, we should recall that Primo de Rivera went back and forth on his support of Catalan separatism and Catalonia's labor movement based on his politics before heavily opposing them once he became dictator. In addition, the lawlessness that existed in the colonial enterprise in Africa and the king's desire to accumulate power there also factored into cultivating the militarism of Africanist dictators who served to defend the protectorate, such as Francisco Franco, who shared this trait with Junteros: "in spite of their divisions, all of them [Africanists and Junteros] shared the same militarist ideology, characterized by its corporativism before the criticism of the civil society, its Spanish ultranationalism, its disdain for politicians, and combat against internal enemies" ("pese a sus divisiones, todos ellos [africanistas y junteros] compartían un mismo ideario militarista, caracterizado por su corporativismo ante las críticas del mundo civil, su ultranacionalismo español, el menosprecio por «los políticos» y el combate contra los «enemigos interiores»"; Casals Meseguer 160). Furthermore, the pathway to solidifying a dictatorship, especially once Primo de Rivera took the charge, depended on the pacification (read suppression) of the Moroccan rebellion, which was accomplished after many deaths, casualties, and the unlawful use of chemical weapons.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, Primo de Rivera's transition from indecisive support in favor of Catalans and Moroccans to his opposition against their independence coincided with the transition from support of his dictatorship to the antagonism that decided its fractured end. The Moroccan War, falling in-between the successful coup and failure of his rule, reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the dictator's and Spain's hegemony.

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<sup>55</sup> The 1919 Treaty of Versailles between France and Spain prohibited their use (Casals Meseguer 186).

When he tried to reach a truce with Abd el Krim, and the Riffian leader refused, Primo de Rivera began to remove troops to avoid more military losses, those of which had already diminished Spanish resources used to quell the rebellion, with a loss of 16,000 casualties (Brenan 128). However, when in 1925 Abd el Krim decided to invade the French sector of Morocco (a much more robust and richer enclave), the Spanish allied with them and together defeated the Riffians. Primo de Rivera saw the victory of the Moroccan War as an opportunity to legitimize and solidify his power, and to continue Spanish interests in the region, using it as a plank to increase his influence internationally after Spain had been demoted to a second-degree state power, competing for a spot equal to other European superpowers at the time: France, Great Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany. However, the cost of an unpopular war (£160,000,000) harmed the economy and instigated already conflicted relations with domestic dissent (Brenan 129).

During this time, Primo de Rivera created the Unión Patriótica (1924) and the Municipal Statute of 1925. These governing organs gave more leverage to politicians and other groups who eventually opposed the dictatorship, henceforth isolating the military and weakening the king's power. Once Primo de Rivera's power was threatened, his methods became more forceful and repressive in order to cling to his rule, until he was met with resistance, especially in the last three years of his tenure. The conflict with Morocco illustrates well the sociopolitical chasm that he created because it solidified as much as delegitimized his leadership.<sup>56</sup> His "victory" against the Riffians assured him of being able to return Spain to a state of normality, however, his military prowess did not easily translate to effective governance.

Like Spain's contentious hold over the military enclave in Morocco as vindication of a post-Disaster mindset, the Vélez-Gomara family is a stronghold in the story that in retrospect represents

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<sup>56</sup> Cleminson and Vázquez García comment that the Moroccan War was one "with little public support and of dubious moral justification" (192).

a glorious past in need of restoration, but it is in decline due to the spiritual lethargy and corrupt financial dealings of Santiago, the father, whose diseased spirit is like a dictator's oppressive grip on the children who are pressured into honoring his tainted legacy. At first everything runs smoothly and José-María and his siblings are able to subsist on their own, overcoming threats to their wellbeing and wealth from outsiders: "This cordial arrangement diluted contradictions before they set and it maintained the unity of the three siblings against all interference dangerous to their fortune. In this way, attempts of *tyranny* by various acquaintances and the assistant; of *abuse* by merchants; of *meddling* by all, failed" ("Esta compaginación cordial diluía las contradicciones antes de cuajarse y mantenía sin la menor grieta la unidad de los tres contra toda injerencia peligrosa para su dicha. De este modo, las tentativas de *tiranía* por parte de varios conocidos y de la asistenta; de *abuso* por parte de los comerciantes; de *intromisión* por parte de todos, fracasaron"; 64, emphasis added). However, toward the end of the penultimate chapter of the novel, before going to Paris, José-María sees things more clearly and says: "So much sacrifice for a name. But to what end? Everything has its point of view... For the Insurance Company your father wasn't noble, but a villain, you see" ("«Tanto sacrificio por un nombre, ¿a qué conduce? Todo tiene su punto de vista... Para la Compañía de Seguros tu padre no fue un noble, sino un villano listo, ya ves»"; 211; ellipsis in original). As he prepares to live his life away from family obligations and a repressive environment, he realizes that his father was corrupt and a fraud. The same can be said of the faith that Spain put on the 'iron surgeon' to heal it from all of its shortcomings and setbacks.

The allegorical parallel between the meddling of the provincial municipality and Santiago's overbearing presence to Primo de Rivera's technocratic, nationalist, and interventionist politics is evident in his treatment of the Moroccan problem (Martín, Martínez Shaw, and Tusell 264). In the novel, these intrusions are inscribed in discourses on gender and sexuality, thus aligning with the way that the conflicts in North Africa were gendered and sexualized along orientalist lines. The sections

that follow discuss how the dictatorship instigated these trends of hegemonic masculinity in ways that also become apparent in the novel, particularly through Santiago's questionable masculinity and Jaime's evasion of patriarchy.

### 1.3.2. The Moroccan War, the Loss of Masculinity, and the "New Modern Man"

Morocco was an attraction for Primo de Rivera's compulsion to climb the ladder of social mobility via his gradual ascendancy in the ranks of the military. Now that Spain concentrated its imperial efforts in Africa as a result of 'the Disaster,' soldiers and officers were paid higher salaries there, and when France and Great Britain reached an agreement called the "Entente Cordiale" (Cordial Treaty) in 1904 to each control parts of the Mediterranean region and North Africa, Spain wanted to compete in the game. However, with France's control of territory from the Pyrenees to Morocco and the British enclave in the Peninsula, Spain was geographically caught in a competitive in-between of imperial power that needed protecting, thus another justification for establishing a protectorate in 1912.<sup>57</sup> Alfonso XIII had ambitions of augmenting the crown's power by becoming "Alfonso el Africano" ("Alfonso the African") and expanding monarchical rule with the help of the military whose officers considered the protectorate an opportunity to "bring civilization" to the region and attain promotions.<sup>58</sup>

It was his taking of Gourougou Mountain in Morocco that promoted Primo de Rivera to brigade general in 1911 (Casals Meseguer 150-52). Morocco became his training ground and sandbox for building aspirations to become Spain's commander-in-chief and, as a result, one of the subsequent "Africanists" who applied their international experiences to domestic governance among

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<sup>57</sup> According to Susan Martín-Márquez, "the [Spanish] nation's ambitions in North Africa would always be circumscribed by the interests of the other European imperial powers that had risen to dominance" (161).

<sup>58</sup> According to Casals Meseguer, "Alfonso XIII, with his Africanist ambitions, yearned to conquer Al Hoceima in order to found a new 'Alphonsine City' there" ("Alfonso XIII, con sus ambiciones africanistas, ansiaba conquistar Alhucemas para edificar allí una nueva «Ciudad Alfonsina»"; 166).

the likes of Francisco Franco, who was also groomed in Morocco: “As such, future Spanish dictators, Primo de Rivera and Franco, and their collaborators, were trained in the Spanish zone of Morocco, who discovered there ‘the levels of real violence that should be confronted with modern armament’” (“Así, en la zona española de Marruecos se forjaron los futuros dictadores españoles, Primo de Rivera y Franco, y sus colaboradores, que allí descubrieron «los niveles de violencia real a que cabe llegar con el armamento moderno»”; 151). Although meant literally, the modern armament used to suppress Moroccan insubordination also consisted of regenerationist tropes of virility versus effeminacy that were deployed to rally “new modern men” for the military campaign against the Riffians.

The Rif War between the Spanish, French, and the Berber tribes of the Rif region was fought from 1911 to 1927. After his coup d'état, Primo de Rivera oversaw the campaign from 1924 to 1927, this last year being the same one in which his dictatorship began to wane. From Primo de Rivera's point of view, albeit understated, Morocco was only meant to be a military stronghold that English and French interests in the region, as well as the Berbers' desire for autonomy, turned into a warzone. This resulted in conflicts in which Spain experienced many military losses, reaching a calamitous denouement in the 1921 Battle of Annual. These losses brought Spanish virility into question. Tropes of masculinity and femininity were evoked when describing the military and the “political impotence” that Spain had been experiencing since ‘the Disaster,’ which was contrary to the regenerationist type of education on the energy, will, and discipline that nationalism and patriotism that was inculcated into the masses.

The loss of manhood was equated to the political and moral decline in the nation. The main cause of the crisis was attributed to *abulia*, but that deficiency in activity and energy was presented in gendered terms as feminine passivity in contrast to the willpower, energy, and courage of an active masculinity (Cleminson and Vázquez García 182). These binaries of passivity versus activity were

also extended to places of socialization: “There are places where the race decays and becomes degenerate, where the national vices of verbosity, flamenco dancing, laziness, drunkenness and excess such as the casino, the bar and the bordello thrive” (187). Not only was this applicable to human faculties but to geographies as well, whereby distinctions between north and south and center and periphery were made: “Africa, like the Orient and in contrast to Europe, is a symbol in turn of the century Europe of the reign of passion and sentiment over and above reason, of the predominance of the feminine over the masculine” (186).

This description of the passiveness/effeminacy of degeneracy versus the activity/masculinity of regenerationism is very similar to the way in which the Spanish province in *El ángel de Sodoma* is described: “The city, Levitical, in spite of the bluish-white paganism of the waves and the immoral ferment brought from time to time by the sailors, sick of oceanic chastity, to the suburban shacks...” (“La ciudad, levítica, a pesar del paganismo azuliblanco de las olas y del fermento inmoral traído de tiempo en tiempo por los marineros, hartos de oceánicas castidades, a las casucas del suburbio...”; 48). The paganism and immorality are depicted in gendered terms as brought by male sailors who may either be domestic citizens or foreign. They come to the province, a coastal town in-between the periphery and city center, to unbridle their repressed sexual desires. The immoralities are delineated in spatial dimensions, as peripheral or alien to the chastity and asceticism of the religious Levitical region, therefore insinuating its need for regeneration.

The same picture is painted when symptoms of passion and sexual indulgence gradually appear in the four children who are entering adulthood, which are tied to an economy of the consumption of goods and bodies: “Jaime brought the second symptoms [of disgrace] from his trip to remote lands, by way of indomitable contraband bought and hidden in his soul, until then weak, in one of those ports where the races and vices from various continents converge” (“Los segundos [síntomas de la desgracia] los trajo Jaime de su viaje a tierras remotas, a modo de contrabando

indómito comprado y escondido en su alma, hasta entonces dócil, en uno de esos puertos donde confluyen las razas y los vicios de varios continentes”); 75). Jaime’s characterization is similar to how the Moroccans were perceived: indomitable, foreign, delinquent, (racially) inferior, and full of vice.<sup>59</sup> He is the prototype of heterosexuality in the story, but it is one modeled against the traditional modern notion of masculinity that intellectuals and politicians developed in the first decades of the twentieth century in Spain:

Virility, in this new formulation, is not seen as the aggressive and intermittent force employed by the warlike aristocracy, dismissing hard work both intellectual and manual. Neither is it linked to inheritance or blood ties. Instead it is a biological and psychological quality based on the values of self-control, foresight, discipline and knowledge. This is a modern form of masculinity which tries to maintain some of the old aristocratic values such as asceticism, stoicism in the face of adversity, noble generosity, dignity, and strength of character. It tries to combine all these with the new bourgeois values of self restraint, pride in one’s work, the values of knowledge for knowledge’s sake, morality and civic sensibility. (Cleminson and Vázquez García 183)

Jaime is the opposite of “the new modern man” as he does not value knowledge after doing poorly in Nautical School (70), showing also that he does not take pride in his work, which is further demonstrated by the turning of his affinities to contraband instead, as well as to the erotic pursuit of the daughter of the tamer of beasts. He exhibits no discipline in his studies or work and no self-control, especially when he comes back home from overseas and his siblings notice that he has changed:

It was a new Jaime ... stronger, with a hint of command and excessive self-confidence in his gestures, frequently illuminated by an almost lewd smile of superiority. ... When the three of them embraced him ... they got an impression of foreignness. ... When he woke up, he would sing unknown songs; he would walk through the furniture without the measured caution of his siblings ... he spoke of incredible adventures and of the stupidity of living only in one place. ... His big hands fell on the delicate objects confectioned by his brother, making them cry. In between excessive cackles—laughter already made to dominate the tumultuous sea—, he ridiculed the homemade liquors that José-María made and took out a flask of gin from his luggage. And every now and then he dropped the glass, launched an insult against the bourgeoisie, followed an unsettling image only visible to him in the cigar smoke. ... You learn in life by stumbling and stumbling... You’ve got to have fun, ladies [he is speaking to his sisters]!

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<sup>59</sup> The narrator in the novella by Spanish writer Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932) “En la guerra,” published in the literary magazine *El Cuento Semanal* in 1909, describes the Rifians as “hungry wolves, ferocious, dirty, and poorly dressed, dark like the devil, with brutish features and stupid eyes” (Martin-Márquez 166). De Burgos was Spain’s first female war correspondent and was familiar with Lamarck, Darwin, and other scientists’ theories on biological determinism and evolution that were widely discussed in Spain (*ibid.*).

Era un Jaime nuevo ... más fornido, con algo de imperativo y de excesivamente desenvuelto en los ademanes, iluminado a menudo por una sonrisa casi procaz de superioridad. ... Cuando lo abrazaron los tres ... sintieron una impresión de extrañeza. ... Cantaba, al levantarse, canciones desconocidas; iba por entre los muebles sin la medida cuidadosa de los otros ... contaba aventuras increíbles y hablaba de la estupidez de vivir en un solo sitio. ... Sus manazas caían sobre los delicados objetos confeccionados por su hermano, haciéndolos gemir. Entre risotadas excesivas—risa ya hecha a dominar el tumulto del mar—, burlóse de los licores caseros hechos por José-María, y sacó de su equipaje una caneca de ginebra. Y de vez en cuando soltaba la copa, lanzaba un insulto contra los burgueses, perseguía una imagen turbadora sólo visible para él en el humo del cigarro. ... De dar tumbos y tumbos por ahí se aprende la vida... ¡Hay que gozar, muchachas [hablando con las hermanas]! (78-81; last ellipsis in original)

The decadence that Jaime displays is reminiscent of his father's: inebriated, unbalanced, impulsive, aggressive, lewd, reckless, but perhaps more anti-establishment than the patriarch who still held onto his bourgeoisie lineage. Jaime's is the type of masculinity that could be considered passive in the sense that it does not direct its energy toward responsible and measured action, social productivity, and patriotism that are characteristics of the new modern man. Instead, he follows his own course and does not consent to being inhibited by tradition and kinship.

The spatial and emotional distance that he creates between himself and his sisters and hometown define his fractured relationship with the world and unmoderated approach to life's struggles. For these reasons, he travels as far away from them, through the Atlantic and to the Caribbean. He also changes his name to Nicolás Smith, an anglicized version that may serve him to smuggle better in Jamaica, at the same time that it changes his Spanish identity, disqualifies him from receiving the family inheritance, and isolates him from everything that Spanish tradition holds dear: family, honor, and patriotism. Although he is a "new" man by becoming physically stronger and (at least in his mind) psychosocially superior (the biological and psychological qualities of the "new modern man"), his new sense of self is erratic, irrational, and rebellious; not based on restraint and discipline but on the old kind of masculinity that is forceful and primitive, although romantically antiheroic. Moreover, Jaime's loathing for the bourgeoisie indicates the deep contrast between his

masculinity and José-María's, who at least on the surface attempts to uphold the image of the new modern man by making responsible choices for the sake of his family.

Jaime's aversion to order, education, and his estrangement from his family runs parallel to the way that the Spanish constructed their nationalistic and patriotic sense of masculinity against the "barbaric, primitive, and foreign Moroccans." In Spain, Moroccans were perceived as Jews were: lacking in masculinity despite the "legendary virility of the Berber warriors" (Martin-Márquez 172). This lack was either due to tropes of effeminacy or homosexuality. According to Joseph Boone, there was increased European sex tourism in North Africa and Egypt throughout the twentieth century, and during the first two decades, gay tourism in Morocco superseded that of Algeria, which was already a popular site for gay cruising for men who could afford it, namely Oscar Wilde, Alfred Douglas, and André Gide (2014: 65; 1995: 99).<sup>60</sup> When describing their victories or defeats in Morocco, Spaniards fomented heterosexist discourses and phallogocentric tropes constructed against the "lack of masculinity" there.

### 1.3.3. 'Morocco the Perverse' and Spanish Degenerationism

After the disastrous Battle of Annual in 1921, "The whole imaginary of Spain as an effeminate nation came to the fore once more" (Cleminson and Vázquez García 192). Psychiatrist César Juarros published an article in 1922 entitled 'Morocco the Perverse,' describing the war as "a feminine campaign, whose narcotic effects ended up debilitating Spanish troops" (*ibid.*). Dr. Aguado Marinoni, a member of the Institute of Social Medicine, spoke of the 'degeneration of the race': "Spain was incapable of engaging in any colonizing undertaking. ... [T]he presence of 'real men' is

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<sup>60</sup> Boone explains that tourism in North Africa came about as a result of the establishment of photographic studies, which allowed for the proliferation of homoerotic visual representations of indigenous life and its mass circulation. Homoerotic desire for adolescent boys, in particular, found expression in the writings of Westerners who vacationed or resided in the Maghreb (2014: 65).

sought. These men are the very substrate of the nation; they will raise the nation from its degenerative state” (193). The appearance of “psychic impotence” around 1910 was used as a discourse to explain “the scarcity of real men.” Lafora argued that psychic impotence was the result of latent homosexuality and lack of virility: “If manliness is demonstrated in combat—and by extension by the ‘struggle for life,’ as Marañón would say—one element in this form of psychical impotence is feminine fearfulness, their cowardice on the battlefield” (198). Indeed, in his prologue to *El ángel de Sodoma*, Marañón insinuates this struggle as a prelude to his theories on intersexuality, which in his estimation threaten manhood: “Man is not born to *his efficaciousness* when birthed to life but rather in that other *longer and bristling* moment in which his life crashes and *is fertilized* against the human environment” (“El hombre no nace a su *eficacia* cuando nace a la vida sino en ese otro momento *más largo y erizado* en que su vida choca y *se fecunda* contra el ambiente humano”; 13; emphasis added). The phallic language of activity and sexual reproduction here is very suggestive of the kind of productivity that the efficacious, fecund, and upright man is expected to achieve (*erizar* also means to make rigid or stand on end, like an erection).

In order to combat psychic impotence at a larger scale, Spaniards looked for someone who would lead the nation into an era of prosperity and might, “a strong, charismatic leader ... in whom all the qualities of a new virility coincided. ... This man must act with conviction, with iron strength,” patriotism, and honesty (Cleminson and Vázquez García 187, 189). This rhetoric was used against effeminate politicians who were “opportunistic and corrupt,” and whom Spanish journalist and writer Ángel María Segovia (1848-1909), under the pseudonym ‘K. Arbbon de Kock,’ referred to as *maricones* in his novel *Los Maricones* (1885), or politicians who lacked manliness and were “a disgrace to the sex” due to “weakness, indecisiveness, and effeminacy” (188). It did not mean that they were homosexuals in the modern-day sense, rather “it signifies deviation with respect to gendered characteristics and not sexual object choice” (*ibid.*).

Although the sexual reform movement partly opposed the criminalization of homosexuality, it did little to contest the characterization of ‘the Disaster’ as a weakening or loss of masculinity. Enter Primo de Rivera onto the scene, who wanted to do away with politicians in favor of a government run by his military comrades. Such an alliance was crucial to his “victory” over the Moroccans in 1925. To the Riffians it might not have seemed like hegemony in light of the force used to “pacify” the region, but the international enterprise translated to local hegemonic gains in Spain, since that force demonstrated to the Spanish that they could rely on Primo de Rivera to lead the homeland to prominence and regenerate the nation despite the campaign’s growing unpopularity.

Like a “good Catholic” and Spanish patriot, it is plausible that he accepted the patronage of Saint Santiago in order to become a ‘matamoros’ (killer of the moors/arabs/Moroccans), but he did not always exhibit this resolve. He actually wanted to retreat after the defeat at Annual, to which he commented: “Abd el Krim has defeated us. He has the immense advantages of the terrain and a fanatical following. Our troops are sick of the war and have been for years. ... I, personally, am in favour of withdrawing entirely from Africa and letting Abd el Krim have it” (Carr 1982: 573, footnote 2; ellipsis in original). Therefore, such a title is probably best given first to Francisco Franco, the future dictator who had risen in the ranks of the military as the “African hero” and who had been involved in the brutal conflicts in Morocco since 1912 as second lieutenant in the Spanish army. Franco begrudged Primo de Rivera for supporting the *maricones*, or the spineless and effeminate politicians who preferred to end the military operation “against the soldiers’ desire for revenge” (573).

A group of these soldiers were part of the Tercio de Extranjeros (Regiment of Foreigners or Foreign Legion, although 90 percent of it was Spanish), volunteers that were recruited to defend the protectorate in North Africa. As its founder, Major José Millán Astray (1879-1954) modeled it after

the French Foreign Legion and it was officially established on 31 August 1920, with Franco as its second-in-command: “To survive and prosper in the Legion, the officers had to be as hard and ruthless as their men” (Preston 30).<sup>61</sup> In 1904, the French had granted northern Morocco to Spain where the latter already had military enclaves between Ceuta and Melilla. General Dámaso Berenguer commanded it when he became Minister of War in 1918 and drew up a three-year plan to pacify the protectorate from 1918 to 1921, but he met with resistance from Abd el Krim. In 1921, a disaster in Melilla forced the army to send Franco and his legionnaires as reinforcements to garrison the enclave: “Through the press and his diary, the role played by Franco in the defence of Melilla contributed to his conversion into a national hero” (32).

After Primo de Rivera’s coup, Franco met with King Alfonso XIII and convinced him that the protectorate could be consolidated against the Riffians, but Primo de Rivera opposed further conflict. The King advised Franco to dine with the newly appointed dictator and present his plan to conquer the rebels, which proposed attacking the headquarters of Abd el Krim by way of the bay of Al Hoceima (Alhucemas in Spanish). Primo de Rivera requested that he draft the plan in writing. Franco went further than this by founding the journal *Revista de Tropas Coloniales* in 1924, which advocated against military withdrawal from North Africa. Among the over forty articles that he wrote for the journal, one published in April of that year was entitled “Pasividad e inacción” (Passivity and Inaction) in which he exhorts his reader to remember the lessons from the disaster of Annual and to not rest in the laurels of inaction, passivity, and impotence while the Berbers embolden their racial hate against the Spanish:

As much as we would like to define the Moroccan protectorate, as much as we would desire peace in Morocco, there exists, in fact, a military problem to solve, a war to win, and in that, *inaction and passivity* irremissibly lead to defeat. ... The events of [19]21 [Annual] mark a revolution in the Moroccan War, *the effective valor* of the military units has *decreased in level* and the troops, before strong

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<sup>61</sup> The Legion was divided in three groups called *banderas* (‘colors’ of ‘flags’). Franco commanded the first *bandera*, “a motley band of desperados, misfits and outcasts, some tough and ruthless, others simply pathetic. They were hard cases, ranging from common criminals, via foreign First World War veterans who had been unable to adjust to peacetime, to the gunmen (*pistoleros*) who fought in the social war then tearing Barcelona apart” (Preston 27).

to resolve a situation, are today *reduced and impotent*. ... The defeat in Annual has been a fatal lesson. ... the hate of the race continues perennially in the cliffs of the Rif and Yebala. ... The war is not work for the *passive; activity and energy, initiative and will are embodied in her*, and those who do not feel the activity to act in the battlefield ... frankly make way for *the more apt and capable*.

Por más que queramos definir el protectorado marroquí, por mucho que ansiemos la paz de Marruecos, de hecho existe un problema militar que solucionar, una guerra en que vencer, y en ella, *la inacción y la pasividad* conducen irremisiblemente a ser vencidos. ... Los sucesos del 21 [Annual] marcan una revolución en la guerra de Marruecos, el valor efectivo de las unidades *ha bajado de nivel* y los efectivos antes fuertes ara resolver una situación, son hoy *reducidos e impotentes*. La [der]rota de Anual ha sido fatal enseñanza. ... en los riscos del Rif y de Yebala sigue perenne *el odio de la raza*. ... No es la guerra oficio de *pasivos; en ella encarnan la actividad y la energía, la iniciativa y la voluntad*, y los que no sientan en la campaña la actividad del obrar ... dejen el paso franco a *los más aptos o capaces*. (166, 167; emphasis added).

Franco mobilizes sexual tropes of passivity and impotence in order to propagate a regenerationist discourse that exalts the new modern man as one that is ready for war and not given to abulia. His rhetoric relies on a racialized othering of the Moor as an analogy of the weakness of Spaniards who are averse to act and fight. The need to resort to such a tactic is both indicative of his megalomania as well as the complex of inferiority that spotlighted his small stature and that plagued the Spanish army. It is interesting to note, furthermore, that the feminization of war and its descriptors via the use of the feminine pronoun ‘ella’ and the repetition of the feminine article ‘la’ (‘en *ella* se encarnan *la actividad y la energía, la iniciativa y la voluntad*’) is a good rhetorical device that masculinizes a feminized metaphor to rally virile instead of listless (passive) men: “Battle-hardened, ruthless in the defence of their lands, familiar with the terrain, they [Berber tribesmen] were the opposite of the poorly trained and totally unmotivated Spanish conscripts who faced them” (Preston 16).

Two months after this article, Primo de Rivera had finally visited the protectorate where Franco and his legionnaires were stationed. At a dinner on 19 July, Franco restated his position to remain in Africa while Primo de Rivera’s speech reiterated the need to abandon the region in order to avoid military expenditure on the grounds that “to go on holding it on the basis of strings of waterless, indefensible blockhouses was ludicrous” (44). Despite wanting to save Spain on account of regenerationism, the “civilizing mission” in Morocco was putting Primo de Rivera’s antagonism

to the test as well as his masculinity. We have only to look back at the excerpt from Franco's article cited above to discover to whom it was addressed—the political *maricones* and *abandonistas*, to include Primo de Rivera who opposed the process of pacification—particularly when he writes: “all *softness and politics* in those moments is to leave aggressions unpunished, and to create interests in the war drives away the hour of peace indefinitely” (“*toda suavidad y política en esos momentos es dejar impunes las agresiones, y el crear intereses en la guerra se aleja indefinidamente la hora de la paz*”; Franco 167; emphasis added). Legion myth has it that at the dinner with Primo de Rivera, Franco served him a plate of *buevos* (eggs), which is Spanish slang for “testicles.” In other words, the dictator did not have the balls to face Abd el Krim and the Riffians, while the Legion had them to spare.

In recounting this incident, biographer Paul Preston denies that Franco would be so bold as to disrespect the dictator in that way and instead addressed his frustrations in the speech he gave (44-45). However, the fact that in 1972 Franco denied that such a menu had been served gives the myth credence, at least as a mindset within the Legion and army. Regardless of its veracity or falsity, that Primo de Rivera was perceived as lacking the bravado to act is undeniable. Nevertheless, Franco did not always fare well either against the increasingly powerful leader of the Berbers. Seeing their occupation of the town of Xauen as an “indefensible liability,” Spanish soldiers consented to evacuate it at the risk of another Annual (Carr 1982: 573). It was only when Abd el Krim's invasion of the much stronger French section of the protectorate backfired that Primo de Rivera and Franco felt more assurance to act, seeing the Berber leader's defeat as the only guarantee to victory over the region.

#### 1.3.4. Mobilizing “Real Men”: Femininity, Masculinity, and Racial Dis-Orient-ations

In discussing the racial theories that underpinned thought on degenerate masculinities, Martin-Márquez stresses that they were circulating in Spain decades before ‘the Disaster’ of 1898.

Since the 1860s, scientific racists such as Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau (1816-82) and Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), and Austrian social critic Max Nordau (1849-1923) believed that the degeneration of Europeans was caused by the mixing of “inferior” and “savage” races from Africa, Asia, and the Americas (175). The French translation of Nordau’s book, *Entartung (Degeneration;* 1892), circulated in Spain not too long after its publication as did the Spanish version (1902), and it attributed racial degeneration to environmental causes, such as the atrophic effects of modernization, with particular emphasis on fin-de-siècle decadent literature (to include Hernández-Catá’s texts) (176). Spanish politician Nicolás Salmerón y García (1864-1933) translated Nordau’s book to Spanish and tied his ideology to the notion of *atrofia/ abulia* (atrophy/abulia) in order to portray degenerate Spaniards as beasts, the primitiveness of which had connotations of femininity. For example, when Jaime describes the woman from the circus, she does not have a name but is reduced to a type. In his conversation with José-María, he exalts her beauty in similar degenerationist fashion:

“She was a marvelous woman, unique! Made to fight with man and beast, her caresses had a terrible flavor. ... doing routines on the trapeze between tigers and lions. What an admirable woman! Such form! The sculpture of one of the black women from Senegal with skin the color of day, blonde and pink... Ah, only for that is it worth travelling, José-Marí! ... Doesn’t that happen to you with the women that come here in the summer? To see this one, and get turned on, was all one thing. And I assure you that she should have experienced the same thing.”

«¡Era una mujer maravillosa, única! Hecha a luchar con hombre y fieras, tenían sus caricias un sabor terrible. ... haciendo ejercicios sobre el trapecio entre los tigres y leones. ¡Qué mujer admirable! ¡Qué forma! La escultura de una de las negras del Senegal con piel color de día, rubia y rosada... ¡Ah, sólo por eso vale la pena de viajar, José-Marí! ... ¿No te pasa a ti con las que vienen aquí los veranos? Ver yo ésta, y sentirme encendido, todo fue uno. Y te advierto que a ella debió pasarle igual.» (83-84; 2<sup>nd</sup> ellipsis in original)

This description portrays bestial primitiveness and female sensuality as one and the same, with a racialized description to accompany it. The woman who José-María did not know if she was blonde or brunette is the same one that Jaime depicts as black in form and white in appearance. Again, there seems to be a preference for the lighter-skinned female but with the exoticized sexuality that the black woman embodies. Blackness serves as the frame of a white portrait. All the while, Jaime is sure

of the fact that the daughter of the tamer of beasts would validate his masculinity, and he reassures José-María of this almost as an exercise of initiation into the protagonist's own exploration of a heterosexuality that is compulsory.

Martin-Márquez makes clear that “prior to 1898, the construction of race and gender had become completely intertwined: degenerate races were deemed quite naturally to produce degenerate masculinities” (177). She goes further to say that the Spanish-Moroccan War was fought based on the idea of cleansing the nation of influences that had tainted its honor, therefore “the nation’s gendered code of *honra* [honor] (through which men affirm their masculinity by avenging affronts to—or by—their womenfolk) framed the campaign,” as did Spanish writers such as Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (1833-91) who praised Spanish “virility and vitality” (*ibid.*). This often came at the heels of gendered and sexual stereotypes of “the sexually perverse Moroccan,” given to excessive eroticism and sins *contra natura*, against nature (i.e., sodomy and homosexuality). Notwithstanding, hardline distinctions between permissible and undignified forms of sex and gender expression and practice were not always stagnant. During the war, the Spanish allied with the Moroccan sultan who, in turn, allied with them to prevent his overthrow by the Berber rebels. The alliance led to the formation of the Army of Africa, whereby Spain recruited Moroccan soldiers into their ranks in order to persuade rebels to offer their allegiance and defeat their own people. This allowed for intermingling, which led to the confluence of varying forms of masculinity.

For instance, Martin-Márquez analyzes the misleading propagandistic rhetoric of Franco’s *Diario* (1922) in which the soldiers of the Legion are portrayed as “los novios de la muerte” (“the bridegrooms of death”), a mythic epithet that denoted the “sublimation of their erotic energies into self-sacrifice for the Spanish nation” when in reality they were inhaling cocaine, prostituting and raping native women, being tortured by their officers, and engaging in homo-social/-sexual acts (186, 187). Some historians have argued that male-to-male sex was a result of men’s deprivation

from the company of women, however, several memoirs written by soldiers who participated in the Rif War, such as Arturo Barea's, indicate that brothels employed both female and male servants. Therefore, homosexual practices were not uncommon among troop members, either in isolation or in company: "Moroccan soldiers who fought alongside Spaniards in the Army of Africa described scenes of group masturbation and indicated that sexual relations among men occurred during prolonged periods of isolation at the front or in the blockades" (187-88).

In addition, camaraderie and fraternity were religion in the Legion, which were based on a fascist model of homosociality in the military that strengthened bonds of solidarity and improved effectiveness in the battlefield (188). In Millán Astray's book, *La Legión* (1923), there are scenes of dancing, music-making, and cross-dressing among soldiers and drag performances that occurred in spaces where same-sex desire was fluent both in its movement between bodies and in the sexual fluidity of the men (189). These interactions took on Orientalist dimensions, particularly when Franco noted how Spanish legionnaires "fraternized" with Moroccans in Moorish cafés, which were associated with male prostitution. His anxiety over the regulation of sexual behavior implies that soldiers were "going native" with Moroccans, as in turning queer.

Martin-Márquez makes an important observation: "Here it is important to note that what is at stake is not so much the threat of 'inversion' itself but rather the threat of an inversion of the racialized top-bottom logic—the 'master-slave' paradigm—that may structure homosexual relationships in militarized colonial contexts" (190-91). The master-slave paradigm is one that we see in *El ángel de Sodoma* in the children's subservience to their father, who is like a dictator to whom they must pay homage, not just economically, but with their chastity and by upholding their station in society. As a result, José-María must sacrifice his femininity in a way that takes on militant dimensions, as though he were a soldier in the Rif War battling against the perverted tyranny of the Riffians:

He didn't want to succumb, he didn't want to dishonor the name nor stain the coat of arms engraved in stone by his ancestors! Neither did he want to, for admiration of the sex to which she had been a happy slave [his mother] once her destiny as a woman had been completely fulfilled, dishonor *the manly appearance* entrusted to his care! He would fight, stomp with his will that abominable, already tyrannous newborn being. He'd drown his bad instincts in his work. He'd strip *that invader María* from his name, and he'd be José, only José forever!

¡Él no quería sucumbir, él no quería deshonorar el nombre ni manchar el escudo grabado por sus antecesores en piedra! ¡No quería, tampoco, por admiración al sexo del que habría sido esclava feliz [su madre] de haberse cumplido su destino de hembra por completo, deshonorar *la apariencia de hombre* confiada a su responsabilidad! Lucharía, pisaría con la voluntad hasta exterminarlo, aquel ser de abominación recién nacido y ya tirano. Ahogaría en el trabajo los malos instintos. ¡Quitaría de su nombre *aquel María invasor*, y sería José, José nada más para siempre! (102-03; emphasis added)

José-María's fear of faltering is undergirded by the religious discourse of the Old Testament that speaks of the fall of man ('sucumbir') and God's Levitical law as commandments inscribed in stone ('grabado por sus antecesores en piedra'). He also is beholden to the mother figure who was his father's "happy slave." It is interesting to note how seldom the mother is stressed in studies on the novel considering how much of José-María's conceptualization of his own femininity depends on her role in the family. Often the father is the one who is discussed, however, here we see how José-María is more dependent on her, the one who exemplified submission to male authority, despite being the pillar that sustained the family. Although manliness is the ideal, the excerpt above seems to prioritize the authenticity and vigor of the woman as holding up what can only be but the "appearance" of a man. In other words, José-María relies on the support of the maternal image to sustain his performance, the façade of what is just the outer shell of virility that covers his more genuine feminine nature, that which he wants to annihilate.

As mentioned before, José-María sees his gender ambiguity and sexuality as enemies, the flowers that he needs to stomp before they bloom into catastrophe. In addition to the Levitical rhetoric ('sucumbir,' 'abominación,' 'manchar'), the use of violent language ('Lucharía,' 'pisaría,' 'exterminarlo,' 'Ahogaría,' 'Quitaría') in the excerpt above is tied to concerns over honor (the name), kinship/patriotism (ancestors' coat of arms), virility (manliness), and identity (his name in relation to his gender and sexuality). All these are behaviors and values that Spanish soldiers upheld in order to

maintain a manly image framed by the patriarchy and valor of the nation against threatening invasions, namely the Moors who were perceived as degenerate and given to sexual perversion. It makes the correlation between Spanish/Moorish masculinity/femininity and the dual gender nature and racial, socioeconomic identity of both the person and name José-María even more notable.

José-María personifies his feminine name, María, as an invader. On the one hand, he exercises to obtain the warlike virility of the Berber warrior but he does not want to forsake his Spanish lineage, which is equally ambiguous. Martin-Márquez's examination of Spanish-Moroccan relations delves further into the shared history and cultures of these neighbors as well as the contradictory colonizer/colonized relationship that made them close enemies. On the one hand, Spaniards see the Moroccan "other" as inferior and perverse, while on the other, they strengthen their military might by recruiting their blood brothers for combat against the Berber tribesmen rebelling against their ally, the sultan. This is due in no small part to both the homosocial and erotic bonds they made in and out of the battlefield: "The rhetoric of shared blood in conjunction with the reference to 'hispanismo' is evocative of the traditional emphasis on Spaniards' practice of *mestizaje* with their colonial others. But here mixing is accomplished not through heterosexual miscegenation but rather through the blood brotherhood of male bonding" (Martin-Márquez 209). Although they wanted to annihilate their African enemies based on a civilizing mission that Orientalized their "otherness," they exalted the virility of these legendary warriors in order to legitimize and glorify their own masculine power. In other words, they needed a worthy opponent in order to make their victory over them a feat to be revered.

What is more, the Spanish became allies with the sultan and his followers in order to antagonize the Moroccan rebel groups. They utilized the sameness of brotherhood to "other the other," a *double* othering, and achieve what critics have identified as 'the revitalization of primitive gender energy' (196). For example, in discussing the life and works of Orientalist novelist and

Africanist essayist Isaac Muñoz (1881-1925), Martín-Márquez points out how the modernist writer inverted the notion that Spain had become degenerate because of miscegenation by postulating that the backhanded project of whitening the inferior race did not help Spain regenerate its power but rather colonization: “colonization in Morocco will enable the Spanish nation to recuperate the virility of its essential Mediterranean identity—and turn away from the impotently immobile character of Castile” (*ibid.*).

In *El ángel de Sodoma*, vicious sexuality takes on militant dimensions when it is portrayed as the restless enemy against which the Vélez-Gomara children must defend themselves, particularly José-María. For instance, José-María tells Amparo: “—If you knew how much I love you, Amparo! You and I have to protect our father’s good name even more than them [Isabel-Luisa and Jaime]... *It’s not our fault*, and yet... We should proceed as *though an enemy were watching us*. We have a noble last name... There’s no other remedy” (“—¡Si vieras cuánto te quiero, Amparo! Tú y yo tenemos que velar aún más que ellos [Isabel-Luisa y Jaime] por el buen nombre de papá... ¡*No es culpa nuestra*, y, sin embargo!... Debemos proceder *como si nos estuviera mirando algún enemigo*. Llevamos un apellido noble... No hay más remedio”; 122-23; ellipses in original; emphasis added). In addition to the father figure’s oppressive shadow and name, they must also guard themselves from any immorality that may cause others to disdain them. In this sense, the province also becomes their enemy based on their own repressive perceptions of gender and sexuality. However, it is mostly José-María who is anxious about the threat of stigmatization and disrepute. The narrative as well as his character present this anxiety not only in sexual and gendered terms, but also in racial ones based on orientalist and xenophobic stereotypes and fears. The geography of the city where they live is important in this regard because it delimits the challenges of foreign influence.

In his dissertation, Luis Navarro-Ayala establishes how the theory on semiospheric boundary developed by literary scholar and cultural historian Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman (1922-93) is useful to

explain how José-María is a “boundary figure” both “‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of national culture” based on the protagonist’s transition from physical and transcultural spaces in Spain and France (31). The first semiotic space that he analyzes is the Vélez-Gomara house, which is situated along the dyad center/periphery of the coastal city’s central nucleus and the “threatening” peripheral borderline of its harbor. It is there where José-María is shocked by the homosocial behavior among sailors that disembark at the coast from abroad at the same time that he is tempted by the harbor’s sexual allure (73). Instead of succumbing to temptation, José-María flees back to the house, which Navarro-Ayala discusses as another semiotic space that serves as a refuge for the character from the menace of the outside world.<sup>62</sup> He expands his analysis from the external to internal spaces in the novel and then to how they correspond to those of José-María’s mind (internal) and body (external). He acknowledges that the vices that José-María struggles with are a “contagion” that he acquires from Jaime who brings them from foreign ports overseas, as I discussed earlier, stating that Hernández-Catá is “in sync with the social hygienist discourse of the period” (84).

For example, José-María discovers his same-sex attraction at the circus, whose members Jaime brings from abroad. Navarro-Ayala focuses on how Paris looks promising for José-María to live out his unconventional lifestyle. However, through the language of the letter he receives from his brother-in-law, “the semiotic space of his hometown invades Paris, transforms into the overpowering panoptical eye he had previously known, and pushes him to kill himself” (98). On the one hand, he argues that the novel’s semiotic spaces refer to “the ‘dangerous’ contact with the Other, particularly the French, as homosexually threatening” (32). On the other, he affirms that “José-María himself represents the physical marker of the Other—not by racial or ethnic composition, but by his physical fragility” (87). He highlights that José-María’s physical appearance

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<sup>62</sup> He also argues, however, that the line that separates both is blurred since the coat of arms of the city is engraved on the door of the house, therefore obligating José-María to honor its legacy (79).

“fails to match the normative nationalist body” and that by traditional standards “he bears an effeminate demeanor” (*ibid.*) that is compared to a flower, the symbolic epitome of femininity: “Pale, with fine features, ivory skin and green eyes, his timid and fragile beauty stood out in the group of faces contracted by an occasional sadness, like a flower” (“Pálido, aguileño, de piel marfilina y ojos verdes, destacaba del grupo de caras contraídas por una tristeza ocasional su belleza tímida y frágil, de flor”; 57).

Although I agree with Navarro-Ayala’s arguments, he overlooks the link between the racially charged “contagion” with which Jaime supposedly infects his siblings and the racial connotations underlying José-María’s perception of himself and his family. Although José-María’s trip to Paris presents a danger, he goes willingly, while the so-called “contagion” of homosexuality is brought on by forces he cannot control and comes from one of the ports in remote lands that Jaime travels to, ergo not from France’s capital. If we return to the citation on the symptoms of disgrace that the children feel as a result of Jaime’s return, it mentions how they are caused by the confluence of *races* and vices at the ports, and not the urban centers, of various continents.

In the novel, gender, sexuality, race, and class are not mutually exclusive but rather intersect within geopolitical contexts. For instance, the family lives in Spain but carries the last name (Vélez-Gomara) that is reminiscent of the Spanish military enclave Peñon Vélez de la Gomera. This creates a geographical imaginary that places us between Spain and Morocco, Europe and Africa, the Mediterranean and the Maghreb, and the shared history of cultural, socioeconomic, and political exchanges among these regions and its peoples. The Peñón, in particular, during the First World War, hardly experienced attacks but instead enjoyed an increase in commerce and mercantilism, and the mixing of peoples as a result (Domínguez Llosá 409). Therefore, I too consider the threat of otherness in *El ángel de Sodoma* but in the context of the conflict in Morocco, which gives continuity to the urgent discourse of danger and foreign infiltration via miscegenation and war in the narrative.

To begin, the Vélez-Gomara children's physical attributes are described as being between white/blonde and brown-skinned ("moreno"): José-María is light-skinned with green eyes, Amparo is described as blonde, Isabel-Luisa as darker-skinned, and Jaime as tanned (57, 62, 100). This ethnic mixing borders on the racial dichotomy between white and non-white, even beyond the family. For instance, José-María randomly admits that he did not know if the daughter of the tamer of beasts was blonde or brunette: "No, he had not paid attention to the woman... He didn't even know if she was blonde or brunette... His five senses, polarized in his sight, did not suffice to look with all the sensual potencies that were dormant until then, without his conscience noticing another part, another being [the acrobat] ..." ("No, no se había fijado en la mujer... Ni siquiera sabía si era rubia o morena... Sus cinco sentidos polarizados en la vista, no habíanle bastado para mirar con todas las potencias sensuales dormidas hasta entonces, sin que su conciencia se diera cuenta, a otra parte, a otro ser [el acróbata]..."; 90; ellipses in original). This excerpt juxtaposes ethnic/racial makeup with sexual desire, denoting that the latter is symbiotic with the former. In other words, it mattered if the woman was blonde or brunette in order to feel attraction or to determine her value as a person, although José-María had his eyes set on the acrobat.

As a white European male, José-María experiences miscegenation in his own family intertwined with erotic innuendo, specifically the differencing of his sisters' skin color and mouths and José-María's gazing of his brother's naked, bronzed upper body while he sleeps: "Jaime's slumber was so massive that he didn't even move. He was uncovered from the waist up, and his tanned and hairy torso accentuated his angular countenance" ("El sueño de Jaime era tan macizo, que ni se movía siquiera. Estaba destapado de cintura arriba, y el dorso tostado y peludo acentuaba la expresión angulosa del rostro"; 100). Similarly, when his sisters' personalities are described, the focus is on the color, shape, and sensuality of their mouths via synecdoche (the part for the whole) and metonymy (substituting their names with the word "boca" [mouth]):

The blonde doll, Amparo, hard-working, impetuous, always adept to romantic raptures of affection, of irritation and apologies, already had insinuated feminine graces; the other, Isabel-Luisa, of a dark spikenard skin color, sedentary, ecstatic, restless for meticulous embroidery, even-tempered in character whose depth was lit with a little flame of mystery and passion that threatened the soul, was, despite her fourteen years, in full puberty. An anomalous exchange existed between them: their mouths. Amparo's was brown, of turgid scarlet shaken in gluttonies, in conversations, and in daydreams; Isabel-Luisa's, a blonde mouth, narrow, discolored; a mouth to only speak and accept in the hour of love. ... Amparo's blonde turgidity already had a hint of fruitiness that made her turn to men as much as the elastic body and impassioned and burnt face of Isabel-Luisa. They continued to be happy. When they entered young adulthood, the divine error that changed their mouths was showing to be more provocative. ... They laughed, and their laughter was foam under which the deep sea of passions remained invisible. ... The fleshy and insatiable mouth contracted in the blonde face, and the fine, bloodless lips traced a line of cruel tenacity in the brown face. By work of that avid mouth that put in the entire countenance, from the halo of hair to the faintly fuzzy and almost vegetable-like point of the chin, a reddish reflection, of sex...

La muñeca rubia, Amparo, hacendosa, impetuosa, presta siempre a raptos románticos de cariño, de enfados y de perdones, tenía ya insinuadas las gracias femeninas; la otra, Isabel-Luisa, de tez de nardo oscuro, sedentaria, extática, incansable para los bordados minuciosos, de carácter apacible en cuyo fondo una llamita de misterio y de pasión alumbraba y amenazaba el ser, estaba, a pesar de sus catorce años, en plena pubertad. Un intercambio anómalo existía entre ellas: las bocas. La de Amparo era boca morena, de escarlata túrgida estremecida en las gulas, en las discusiones y en los ensueños; la de Isabel-Luisa, boca rubia, estrecha, descolorida; boca sólo de hablar y aceptar en la hora del amor. ... ya las turgencias rubias de Amparo tenían algo de frutal que obligaba a volverse a los hombres tanto como el cuerpo elástico y el rostro apasionado y quemado de Isabel-Luisa. Seguían siendo felices. Con la entrada en la juventud el error divino de haberles cambiado las bocas, se mostraba más incitante. ... Reían, y era su risa espuma bajo la cual el mar hondo de las pasiones permanecía invisible. ... La boca carnosa y golosa se contrajo en la cara rubia, y los finos labios exangües trazaron en el rostro moreno una línea de tesón cruel. Por obra de aquella boca ávida que ponía en toda la faz, desde el pelo de aureola al vértice tenuemente velloso y casi vegetal de la barbilla, un reflejo rojizo, de sexo... (62, 71-72, 76)

These passages illustrate the heavy sexual content of the *literatura sicalíptica/galante/erótica* or erotic novel genre that became popular in Latin America and Spain during the early twentieth century.

Although they seem to objectify and fetishize women's bodies and sexualities, women are often the protagonists of erotic novels and these, in turn, are sexually reformist with regard to the "controls and repressions of the dominant moral norm. They attempt to 'return sex to its 'natural' place by way of a critique of backward and obsolete conceptions of it'" ("controles y represiones de la norma moral dominante. Hay en ellos un intento de «devolver a su lugar 'natural' al sexo mediante una crítica a las concepciones atrasadas y obsoletas»"; Pedraza Jiménez 46). In the excerpts above, there

is a tension between the limits of a more liberated female sexuality and its possibilities, particularly in the oxymoronic dichotomies (“the divine error”) of danger and pleasure, sensuality and chastity.

The mouth represents these binaries as a symbol of creative force through which breath, speech, and food pass, but also of destruction, like the devouring “jaws of a monster” or “a mouth of darkness ... a gaping entrance to the Underworld. ... It is the transition from light to darkness, life to death ... the point of departure of convergence of two directions [from the upper palate to the lower jaw] ... the source of opposites, contrarities and ambiguities” (Chevalier 685-86).

Amparo and Isabel-Luisa embody this symbolization coupled with a color contrast between lightness in one (*rubia*/blonde) and darkness in the other (*morena*/brown) that converges in both: a blonde, light-skinned Amparo with brown lips, and a brown, dark-skinned Isabel-Luisa with discolored ones. The union of light and dark with their bodies in relation to the opposites of creation/destruction connotes both a divide and connection with the positive and negative that triggers sensual curiosity as well as discomfort in José-María. This is shown, for example, in the way that he tries to harness his sisters’ sexualities by being the overprotective and prudish brother, especially with Isabel-Luisa:

He already watched over them with anxious sweetness:

—Wait for me on the side street to avoid running into our classmates; it’s better... You have to lengthen your dress by two fingers, Isabel-Luisa.

—It’s impossible already.

—No, it isn’t, you’ll see... If Amparo sews a banded insertion, I can add it to your dress.

Él las celaba ya con inquieta dulzura:

—Esperadme en la calle de al lado para no encontrarnos con los compañeros; es mejor... Tienes que alargarte dos dedos ese vestido, Isabel-Luisa.

—No se puede ya.

—Sí, ya verás... Si Amparo nos teje una tira de entredós, yo te lo añado. (68)

The mouths as metonymies of the sisters’ female bodies must be controlled in order to avoid the dangers of unpleasant sexual situations and to bridle their lust for men:

Amparo ... fell in love with a common lad employed in the warehouse on the bottom floor of the house, while Isabel-Luisa, with sagacious caution, without giving the smallest concession, flirting with eyes down and graduated coldness, had incited the son of the banker in whose offices her brother

worked. He as well suffered from both threats, because if he wished for a man of higher rank for the first one, he didn't want that, for only the money, a weakling, premature soul, could buy Isabel-Luisa with the only guarantee of a sacrament.

Amparo ... enamoróse de un mozo vulgar empleado en el almacén en la planta baja de la casa, mientras Isabel-Luisa, con cautela sagaz, sin otorgar la menor concesión, manejando una coquetería de ojos bajos y graduadas frialdades, tenía soliviantado al hijo del banquero en cuyas oficinas trabajaba su hermano. Éste sufría por igual de las dos amenazas, pues si anhelaba para la primera un hombre de otro rango, no quería que, por el dinero nada más, un canijo, sietemesino también de alma, pudiera comprar a Isabel-Luisa con la garantía única de un sacramento. (76-77)

José-María shows care and love in what he wishes for his sisters, particularly for Isabel-Luisa for whom he wants a man who will truly love her and not go through the façade of a marriage just for her dowry. At the same time, he disapproves of Amparo dating men below her station as much as she pities her sister's involvement with a foreigner: "I haven't been able to tell you yet: She now flirts with a foreigner. ¡What a pity! Right? She's so good, so... ¡Ah, if I were to marry well, if one day we could get out of this mediocrity, at her age and all I'd send her to school!" ("No he podido decírtelo aún: Ahora coquetea con un forastero. ¡Qué lástima!, ¿verdad? Tan buena, tan... ¡Ah, si yo me casara bien, si alguna vez saliéramos de esta mediocridad, a sus años y todo la metía en un colegio!"; 148; ellipsis in original). As the second oldest, Amparo shares her brother's fears and both aim to preserve the honor of the family by conserving its sexual morale through chastity and childlike innocence: "If in place of the mouth of bland ember that projected a brown brightness over her blonde flesh, she had her true mouth, the chaste and narrow one that Isabel-Luisa would steal from her ... In spite of the mouth, many times a childlike gaze with bars of mascara would lean out the windows polished in blue" ("Si en lugar de la boca de brasa blanda que proyectaba sobre su carne rubia un fulgor moreno, tuviese su boca verdadera, la casta y estrecha que le usurpaba Isabel-Luisa ... ¡A pesar de la boca, muchas veces se asomaba a las ventanas de azuloso betún con rejas de rimel [sic] una mirada niña, indefensa!"; 122).

Light versus dark colors in relation to fine versus voluptuous body features are descriptors used in the characterization of the sisters to delineate the positive and negative, or desired and

undesired, aspects of their personalities. Chastity, innocence, honor, and goodness are light and fine while lust, dishonor, and vulgarity are dark and excessive. What seems to be valued the most is the light and fine according to its distribution between, and attribution to, the sisters' bodies, particularly Isabel-Luisa's chaste and narrow mouth despite her dark skin, a mouth that José-María wants for Amparo so that it matches her blonde complexion and harnesses her sensuality. He believes that it is the darkness in both that could jeopardize them and the family.

The eroticization of dark skin reappears when José-María takes up a variety of habits to become more "masculine":

In the meantime, he exercised violently for half an hour every morning and ... he'd go to the terrace, naked, *under the rigor of the sun, which burned his skin*, producing tremendous headaches and leaving in his eyes caustic and terrible sparking stars.

—Have you seen the heresies this man does? And with that *jasmine* skin that causes envy! You're going to become a *Moor*—Amparo said.

—*I hope so!* —he responded with so much ardor, that Isabel-Luisa, snapping out of her self-absorption, mediated:

—You shouldn't dwell on everyone's quirks. It's the best way to avoid fights.

And then, José-María's soul opened to giving advice that the brown mouth received with cheer and the blond mouth with an almost sardonic grin.

Mientras tanto hacía media hora de gimnasia violenta todas las mañanas y ... se sometía en la terraza, desnudo, *al rigor del sol, que le abrasaba la piel*, le producía tremendas cefalalgias y dejaba dentro de sus ojos un chisporroteo de estrellitas cáusticas, terribles.

—¿Has visto las herejías que hace este hombre? ¡Y con ese *cutis de jazmín* que da envidia! Te vas a poner hecho un *moro*—decíale Amparo.

—¡*Ojalá!* —respondía él con tanto ardor, que Isabel-Luisa, saliendo de su ensimismamiento, terciaba:

—Hay que dejar a cada cual con sus manías. Es el mejor modo de no reñir.

Y entonces el alma de José-María se abría en consejos que la boca morena recibía risueña y la boca rubia con un rictus casi sardónico. (130-31; emphasis added)

Jasmine is a flower whose common color is white. Amparo compares it to José-María's skin while privileging it over the dark "Moorish" skin that he acquires from sunbathing. Amparo makes a value judgement based on racial stereotypes against North Africans, which is exacerbated by the images of the sun's harshness on José-María's skin and its damage to his head and eyes. José-María's response instigates Amparo's prejudice, even more so by responding with the word "Ojalá," which is of Arab and not Spanish origin. While the head and eyes, as aforementioned in the discussion about the

cyclops, are symbols of intelligence, the sun causes dryness that leads to dehydration and a lack of oxygen, which are essential for proper functioning of the brain and eyesight. The quixotic allusion is revelatory of the delusion and primitiveness behind José-María's actions, mirroring those that the uncivilized Moors were thought to possess. He exercises and tans in order to be physically stronger and darker-skinned, traits that are akin to the Moors, but that are inferior in Amparo's mind in contrast to the superior whiteness/Europeanness of the Spanish lineage. Amparo is also looking through her own eyes as she too is light-skinned, therefore reproducing anti-brown/black racial biases tied to stereotypes of masculinity.

Ultimately, José-María represents and embodies three (mis)perceptions of Moroccans: (1) they are an inferior and perverse race; (2) as such, going native (i.e., queer) reinforces the dominant manhood of the Spanish; and (3) their warlike virility is useful in the battlefield for the legitimation of Spain as a superior nation, which is in reality achieved by debunking such a myth as soldiers strengthened their bonds through homosocial and homoerotic practices. The paradox of Spanish-Moorish relations is bound to José-María's racial makeup whereby the masculine and feminine parts of his mixed identity are at war at the same time that they feed into each other. On one end, he disdains the dark features of his siblings' physical appearances as both inferior and perverse. On the other, he performs a Moorish masculine identity by tanning and building muscle in order to combat the enemy of perverse sexuality of which he and Amparo must be vigilant. In this way, the manhood of his Spanish heritage entrusted to him by his ancestors converges with the virility of the Moor. Nevertheless, that convergence is disdained by his sisters who admonish him to retain his white complexion, although this implies that his Spanish blood is not virile enough (remember the father's lack of masculinity, which I will return to in the next section). At the same time that they project white superiority onto José-María by advising against adopting a Moorish masculinity, they are also inadvertently enabling the "effeminate degeneracy" that he intends to ward off. When Isabel-Luisa

says that he should be left to his own devices in order to avoid conflict, there is an acknowledgement of the gravity of the racial and sexual implications of her brother's habits and of the potential rift that disagreement on these matters could cause.

The microcosm of the family striving to maintain its whiteness and Europeanness along gender and racial lines is a metaphor of the macrocosm of Spain and its nationalistic struggle for racial homogeneity and protection of citizenship against foreign invaders. In his prologue to *El ángel de Sodoma*, Marañón hints at this correlation:

...no one will find in these pages [of the novel] more than a clean lesson on morale ... *The genesis* of abnormality, since the years of childhood; *the revelation* of the existence of the thorn, festered in the shadow and knelt by instinct; *the heroic struggle of man against the hidden enemy* of his own nature; *the triumph over outside snares*; and, finally, *the defeat* by one's own inner temptation, have the exactness of a clinical story, but none of the details of a repellent naturalism.

...nadie encontrará en estas páginas [de la novela] más que una limpia lección de moral ... *La génesis* de la anormalidad, desde los años de niño; *la revelación* de la existencia de la espina, enconada en la sombra e hincada en el instinto; *la lucha heroica del hombre contra el enemigo escondido* en su propia naturaleza; *el triunfo sobre las asechanzas de fuera*; y, al fin, *la derrota* por la propia tentación de dentro, tienen la exactitud de una historia clínica, pero ninguno de los detalles de un naturalismo repelente. (38; emphasis added)

Although Marañón discourages from interpreting the novel as a naturalistic account meant to repel the reader by sexual immorality, he still considers homosexuality abnormal. Furthermore, his words are inscribed in an almost biblical rhetoric of spiritual warfare against a type of sexual degeneration that is intrinsic (since childhood) as well as external, like a foreign enemy invading the mind and body of the sexual non-conformist. Such language is replicated in the narrative in various instances that José-María feels threatened by his own feminine nature and manifestations of effeminacy in relation to others.

In one instance, he takes pity on his feminine nature after he has discovered his same-sex desire at the circus and he watches Jaime sleep half-naked. His monologue replicates the embodied sexual and racial connotations of physical appearance and meshes them with a language of battle and repression that is reminiscent of the dictatorial iron surgeon:

José-María sat up and, in the moon [mirror] of the closet, saw, with ire, *as though it were until then an unknown enemy*, his countenance and thorax. ... An ambiguous halo, of flesh and indecisive forms between the two sexes, differentiated his torso from Jaime's hairy one. Equivocal looseness finetuned the features: his mouth participated in something meshed with his sisters' ... He would have wanted to duplicate himself ... in order to caress and console himself. But no: that angst of consolation and caresses was feminine too! He'd triumph over all unhealthy weakness with rigor. *Healing by fire and iron*, without contemplations! ... *He'd wear a hard corset—No, not a corset! A soul of inflexible steel*—that would not permit him to bend to any of his instincts.

José-María se incorporó y, en la luna [espejo] del armario, vio, con ira, *cual si se tratara de un enemigo desconocido hasta entonces*, su faz y su tórax. ... Un halo ambiguo, de carne y de formas indecisas entre los dos sexos, diferenciaba su torso del velludo de Jaime. Equívoca dejadez afinaba las facciones: la boca participaba de algo de la de sus hermanas ... Hubiera querido desdoblarse ... [para] acariciarse y consolarse. ¡Pero no: ese ansia de consuelo y caricia era feminidad también! Triunfaría de toda flaqueza malsana con rigor. *¡Cura de fuego y hierro*, sin contemplaciones! ... *Pondría él duro corsé—¡no, corsé no!, alma de acero inflexible*—que no permitiera torcerse a ninguno de sus instintos. (101-02; emphasis added)

The mouths of his sisters and Jaime's manliness are reiterated in ways that allow him to other himself. He embodies the duplicity of his sexual ambiguity, pressuring him to extreme suppression by force of his instincts. The methods he employs are not scientific but masochistic. It is a work on the body that he needs to execute in order to keep the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity intact until the latter is exterminated, like the pestiferous flower to be stomped on before it buds into María. Consequently, it skews not only his perception of himself but also of other "effeminate" and homosexual men that he encounters in his hometown and Paris in contrast to the militant soldiers that he observes in the Spanish city.

#### 1.4. "The White Knight of Sodom": Inversion as an Embattled "Camp" and the Failures of Regenerationism

In *El ángel de Sodoma*, the coat of arms containing the Vélez-Gomara name and family is at the forefront of the story, symbolizing the nobility and prominence of its members in civic society. Coats of arms of families were passed down through lineage. In Spain, both men and women could inherit it, although the men in the Vélez-Gomara family are the heirs, since Isabel-Luisa and Amparo take the names of their husbands: "With what recondite pleasure José-María saw his last name

erased in his sisters by those of Claudio and Marco” (“¡Con qué placer recóndito veía José-María su apellido borrado por los de Claudio y Marco en sus hermanas!”; 210). Also, Claudio’s letter to José-María petitions him to consider the union of both families, the Osunas and the Vélez-Gomaras, therefore implying that it was José-María’s responsibility to inherit and carry on the heraldic shield: “On his return—Claudio assuredly stated—there would be sensational changes... It was imperative to make the family out of two, one, strong!” (“A su regreso—aseguraba Claudio—habría cambios sensacionales... «¡Era preciso hacer, de las dos, una familia sola, fuerte!...»”; *ibid.*; ellipses in original).

Coats of arms date back to the Middle Ages and they were mainly used by knights to distinguish themselves on the battlefield, “implying that the knight defends himself by displaying his identity and invoking it in the hour of peril,” in the same way that José-María does when facing sexual temptation (Cirlot 294). In Spain, they were mostly attributed to military service. Thus, it is fitting for the Vélez-Gomara coat of arms to symbolize these meanings considering that its lineage is of utmost importance and that the house is described like a military fortress, made completely of rock, like the sentinel of the city. Furthermore, its allusion to the military enclave Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera affiliates it with knighthood and military service.

The Vélez-Gomara house and family, however, are in decline. According to the first sentence of the narrative text, their blazon is materially deteriorating and spiritually waning as a result of the financial corruption and weakening of its men. In other words, its mythical heraldic history, dating back to medieval times, is spearheaded by knights and soldiers that had neglected their manhood and lost their vigor. Knighthood commanded loyalty, virility, and piety:

[The knight] is the master, the *logos*, the spirit which prevails over the mount (that is, over matter). ... a human type superior to all others. As a consequence, the education of the knight was directed in part to strengthening him physically, but in particular to developing his soul and spirit, his affections (that is, his morals) and his mind (that is, his reason) in order to prepare him adequately for the task of directing and controlling the real world, so that he might take his proper place in the hierarchies of the universe. ... The practical means of achieving the knight’s ultimate goal consisted of corporeal exertions, which were, in effect, not merely physical or material since the knight practiced with *all* kinds of arms, and these arms stood for symbolic potentialities; these practical exertions, then, led

eventually to the inversion of the world of desire through the ascetic denial of physical pleasure—the very essence of knighthood—and the almost mystic cult of the beloved. (164; emphasis in original)

It is plain to see that the description of the knight in the citation above is the opposite, or the *inversion*, of what the Vélez-Gomara house and men represent. The house has lost the balance between materiality and spirituality, disrupting the logos (the logic) that sustained its structure and degenerating the morale that maintained its dignity. The father Don Santiago is the first reflection of this disequilibrium after having abandoned his post as master of the house, both materially through financial corruption and in spirit via suicide.

As cited earlier, Santiago no longer wears the coat of arms on his clothing, according to Isabel-Luisa (161). Not only is he described as a cyclops lacking in intelligence, with a big head and feet big enough to fit, as the town folks in the province say, “su bota de siete leguas” (“his seven-league boot”; 53).<sup>63</sup> His body is also compared to a centaur’s after buying a red car too small for his monstrous size: “Don Santiago bought a little, miniscule car painted in red, so disproportionate to his enormous body that the seatbelt laboriously fastened at the waist and made one think in the abortion of a centaur: bust of a cyclops and legs of poor nags of vapor hidden under vibrant metal plates” (“don Santiago compró un cochecillo minúsculo, pintado de rojo, tan desproporcionado para su corpachón, que le ajustaba a la cintura trabajosamente y hacía pensar en el aborto de un centauro: busto de cíclope y patas de pobres caballejos de vapor ocultas bajo vibrantes chapas de metal”; 52).

The centaur is a creature in Greek mythology with a human head, arms, and torso and the body and legs of a horse, representing man’s animal nature (Chevalier 173). Symbolically, it is “the *antithesis of the knight*, that is, it represents the complete domination of a being by the baser [bestial] forces ... uncontrolled by the spirit” (Cirlot 40; emphasis added). Santiago’s debauchery, avarice, and abusive proclivities exemplify a centaur’s base behavior, causing him to forego reason (logos)

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<sup>63</sup> A league is “a former measure of distance by land, usually about three miles” (NOED). If multiplied by seven, Santiago’s boot would be about 21 miles long.

and lose morale (soul/spirit) as head of household: “The current head of the Vélez family, Don Santiago—only active and happy when the mist of alcohol surrounded him with absurd views of gold—settled for scorning the wholeness of the familial orbit, and for boasting about his scrolls and stature” (“El actual jefe de la familia de los Vélez, don Santiago, sólo activo y alegre cuando la bruma del alcohol lo rodeaba de absurdas perspectivas de oro, se conformaba con despreciar al orbe íntegro, y con ufanarse de sus pergaminos y de su estatura”; 50). Without the industriousness of the wife, the house, “so clean, so orderly, lost its equilibrium and fell into a filth of gloomy moods” (“tan limpia, tan ordenada, perdió el equilibrio y cayó en una suciedad de humores hoscos”; 51).

Recalling the allegorical comparisons between Santiago and Primo de Rivera, the father-figure is incapable of sustaining the house and his family because he can barely take care of himself, similar to how Primo de Rivera’s regenerationist zeal failed to cure Spain of its ills: “the centaur terribly dissociated himself, and part of the cyclops remained flattened against a tree trunk” (“el centauro se disoció terriblemente, y su parte de cíclope quedó aplastada contra un tronco”; 54-55). His carelessness and suicidal apathy are similar to the degeneration that regenerationism sought to repair. He is unable to fulfill his duties as a parent. As a result, his children are not raised in a nurturing environment nor with the proper education that is expected of a noble upbringing. Consequently, the virtues of knighthood and chivalry are not passed down to Jaime and José-María as they should, instead they are to rely on their self-sufficiency and on an aging tutor, Bermúdez-Gil: “And the children ... would have to force the passing of time ... and discover, each one, what of man and woman awaited them behind the infantile shell, also broken by the ill-fated crash” (“Y los hijos ... hubieron de forzar los trámites del tiempo ... y descubrir cada uno lo que de hombre o mujer esperaba tras de la corteza infantil, rota también en el choque funesto”; 57). Like the crash, the father leaves them with a fractured identity, a coat of arms tainted by disrepute and fraudulence, and a poorly designed template for life.

As discussed earlier, Jaime emulates his father's behaviors by not assuming his responsibilities as one of the males in the family. He flunks nautical school, gets involved in illegal activities, and strips himself of the family name. José-María also struggles to pick up the broken pieces of his family's past in the absence of the industriousness of his mother—a slave to his father—and a lack of education. José-María seems to do well on recuperating the family's material wealth, but the spiritual virtue that its coat of arms demands is a narrow road full of strife and ambivalence due to his gender and sexual ambiguity. The model of masculinity his father left him is one that had desecrated the heraldic symbol and that depended on the care of the wife.

Bermúdez Gil is the remaining father-figure that he respects and admires. However, the captain also fails to serve as an example, especially when the guardian dies and José-María, after perusing through his belongings, discovers that the old professor wanted to end his widowhood by marrying one of his sisters (152-54). Even after this revelation, José-María continues to repudiate his femininity and makes every effort to become the heteronormative man that his ancestors desired: “But Bermúdez Gil's secret, upon opening a grotesque breach of malice, didn't have the shameful ugliness of his [José-María's]. An old man in love was ridiculous; a man abandoned by his sex, vilifying it with the yearning of every one of his pores, with the femininity of his heart, was loathsome, repugnant” (“Pero el secreto de Bermúdez Gil, con abrir a la malicia una brecha grotesca, no tenía la fealdad infamante del suyo [de José-María]. Un viejo enamorado era ridículo; un hombre abandonado por su sexo, vilipendiándolo con el anhelo de cada uno de sus poros, con la feminidad [sic] de sus entrañas, era odioso, repugnante”; 154-55).

As heir of the family's coat of arms, José-María attempts to educate himself like a knight would: by developing his physical form via exercise, sunbathing, smoking, and walking with a cane in order to *appear* more masculine, and by purifying his soul via sexual asceticism in order to maintain his chaste honor: “His bedroom was already ascetic: without a portrait, without a flower,

even without the ivory crucifix—a naked man in the end—inherited from his grandparents” (“Ya su alcoba era ascética: sin un retrato, sin una flor, hasta sin el crucifijo de marfil—hombre desnudo al fin—heredado de sus abuelos”; 158). Ivory is a symbol of purity and incorruptibility (Chevalier 546). Seeing that it is attached to an absent crucifix, it represents the absence of purity in José-María’s life and his inability to rely on God to help him achieve it. Furthermore, the crucifix’s absence implies that he cannot depend on Jesus’ sacrifice to cleanse him of the shame of sexual sin, therefore he would have to sacrifice himself as a result, but not as a knighted martyr in light of his abandonment by God and the falsehood of his birthright, instead as his own self-realized being.

Transposing the virtues of knighthood to modern codes of conduct in Spain, José-María’s repression of inversion and homosexuality emulates the cult of the beloved in chivalry by exalting the woman as a figure of heteronormative chastity and purity and by making his union with a female his ultimate goal:

“Yes, it was necessary, before despairing, to run the last test. Maybe upon being in contact with a woman his bad inclination would cease and the man would triumph forever in his double nature.” ... Oh, yes! There was another lineage of women, fragrant and pure! Here the little green flower was born from hope. The woman, to defeat his bad inclination, would have to enter through the paths of his spirit: be tender, good, beautiful, sweet... Who knows if she was at the door of miracles and if, thanks to a woman worthy of his name, José would be able to win a victory over María greater than Saint George over the Dragon!

He was going to search for a girlfriend, a chaste girlfriend, young, deserving of being loved by the spirit and the flesh.

«Sí, era menester, antes de desesperarse, correr la prueba última. Tal vez al contacto de la mujer la mala inclinación cediese, y triunfara para siempre, en su doble naturaleza, el hombre.» ... ¡Ah, sí: Había otro linaje de mujeres, fragantes y puras! Aquí nació la florecilla verde de la esperanza. La mujer, para vencer su mala inclinación, había de entrarle por los caminos del espíritu: ser tierna, buena, bella, dulce... ¡Quién sabe si estaba a la puerta del milagro y si, merced a una mujer digna de su nombre, José podría lograr contra María una victoria mayor que la de San Jorge sobre el Dragón!

Iba a buscar novia, una novia casta, joven, merecedora de ser querida por el espíritu y por la carne. (162, 164-65; 2<sup>nd</sup> ellipsis in original)

José-María sees courtship as a knight would: as a conquest, like Saint George who slew the dragon, a symbol of evil and paganism, in order to conquer the princess.<sup>64</sup> It is the last test of his quest to overcoming his natural, base inclinations in order to become an honorable, spiritual man.

In medieval tales and legends there are different types of knights: the Green Knight is the pre-knight, the apprentice who is knighted; the Black Knight “undergoes the tribulations of sin, expiation and obscurity in order to attain to immortality”; the White Knight is the conqueror, “the ‘chosen one’ of the Evangelists, the ‘illuminated one’”; the Red Knight is “supremely virile, conqueror of all that is base, who, having completed his life’s work, is fully deserving of gold in its ultimate transmutation—glorification. Knighthood should be seen, then, as a superior kind of pedagogy helping to bring about the transmutation of natural man (steedless) into spiritual man” (Cirlot 162-63). This progression in rank is interrupted, *inverted*, when applied to José-María. His apprenticeship is unstructured and one that he achieves on his own amidst the absence of exemplary mentors. He undergoes the tribulations of sin, expiation, and obscurity but not as a chosen, or illuminated one, rather as a stigmatized other. There is no separation, albeit a conflict, between his nature and his soul, instead they are intertwined and redirected from chivalric duty to an inverted orientation.

José-María is scientific in the sense that he is methodical in his ascetic approach to saving himself and his family from ruin and to becoming more masculine like in the stages of knighthood. When his conscience tells him that his efforts are futile he thinks: “But his character responded to this cynical irony with new precautions, pressing on his impetus *to complete the stages* without faltering” (“Pero a esta ironía cínica respondía el carácter con nuevas precauciones ahincando el ímpetu *para cumplir las etapas* sin desmayar”; 134; emphasis added). The stages referred to here are both ones that

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<sup>64</sup> Many countries have adopted Saint George as their patron saint and have included a depiction of the slaying of the dragon in national and municipal coats of arms.

he undergoes as well as ones related to his siblings: marrying his sisters and helping Jaime finish school and become a responsible adult. At the same time, he refuses to follow social custom and reverts back to his natural, inverted inclinations. For instance, after his internal debacle on stimulating or repressing his inversion, Isabel-Luisa suggests that he marry Claudio's aunt, to which he responds: "—Be quiet, woman! It disgusts me to listen to you. . . . the irrepressible repugnance with which his entire being responded to the matrimonial insinuation" ("—¡Calla, mujer! Me da asco oírte. . . . la irreprimible repugnancia con que todo su ser respondió a la insinuación matrimonial"; 135-36).

This incident compels him to leave the house and go to a café near the harbor, transitioning from the enclosed space of normativity to the region where his sexual desires awoke. To complement the transition, he takes Jaime's letter with him (personifying one of the "originators of his deviance"), the one stating that he had disembarked in Colombo due to dishonorable behavior and had run out of luck in gambling, thus incurring debt (138).<sup>65</sup> At the café, José-María sits next to military soldiers and two older men. He reads Jaime's letter in the "hum of the immense beehive of parasites, he felt isolated, as though in the garrulous vibration he made a strange zone of artificial silence" ("runrún de la inmensa colmena de zánganos, sintióse aislado, cual si en la vibración gárrula del café hubiérase hecho una extraña zona de artificial silencio"; 137).

In addition to his father and Bermúdez Gil, José-María relies on his memory of Jaime to make sense of his own gender identity, often seeing a version of his potentially heterosexual self through his brother that, contrarily, reminds him of the man and woman from the circus:

The presence of the woman that looked like the man [the acrobat] that revealed his [José-María's] misfortune of having fallen under an indecision of Nature, justified everything. Poor Jaime! Upon sympathizing with him, José-María pitied himself too. And he almost wished that the losses to

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<sup>65</sup> There are seven countries in the world where there are places named Colombo: Brazil, Honduras, Indonesia, Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa, and Sri Lanka: <https://za.geotarget.com/called.php?qcity=Colombo>. Since it is often said that Jaime's voyages are transatlantic, it is likely that he goes to one of the cities by that name in the Americas.

gambling were a lie so that the sin of the one who he considered to be *the true first-born heir of the family* would have something in common with his.

La presencia de la mujer parecida al hombre [el acróbata] que le reveló [a José-María] la desventura de haber caído bajo una indecisión de la Naturaleza, justificaba todo. ¡Pobre Jaime! Al compadecerlo José-María se compadecía a sí mismo también. Y casi deseaba que fuera mentira lo de las pérdidas de juego, para que el pecado del que ya consideraba él como *verdadero mayorazgo de la familia*, tuviese siquiera algo de común con el suyo. (140-41; emphasis added)

This passage shows a change in José-María's usual reasoning. Although he continues to blame the daughter of the tamer of the beasts and the acrobat for his inversion, he no longer holds them responsible for Jaime's misfortune. The realization that his brother had instead fallen victim to gaming dismantles the projection of his own shame onto him. Although he seems to be making a wrong turn away from salvaging his family's honor, José-María admits that he does not consider himself to be the true first-born heir to his family's inheritance, which deviates from the plan of moral rectitude he sets out for himself. Ironically, José-María, in order to clear his head and make sense of his indecision, goes to a café at the piers, the place where it began, which reveals that he is in the process of reevaluating his gender normativity, or inversion, that Nature, undecided, had bestowed on him.

At the café, he sits next to military soldiers and old men, archetypes of virility and patriarchy, while thinking about Jaime's indiscretions, which contrast the manliness that these figures represent. Yet, they are described as 'zánganos,' which literally means a male bee while figuratively meaning "parasites," or in slang "boneheaded" (NOED). In other words, they are listless and uneducated men. However, there is one young soldier that stands out in the group by delivering a speech with a mouth that sits on a gigantic jaw: "At the adjacent table [to José-María] soldiers disputed; and one younger than the others, with a brutally large jaw, stroke the cross hanging on his chest with his right hand. He was a surly, jaundiced lad. Ugly and violent, he mixed cuss words into his speech, and by way of supreme reason punched the marble. How José-María admired his [*elevated package/fiery delivery*]!" ("En la mesa inmediata [a José-María] los militares disputaban; y uno más joven que los

otros, de mandíbula *brutal*, golpeó con la diestra la cruz pendiente de su pecho. Era un mozo cetrino, áspero. Feo y violento, entreveraba de palabrotas su discurso, y a modo de suprema razón daba puñadas en el mármol. ¡Cómo admiró José-María su *empaque altivo!*”; 141; emphasis added).

This is one of the scenes—in addition to the caricaturized description of the father, his suicide, and the circus scene—that resemble the hyperbole and sardonic tone of what Susan Sontag has notably discussed in her famous essay “Notes on Camp.” Described as a sensibility and a love of the unnatural, artifice, and exaggeration, “camp” in Hernández-Catá’s aesthetic manifests in its ironic inversion of high culture, beauty, value, and taste, and its focus on sensibilities while subverting reason and discourse. According to Sontag, “Camp responds particularly to the markedly attenuated and to the strongly exaggerated. The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility. Allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is ... a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms” (Note 9). The description of the young soldier in relation to José-María’s androgynous inversion follows these tenets.

The soldier’s words and gestures are virulent, and his characteristics and mannerisms are exaggerated in order to reveal the ironies of extreme virility in relation to José-María’s weak femininity. His gigantic jaw, in its connection to the mouth, emphasizes the “potency of word or logos” (Ronnberg 368). That word, however, is accompanied by a violent tone and aggressive delivery that is reminiscent of an authoritarian leader, such as Primo de Rivera, who wielded his political influence early on at cafés through fiery discussions and speeches. He served in the military and, as aforementioned, Brenan describes Primo de Rivera as a ‘café politician’ as does Ian Kershaw of Hitler: “His milieu was that of the beer-table philosophers and corner-café improvers of the world, the cranks and half-educated know-alls. ... he could flare up and treat anyone in proximity to his fiercely held views on whatever preoccupied him at the time” (84). Although it had some

elements similar to fascism, Primo de Rivera's dictatorship was not fascist, exhibiting a softer kind of authoritarianism, but authoritarian nonetheless.

In the excerpt cited above, José-María admires the soldier's 'empaque altivo,' which literally means "elevated package." Figuratively, it could refer to the soldier's elevated temper or arrogance as well as to his erect phallus. The narration clarifies José-María's ambiguous reaction in the paragraph that follows:

And in his [José-María's] admiration, made of pure envy, there wasn't anything of the turbid [muddy] attraction that, since childhood, other beings of the same sex had produced in him; anything of the sentiment of offensive admiration that the Hercules of the circus produced in him. That man [the soldier], perhaps in a second of blind cholera or in one of those absolute fears that annul even the instinct and obligate one to flee onward, had consecrated his manliness with heroic value; and he [José-María], he who in so many minutes, so many hours of demoralizing spring resisted the enemy without surrender, considered himself indignant, weak in front of his [the soldier's] arrogant and armed strength.

Y no había en su admiración [la de José-María], hecha de pura envidia, nada del atractivo turbio [cenagoso] que, desde niño, habíanle producido otros seres de su propio sexo; nada del sentimiento de admiración delictiva que le produjo el hércules del circo. Aquel hombre [el militar], tal vez en un segundo de cólera ciega o en uno de esos miedos absolutos que anulan hasta el instinto y obligan a huir hacia adelante, habría consagrado su varonía con cifra heroica; y él [José-María], él que en tantos minutos, en tantas horas de desmoralizadora primavera resistía al enemigo sin entregarse, se consideraba frente a su fuerza [la del militar] ufana y armada, indigno, débil. (141-42)

While this passage restates the inborn nature of José-María's sexual attraction as exhibited since childhood, it reemphasizes the novel's focus on gender non-conformity as opposed to same-sex attraction by highlighting José-María's battle with his gender inversion. Notwithstanding, regardless of the narrator's non-erotic explanation of José-María's admiration toward the soldier, one could interpret his 'empaque altivo' ('elevated package') as a symbol of his phallic virility that characterizes his manly strength, an attribute that José-María admires upon comparing his timidity to the soldier's valor in times of agitation or fear. Instead of heroically attaining the spiritual enlightenment of knighthood, José-María is presented as the damsel in distress who reacts with forlorn desperation at the arrival of the knight who has come to save her.

Up until this point, it seems like José-María has acquiesced to his impotent passivity, but the narrative takes a critical turn that inverts his perceptions of hegemonic masculinity, questioning the vituperation of femininity in the paragraph following his reaction to the soldier:

And a protest against the demarcations of Nature agitated him. His mother had been more virile in the face of forceful pains and adversities than the paternal giant [Santiago]; innumerable women responded more to the masculine concept than so many weak, soft men. Is it that repudiated sexuality should drag everything behind it? And the absurd idea of getting up and slapping the decorated soldier grated the muscles of his right arm [or grated on his nerves, as in got on his nerves].

Y una protesta contra las demarcaciones de la Naturaleza lo agitaba. Más viril ante los dolores forzosos y las adversidades había sido su madre que el gigante paterno [Santiago]; más respondía al concepto masculino infinidad de mujeres que tantos hombres débiles, fofos. ¿Es que la odiosa sexualidad había de arrastrar todo detrás de sí? Y la idea absurda de levantarse y abofetear al militar condecorado le hacía crispár los músculos del brazo derecho. (142-43)

This excerpt is seemingly ambiguous because its main argument is difficult to ascertain at first glance. Is José-María denigrating his feminine or masculine nature? If we take ‘Nature’ to refer to his sexual inversion, both his masculinity and femininity (like in the excerpt cited on pages 229-30), then it could be a criticism of his indecision about which gender is strongest in him: male or female. But if we take ‘Nature’ with a capital “N” as referring to the phenomena of the physical world in general, then José-María’s reflection reads like a philosophical argument against the repudiation of women and femininity.

He sees Nature as playing a trick on him by making him think that the soldier is the epitome of manliness and vitality when, in his personal experience, it is the woman that has exhibited more virility and resilience amidst adversity, as exemplified by his mother, contrary to his father’s impotence. The passage reads like a theoretical essay (‘the masculine concept’) that questions the very basis of heteronormative stereotypes and the inferiority of women. In his mind, women are more valiant than men and he is annoyed by the presumption that they, as the repudiated, hated sex, are to drag every hardship and trouble in life, picking up the slack of weak men. It disturbs him to

the point where the soldier's boisterous discourse gets on his nerves. However, he is too reserved and timid to strike him because he is also envious of his unrestrained boldness. He thinks:

With his brute jaw and his suddenly forged soul, the soldier could look at no matter who face-to-face and blaspheme and exasperate himself at the slightest contradiction, while as soon as two eyes examined him, even if casually, he'd feel obligated to lower his head. Oh, had he been alone in life, without the responsibility of three destinies above his, he too would have gone to war, no matter which one, to fight blackened by smoke, his mouth bitter from the dust and his soul from barbarity! If that and nothing more was to be a man, how easy it would've been for him to be one!

Con su mandíbula bruta y su alma forjada de un golpe, el militar podía mirar a no importa quién cara a cara, y blasfemar y exasperarse a la menor contradicción, mientras que él, en cuanto dos ojos lo examinaban, aun cuando fuera casualmente, sentía obligado a humillar la cabeza. ¡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, no importa a cuál, a pelear negro de humo, amarga la boca de pólvora y el alma de barbarie! Si eso nada más era ser hombre, ¡que fácil hubiera sido ser hombre para él! (143)

Although the tone of his thoughts is regretful, there is a noticeable critique of hegemonic masculinity and the military that is difficult to ignore. While he admires the soldier's unbridled spirit, José-María implies that he is a brute, naïve, impulsive, and barbarous. He invokes the militaristic heritage of his family's coat of arms upon contemplating life as a soldier on the battlefield. However, this is not the kind of life he wants to live nor the kind of man he wants to be or image he wants to portray to his siblings.

José-María sees life in the army as an impossibility: "But no... Impossible: Jaime, Isabel-Luisa and Amparo also carried the paternal name and maybe they wouldn't resist the bad forces like he had done. There was Jaime as an example, fallen in the first departure; perhaps softened by the worst weaknesses when he [José-María], envious, imagined him on the bridge, his chest full of sea air, and his gaze of horizon" ("Pero no... Imposible: Jaime, Isabel-Luisa y Amparo llevaban también el nombre paterno y, acaso, no podrían resistir los malos ímpetus como él. Allí estaba el ejemplo de Jaime, caído a la primera salida; tal vez ablandado por las peores flaquezas cuando él [José-María], envidioso, lo suponía en el puente, lleno el pecho de aire de mar y la mirada de horizonte"; 144; ellipsis in original). Once Jaime changes his name, however, José-María sees a way out of this dilemma: "That name for which he spent so many years sacrificing himself; the name that was the

pride of the city, save barely a few miles, was nothing, nothing ‘across the wide world,’ and could be switched for any other...” (“El nombre aquel por el que llevaba tantos años sacrificándose; el nombre que era orgullo de la ciudad, apenas salvadas unas leguas, «por el ancho mundo», no era nada, nada, y podía trocarse por cualquiera otro...”; 176-77).

After his breakup with Cecilia, José-María is driven through the Spanish city. Not only does his chauffeur recognize him but pedestrians as well:

—Yes, Mister José-María.

He ignored that the chauffeur knew him, and was surprised. He was more surprised when, here and there, many people turned to greet him and everywhere a murmur elevated his passing with affection: “It’s the master of the house with the coat of arms.” “It’s the first-born of the Vélez-Gomaras; there are still good men out there!” And in the face of that farewell from the city that since childhood had demanded fidelity to his rank, he felt the impulse to stand upright and scream: “I’m not good, I’m a monster! *A tomb badly whitewashed*... The little mommy! Who knows if one day you’ll see me smeared in red makeup and with a flower behind my ear!”

—Sí, señorito José-María.

Ignoraba que el cochero lo conociera, y se sorprendió. Se sorprendió más cuando, aquí y allá, muchas personas se volvían para saludarle y por doquier elevaba su paso un murmullo de simpatía: «Es el señor de la casa del escudo.» «Es el mayorazgo de los Vélez-Gomara, ¡bueno sí los hay!» Y ante aquella despedida de la ciudad que desde niño habíale exigido fidelidad a su rango, él sentía impulsos de erguirse y gritar: «¡No soy bueno, soy un monstruo! *Un sepulcro mal blanqueado*... ¡La madrecita! ¡Quien sabe si un día me veáis pintarrajeado de rojo y con una flor tras de la oreja!» (207-08; ellipses in original; emphasis added)

The phrase ‘sepulcro mal blanqueado’ (‘tomb badly whitewashed’) is taken from the biblical passage of Matthew 23:27, when Jesus addresses the hypocrisy of the Pharisees: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like *whitewashed tombs*, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (“«¡Ay de vosotros, escribas y fariseos hipócritas, pues sois semejantes a *sepulcros blanqueados*, que por fuera parecen bonitos, pero por dentro están llenos de huesos de muertos y de toda inmundicia!»”; NIV; emphasis added). According to José-María, he would like to shout that he is worse than the teachers of law and the Pharisees because he cannot even hide his hypocrisy. The paint job over his “hypocritical” tomb is badly done, referring to how poorly he has combatted his inversion and erotic desires, predicting that one day he may return to the city like the effeminate man he ran into near the

brothels. At the same time, José-María is again reproducing the shame that the town could impose on him while not completely ruling out the possibility of returning as a man given to his true desires.

Ultimately, he leaves the town because he is incapable of being dishonest and prefers to abandon it in order to be himself elsewhere, in a more accepting environment:

Another month, half, ten days, and he would depart [from the city] for the first time in his life *to be the true José-María*, and as soon as he jumped from one train to another and transposed a border, no one could tell him: “You are the first-born of the Vélez-Gomaras. Men of your lineage founded our city, and on your coat of arms, dug into the midpoint of the rock under which many generations passed, the eight quarters boast blazons, each one of which obligates you to be superior to us...”

Un mes más, medio, diez días, y él partiría [de la ciudad] por primera vez en la vida *a ser el José-María verdadero*, y apenas saltase de un tren a otro y traspusiese una frontera, nadie podría decirle: «Tú eres el primogénito de los Vélez-Gomara. Hombres de tu linaje fundaron nuestra ciudad, y en tu escudo, ahondado en el medio punto de piedra bajo el cual muchas generaciones pasaron, los ocho cuarteles ostentan blasones, cada uno de los cuales te obliga a ser superior a nosotros...» (199-200; ellipsis in original; emphasis added)

José-María is determined to be his true self, regardless of what his city and family expect of him. The city itself recognizes that it has not lived up to its Levitical laws, therefore depending on José-María's sacrifice to atone for its sins. The town, however, is as hypocritical as José-María assumes to be that not even the soldier with the big jaw can hide his double morale. He portends to be a good Christian by clenching the cross dangling from his neck, yet he visits the “lewd” part of town where all the “parasites” are found and he exhibits violent behavior that contradicts Christian charity. The modern soldier is not like the medieval knight whose superior morality is glorified by the city. Similarly, the town has high expectations that even it cannot fulfil, expecting José-María to be their knight in shining armor with a blazon that is corrupted by the impotence of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, the final stop that he makes in his last commemorative journey through the city is the site where his father, the “poor giant with half a soul, and to whom he owed his existence, had fallen” (“pobre gigante [sic] con media alma a quien debía la existencia, había caído”; 202-03).

The image of his dead father, with half a soul as a result of his dependency on his wife, is coupled with that of Claudio's dad. José-María admires him for having the profile of a Judaic

patriarch (“patriarca de judaico perfil”; 203), but in old age he reaches a vegetative state due to a hemiplegic attack, which causes complete paralysis of half of his body due to a stroke. He comes to mind after José-María reminisces on his father’s weak soul as he thinks to himself: “the idea of reaching that state without having been at least once ‘his real self,’ solidified his decision to leave” (“la idea de llegar a ese estado sin haber sido siquiera una vez «él mismo», robustecíale la decisión de irse”; 203-04). José-María does not want to be like Claudio’s father, who after living a Levitical life, ends up paralyzed. Analogically, it follows that Levitical patriarchy is to paralysis what José-María is to hegemonic masculinity. The unifying relation in this analogy is femininity and the crippling effect that Levitical patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity can have on it, to which José-María says the following:

To dissuade a phantom insistent on clamoring for the common places of duty, he leveled with the perspective of a free existence, without fantasies for which to sacrifice himself, already without responsibility, without possibilities of wasting the plethora of young energy on mere projects of avarice, bogged down by money and pushed by the comforts that life was obligating him to accept, toward the declining slope whereby the senses rule.

He felt like he was awaiting execution, condemned, not to death but to life, and he felt a kind of pity on, and admiration for, himself that from time to time made him bring his right hand to his head or thigh in order to softly caress himself.

Para disuadir a un fantasma obstinado en clamar los lugares comunes del deber, explanaba la perspectiva de una existencia libre, sin entelequias a que sacrificarse, ya sin responsabilidad, sin posibilidades de gastar la plétora de energía juvenil en meros trabajos de avaricia, apoltronado por el dinero y empujado por las comodidades que la vida le iba obligando a aceptar, hacia el declive por donde ruedan los sentidos.

Sentíase en capilla, condenado, no a muerte sino a vida, y se tenía una especie de lástima y de admiración, que de tiempo en tiempo hacía llevarse la diestra a la cabeza o al muslo para acariciarse suavemente. (204)

In order to persuade the phantom of death (of both Santiago and Claudio’s father) to not obligate him to fulfil his duties as heir to his family’s name and heritage, José-María will chart a path of freedom for himself that does not take him back to the falsity, burden, avarice, and opulence of his birthright on pain of losing the senses that could lead him to emancipation.

Although he admires Claudio’s father, his family is hungry for money. For example, José-María refers to Claudio as a “sietemesino cubierto de oro” (“premature baby wrapped in gold”; 148)

and to his aunt's wealth as "oro insolente" ("insolent gold"; 165). When he asks for Claudio (his boss and future brother-in-law) to hire Marco for a job at the bank, he notices that he is not interested in upholding the Vélez-Gomara coat of arms as much as he is in acquiring its wealth by marrying Isabel-Luisa: "And he smiled at the response of the premature infant full of gold, already preoccupied with not creating an illegitimate relationship with the quarters of the coat of arms that he was going to buy sacramentally" ("Y le hizo sonreír la respuesta del sietemesino cargado de oro, ya preocupado de no dar espurios entronques a los cuarteles del escudo que iba sacramentalmente a comprar"; 186). Seeing that preserving hegemonic masculinity and suppressing femininity brought one patriarch to his demise and the other to impotence, causing their sons (Jaime and Claudio) to obsess over money and to objectify, in effect, the women they get involved with, José-María does not want to follow in their footsteps.

The second paragraph of the excerpt cited above foreshadows the simultaneous pull of life and death that enfolds José-María in the next, and last, chapter of the novel and the decision he makes to die to his ancestry, relinquish the family name, and live as his authentic self. The presentiment of death that he feels when thinking about letting go of his birthright is a presage to the reemergence of his past during his time in Paris, which leads him to annihilate the José-María from the Spanish city. In order to commit suicide, he employs instead his maternal inheritance, his femininity. In this sense he is not the supremely virile Red Knight who has conquered every base instinct and desire in order to obtain glory and become a spiritual man, an angel, or chaste invert. Rather, he turns his demise into a symbolic act at the Javel metro station, a place with a name that represents cleansing and renewal, where he would regenerate the inversion on his own terms and not by force of a mandate: "Change his name, baptize himself, cut the umbilical cord of the soul and recognize himself alone, *the only irresponsible link slipped from every chain...* Set aside the wide sheath of the surnames and be someone else, more true perhaps, without past, without burdens... What a

marvell” (“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; ellipses in original; emphasis added).

José-María personifies himself as an irresponsible link that slips from every chain, the chain being the responsibility of being the knight or soldier who fights the urges and wishes of his true, inverted self. Yet, this is what he does in the moment of committing suicide. He intentionally slips at the edge of the platform, leaving behind a burdensome past in order to find, recognize, and become himself as both José *and* María. At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that José-María is the link that holds the tension between both ends of the chain of hegemonic masculinity. One end of the chain pressures him to reproduce patriarchy and sociocultural biases while the other end urges him to think of ways of executing his agency to free himself from its grasp and create new links that nurture his autonomy and self-realization. Surely enough, when José-María plans his casual encounter with death, he alludes to the end piece of a rope, like a chain, by asking and responding to his own question: “Was not there in every coincidence a voluntary end piece held by God’s hand? Now he would have that end piece” (“No había en toda casualidad un cabo voluntario sujeto por la mano de Dios? Ahora ese cabo lo tendría él”; 233-34). The chain and rope stand as symbols of the transitivity and transversality inherent to the inverted nature of the transmodern subject as it shifts and moves across the binaries of sex, gender, and race. In this fashion, Hernández-Catá, who with his pen stirs the mud of the swamp, utters the following statement in reply to his detractors in the epigraphic preface: “More work and less lucid, you’d say. It doesn’t matter!” (“Más trabajo y menos lucido, dirá usted. ¡No importa!”). And so, he too could have said at the end of writing *El ángel de Sodoma* like José-María: “What a marvel!”

PART TWO. A (RE)VISION OF BLACKNESS: ALFONSO HERNÁNDEZ-CÁTÁ'S *LA PIEL*

I. CHAPTER THREE. Blackness, Racial Inversion, and Resistance in Hernández-Catá's *La piel*

Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's Self. . . . a journey that will not be unfamiliar to all those who have been forced to endure western civilization (vii).

—Ziauddin Sardar, "Foreword to the 2008 Edition" of *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon

1.1. Introduction

In what could very well be one of his most psychological and socially compelling early works, Hernández-Catá's novel, *La piel* (The Skin; 1913-1928), takes us on a journey from the childhood memories to the itinerant experiences and unjustly violent assassination of its male protagonist, Eulogio Valdés.<sup>66</sup> Told by an omniscient narrator, Eulogio is born in Tahiti—the largest island of French Polynesia in the South Pacific—from an enslaved black mother and a white father that is physically absent both in his life and as an active/visible character in the story, but he remains a haunting presence in Eulogio's consciousness that constantly reminds him of his biracial identity and racial inferiority as a black man. During his upbringing, a coercive slave owner and a kind priest,

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<sup>66</sup> I consulted as many editions of *La piel* that I could find (both hard and digital copies), which are listed in the "Bibliography." All were published in Madrid and distributed to other cities, such as Paris and Buenos Aires. I rely on all of them for my analysis but mostly on the sixth edition of 1928 because it was published by Mundo Latino, the publishing house that Hernández-Catá directed at the time, and it reflects the latest changes made to the novel's narrative since it was first published in 1913. The latest edition that I could find was published in Madrid in 1953 by the publisher Aguilar, but it is not as significant since it is a reprint of previous editions that are prior to the modifications made for the one published in 1928. Later in this chapter's introduction, I discuss some of the changes and revisions that Hernández-Catá made in subsequent editions, which span 15 years from the first to the 1928 edition.

Don Antonio, serve as Eulogio's father figures, the former raising him to be obedient to his manipulative whims and the latter grooming him to become a priest.

After the murder of his owner and the abolition of slavery, Don Antonio sends Eulogio to seminary where white, black, and mixed members of the institution and the surrounding community discriminate against his blackness. When the priest dies, Eulogio is left with a large sum of his money, after which he decides to leave seminary and enter university. In order to combat racial prejudice, Eulogio becomes the leader of the Tahitian political party. However, he seems to internalize the racism he suffers by hoping to "save and redeem" the freed negroes from racial subjection and their own cultural "backwardness" in his new position of leadership. To stomp his political ascent, other members of the party convince him to leave Tahiti in order to replace the consul of the island in Birmingham, England. Now an adult, he strives to make a place for himself as a free man struggling to find meaning and agency away from home and amid the racial prejudice he experiences in the English city. With hopes of living a better life, a Frenchman that he befriends persuades him to find happiness in Paris.

While Birmingham proves to be inhospitable to his blackness, in Paris he goes broke and is constantly reminded of his foreignness as he is unable to sedate the growing nostalgia for his homeland. From a distance, he is tormented by his inability to advocate for social justice in favor of his people in Tahiti against foreign exploitation, white supremacy, and greed, as he wanders aimlessly through the streets of the French capital in helpless search of purpose. Unfortunately, he realizes too late that European smugglers plot a scheme headed by the former consul to Tahiti that Eulogio had replaced, Mr. Hohstkis, in order to falsely accuse Eulogio of sending firearms by contraband to French Polynesia. In the meantime, the boss of the Parisian hotel in which Eulogio is lodged tells him that an employee from the bank of Mr. Vatan had come looking for him. When they meet, Mr. Vatan tells Eulogio that he has all the shares to build an Oriental railway system in Tahiti and that he

would like to merge them with the shares of the Occidental one, unite all the railroad branches, and create a network of communications for profit. He claims that the unrest in Tahiti, however, prevents him from moving this project forward and he solicits Eulogio's help in order to convert the Tahitians into allies, which, in turn, could redeem him of any false accusations of contraband.

Although his fellow Tahitians tout him as a hero, Eulogio hesitates to return to his native country and is afraid of being seen as a criminal since that could augment the ebullient revolutionary turmoil in the island against the new colonizing government. He is also suspicious of Mr. Vatan's motives but the banker persuades him to go back to his birthplace. Eulogio acquiesces after he convinces himself that returning home would be an opportunity to help his people. During his journey back to the South Pacific, a multitude of so-called blacks at the shores of Tahiti await his return from Paris. As he approaches land and becomes more visible, the restless crowd starts to rise with excitement. However, their elation is tragically mistaken for revolt and the police charges against them, firing their weapons and killing any blacks that cross their path. Amidst the pandemonium, three bullets hit Eulogio's body and a sergeant strikes him with the butt of his rifle, the final blow that brings him to his death. The novel ends with the sealing of the business deal between Mr. Vatan and the railway companies.

After this brief summary of the plot, it is apparent that the story of *La piel* has many layers, all of which emphasize the psychological struggle that Eulogio experiences and the jeopardizing circumstances that bring him to his death. Two of the only critical studies that exist on the text each focus on the circumstantial aspects of the plot, analyzing more closely the dual racial nature of Eulogio's character as an impediment to his own psychosocial development and sense of belonging in society. For instance, in the article, "*La piel: novela antirracista psicológica*" (*La piel: an Anti-Racist, Psychological Novel*), Alberto Gutiérrez de la Solana provides an insightful analysis of Eulogio's duality, referring to it in psychological terms as a split personality based on the inner

turmoil brought on by his biracial ambiguity. On the one hand, it states that Eulogio's ability to find happiness in Paris indicates that his misfortune is not so much caused by his psychological duality as by the racism of others (206). On the other, Gutiérrez de la Solana seems more inclined to blame the protagonist for not being able to find the strength and capability within himself to overcome adversity. He is described as a "a puppet of destiny, of circumstance" ("muñeco del destino, de las circunstancias"; *ibid.*), and as possessing a peculiar and selective spirit, "that impedes him from having the necessary mimicry to fight in his own environment, even among those of his own race" ("que le impide tener el mimetismo necesario para luchar en su ambiente, inclusive entre los de su raza"; *ibid.*).<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, Michelle María Álvarez Amargós' examination of the short novel—"Muerte y espacio artístico en el hombre colonizado: análisis de la novela corta 'La piel' de Alfonso Hernández Catá"—also stresses the idea that Eulogio is unable to act on his own free will: "he is simply manipulated like another piece of the conquistador's scaffold" ("simplemente es manipulado como una pieza más dentro del andamiaje del conquistador"; 6). It argues that Eulogio's characterization is representative of the polemical colonizer-colonized dichotomy, whereby Hernández-Catá draws from Latin American philosophical thinkers—namely José Enrique Rodó and his work *Ariel*<sup>68</sup>—in order to typify Eulogio as the colonized man who is lost in himself and is unsuccessful in his search for a place of belonging as a result of the encroaching and oppressive processes of colonization.

What both Gutiérrez de la Solana and Álvarez Amargós do well is highlight Hernández-Catá's use of contrast in order to sustain the main tenets of their arguments regarding racism and the

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<sup>67</sup> Citations of primary and secondary sources are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>68</sup> Rodó (1871-1917) was a Uruguayan essayist and *Ariel* (1900) is the essay for which he is most known. It is based on William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which the titular character, Ariel, symbolizes a spirit of beauty and goodness, and his opposite, Caliban, symbolizes what is not. Rodó uses them as metaphors to critique the negative effects of utilitarianism and materialism (Caliban) on the mind and spirit (Ariel), particularly manifest in North America's growing influence over the economic wealth and cultural identities of Latin America.

opposition, as well as symbiosis, of dominance and subjection inherent in the colonizer/colonized binary. I incorporate these themes into my analysis and I refer back to these earlier studies, especially since I also address Hernández-Catá's use of contrast as integral to my argument regarding racial inversion. Not only do I agree that the narrative construction of *La piel* is based on an aesthetic of contrast in order to set the foundation for the various dichotomies thematically explored in the text. I also stress that its antithetical construction is reflected in the story's narration and, more important, in the actions of its protagonist. In order to add to the critical analysis of these aforementioned studies, I address how the various forms of opposition in the text are destabilized beyond their binarial constraints as a result of its narrative construction in tandem with the protagonist's characterization and the complexity of race relations and transpacific politics that frame the novel.

#### 1.1.1. A Transnational Context

The extent of Hernández-Catá's knowledge of racial tensions in Tahiti is unknown. He began living in Santiago de Cuba a few months after his birth in 1885 up until he was sent to military school in Toledo, Spain in 1901 (approximately 16 years in Cuba). He immediately escapes the academy in order to revel in Madrid's bohemia and begin his literary and journalistic career. Therefore, he lived through Spanish decolonization, the independence movements in the Americas, and the ramifications thereof. In 1905, he returns to Cuba, this time to settle in Havana, the center of Cuban sociopolitical life. In 1907, he crosses the Atlantic for the fourth time to Spain, where he marries and publishes his first collection of short stories, *Cuentos pasionales*, only to return once more to Havana the following year. His diplomatic assignments begin at this time, first serving as second consul to Cuba in Le Havre, France (1909-11) and in Birmingham, England (1911-13), the same time in which he wrote *La piel*. Enamored by French culture, he also frequently visited Paris in this period.

It is very likely that *La piel* is inspired by Hernández-Catá's experiences at the turn of the century, particularly its geographical context and Eulogio's characterization. Seeing that Tahiti was first an English and then French colony, it is probable that Hernández-Catá learned about its history and politics while completing his diplomatic duties in Le Havre and Birmingham. His assignments are reflected in Eulogio's travels to both England and France; however, the protagonist is a Spanish speaker. Although the French Ministry of the Navy had its headquarters in Valparaíso, Chile, the Spanish had explored the South Pacific since the sixteenth century and they attempted to colonize Tahiti during the eighteenth century, but only until 1775 due to the abandonment of the mission that the Viceroy of Peru had established there by command of the Spanish Crown. Then there is the Polynesians of Rapa Nui, who navigated to South America during the tenth or eleventh century, introducing the sweet potato and bottle gourd to the South Pacific, as well as the Spanish language from Chile (Fischer 37). Although it is pertinent mostly to that region of Polynesia, Tahitians and Polynesians in general were known for traveling and colonizing other islands, making it more heterogenous than its neighbors, Melanesia and Micronesia. Therefore, it is likely that Spanish infiltrated the culture of other islanders as well.

Eulogio is often portrayed in the novel as connecting with other Spanish speakers and Europeans through the Spanish language, and cultural differences are mentioned from the vantage point of Hispanism and the politics of colonization. It is also apparent that Eulogio does not speak any other language than Spanish and the only person that he befriends and trusts in Birmingham's inhospitable environment is a Chilean no less, who lets him stay in his office in order to mitigate his ostracism as a result of racial discrimination: "By knowing that you speak Spanish, that you... let's face it, it seems to me that I'm not so alone" ("Con saber que usted habla español, que usted me... vamos, me parece que no estoy tan solo"; 187; ellipsis in original).

Historically, the origins of the Polynesian population and their languages are mixed, closely related to the Melanesian and Micronesian languages that belong to the Austronesian language group, which includes the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Madagascar, and others (Campbell 30; Fischer 13).<sup>69</sup> Its genetic and cultural makeup is Austronesian as well. This could include parts of East Africa while mostly consisting of Southeast Asia. While in reality Polynesians are primarily of mixed Austronesian (Southern Mongoloid) and Polynesian-French ancestry, the novel characterizes the Tahitians homogeneously as black, a racial category that is often contingently deployed in the novel as a contrast to the whiteness of Europeans (Fischer 12). Based on Hernández-Catá's biography, it is then also possible that he drew from Spanish history and decolonization in the Americas, thus explaining the novel's mention of the abolition of slavery in Tahiti, which could either be a reference to its abolition in French colonies in 1848, in the United States in 1865, and in Cuba in 1886. This is coupled with the mention of Frederick Douglass, Mary Edmonia Lewis, and Alexandre Dumas, important biracial figures who lived through these historic moments.

Considering Hernández-Catá's trajectory back-and-forth between Spain and Cuba, his appointments in France and England, and his trips to the United States, it is conceivable that he based the novel on his experiences in these countries, on a knowledge of their history, and on his involvement in their current events either personally, as a diplomat, or via journalism, the latter being an activity in which Eulogio thoroughly engages as an avid reader of newspapers. Therefore, the novel's narrative discourse is constructed as a response to colonialism, slavery, and their aftermath via a character who is portrayed through the lens of colonization and emancipation in a transnational setting. This setting is also transpacific and transatlantic in scope, rendering the racial

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<sup>69</sup> According to Fischer, "the Austronesian language family contains the world's greatest number of member tongues: around 1000 or 20 per cent of all the world's languages ... Spoken today by approximately 360 million people, the Austronesian language family includes nearly all the languages of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Madagascar (East Africa), Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia." (13).

politics that it addresses as both pertinent to French-Polynesian and Spanish-Cuban relations. Both Tahiti and Cuba at the beginning of the twentieth century experienced violent encounters with European colonizers and subsequent processes of decolonization. As mentioned previously, I will discuss the novel in the context of decolonization in Tahiti. Notwithstanding, in light of Hernández-Catá's proximity to current events in Cuba and Eulogio's characterization as a Spanish-speaker and an enslaved black man—traits that are more easily traceable to Cuba than to Tahiti—I will also discuss how his journey is inspired by the history of contentious race relations in Cuba, particularly the Armed Uprising of the Independents of Color in 1912, just a year before the publication of the first edition of *La piel*.

### 1.1.2. An Inverted Approach

*La piel* is divided in three parts. From the first to the second part of the novel, we realize that other's racial prejudice—even that of the Tahitians—impedes Eulogio from obtaining social justice, which prompts him to devalue his blackness in favor of his white lineage. On the one hand, the first part, “La partida” (The Departure), represents him as a sociocultural repository of stereotypical racial constructions of blackness drawn from the historical contexts of, and allusions in, the novel. On the other, the second part, “La tempestad” (The Tempest), exacerbates the ambiguity of his biraciality in his departure from Tahiti to Birmingham, England, where he vacillates between assimilating to his whiteness and asserting his blackness to the displeasure or appeasement of both whites and Tahitians back in his homeland. Finally, the third part, “El puerto” (The Port), takes him to Paris where he tries to recuperate from the trauma of racial prejudice that he experiences in Birmingham but instead is exploited as a result of other's political and economic corruption. There he reevaluates his blackness in light of Tahiti's transition to a new government and realizes, more than ever, that the prejudice and misery he faces is part of a much more complex network of power

relations and an economic system of coercive political interests. As a result, he understands the reassertion of his blackness as important to the plight of the Tahitians against whites' fear of a black revolt, as evidenced by his violent demise.

In what follows of this chapter, I trace how inversion is instantiated in *La piel* as a symbolic literary device that Hernández-Catá aesthetically configures to foreground the binaries that frame the portrayal of race and blackness in the novel. I begin by examining the dichotomies portrayed in the book's artwork, the changes and additions to the text between editions, and the paratexts (prologues, reviews, etc.) of three editions of the novel: the first two published in 1913 and 1915, and the one from 1928. A discussion on the formal aspects of the text explains how Eulogio's story came to be as a result of the inscription of history and representation of sociopolitical life in realist literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Then I discuss the structural aspects of the text, particularly the first five pages of the narrative, which introduce Eulogio as a character almost abstracted from history before the abolition of slavery, as though his death had never happened, therefore making his story more universal to discourses and processes of racialization and subjectivity.

Following that, I demonstrate how in the first part of the story, Eulogio's ahistorical representation stresses even more the significance of time and space as historical elements important to discourses and practices of racialization. I specifically examine how he attempts to medically change the color of his skin in part one of the story in order to invert his blackness to whiteness as a corollary of "black inferiority" versus "white superiority." This leads into a discussion on racial inversion, a term that I "coin" based on the symbiosis of discourses on race and sexual inversion that often bled into and buttressed each other during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of eugenics and hygienic and sexual reform. Eulogio's inversion as an act on the body urges me to use the term *racial inversion* much in the same way that gender roles were reversed based on the embodied sexual inversion of masculine to feminine behaviors, and vice versa. I pair this with a

critical discussion on W.E.B. DuBois' theory on double consciousness as discussed by Paul Gilroy in order to add racial inversion to its theoretical framework. This addition would include acts and not only psychological states of racial duality that are affective, altering both the sentient and material constitution of the black subject.

This critical discussion is further illustrated by an analysis of the few sentences that were definitively added to the 1915 edition of the first part of the story in which Eulogio compares himself to Douglass, Lewis, and Dumas (all of mixed race like him). He aspires to be revered like they were, regardless of the color of their skin, but he questions whether he will be as successful as them and overcome the stigma on his blackness in time to obtain racial equality in Tahiti. I suggest that Hernández-Catá poses this dilemma as the thesis of the novel in order to problematize the devastating effects of racial inversion and sociopolitical tensions in the text, and to point towards the necessity of racial equality even though it is not achieved. Therefore, I argue that while the racial tensions that the black-skinned subject is conditioned to internalize leads to his death, they also do not go unchallenged by Eulogio's willpower and agency in the struggle for social justice. I show how this characterization invites us to look at the many facets of Hernández-Catá's aesthetical response to the modern subject's historical positioning and agency, particularly his internal development within a dynamic period of racial and political conflict. Lastly, I expand on these aspects by interpreting the story as an allegory of the historical racial tensions in Tahiti and Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century, which in my view are what inspire Hernández-Catá to write the story and bring it into the consciousness of readers and the transnational imaginary. In so doing, *La piel* portrays racial inversion as a personal struggle that parallels the reversal (*inversion*) of inequality, demonstrating both the potentially beneficial or dire consequences of modern subjectivity and racial inequities in the global landscape.

## 1.2. From Symbolic to Racial Inversions: Book, Image, and Text

### 1.2.1. Marrying the Book as Aesthetical Object to Its Content: Kiosk Literature and the Publication of *La piel*

Hernández-Catá took great care in presenting his best work in much the same way that he cared about the social issues that it addresses. According to its colophon, the sixth edition of *La piel* was published on 6 June 1928 as part of Hernández-Catá's short novel collection *Los frutos ácidos* (Acidic Fruits), just a little over four months before the first edition of his novel on sexual inversion, *El ángel de Sodoma* (The Angel of Sodom), was published (17 October). Then Hernández-Catá modified the narrative of *El ángel de Sodoma* for its second edition, published on 4 October 1929, which coincided with the publication in Madrid by the publishing house Renacimiento of his *Mitología de Martí* (Martí Mythology)—an homage to José Martí (1853-95), the “Father of Cuban Independence”—on 11 December that same year. Four years later he published *Un cementerio en las Antillas* (A Cemetery in the Antilles; 1933), a book decrying the dictatorial government of Gerardo Machado in Cuba during his first term as President from 1925 to 1927.<sup>70</sup>

The aforementioned texts deal with controversial topics such as homosexuality, racism, political upheaval, and social (in)justice, and the first two were published during the time that Hernández-Catá was director of their publishing house, Mundo Latino. That a seventh edition of *Los frutos ácidos* was published in 1931 in Barcelona and Buenos Aires instead of exclusively in Madrid (see footnote 6), points to the fact that the text and its content was as important as the other works previously mentioned, and that altogether they represent Hernández-Catá's continuous concern for the plight of the human subject in the midst of adversity. Moreover, the need to publish the same edition of 1928 denotes the significance of its content as a reflection of a turbulent

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<sup>70</sup> Machado modified the Constitution of 1901 in order to extend his power for a second term, pushing a number of amendments in order to seek re-election in the 1928 presidential election, which caused violent backlash from insurgent groups, war veterans, and political actors.

historical moment. Additionally, the sixth edition of 1928 marked the 15-year anniversary of the first edition, again underscoring the importance of the text, at least for a socially conscious writer such as Hernández-Catá. His draw toward sociopolitical matters paralleled his attention to the perfect execution of the book as both an aesthetical object (artistically and textually) and as an ethical medium, particularly in his role as editing director of Mundo Latino, which gave him the wherewithal to make his voice heard on controversial issues of the time.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, there is a symbiotic relation between author, book, text, and narrative that links fiction, history, and social reality from the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth. Tracing the changes that have been made to the book and text illuminate these relations in ways that makes the themes of *La piel* even more compelling with regard to blackness and social justice.

There are three main editions of *La piel* that I consider (also see “Appendix,” Table 1): (1) the first edition of 1913 published in Madrid by *El libro popular* (The Popular Book) with an illustrated front cover, eight illustrations in black and white dispersed in the narrative text, and Hernández-Catá’s handwritten signature on the last page of the story; (2) the 1915 edition published in Madrid by Renacimiento in the collection *Los frutos ácidos*, also containing an illustrated front cover, a short bibliographic review by Rafael Cansinos-Asséns,<sup>72</sup> a dedication to José Antonio González Lanuza, and a prologue addressed to the reader;<sup>73</sup> and (3) the 1928 edition published in

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<sup>71</sup> According to Cansinos-Asséns, Hernández-Catá was able to save the publishing house Mundo Latino from going bankrupt and closing because he had access to funding sources and he felt the “itch to dominate a publishing house whereby he could develop down to a tee his modern initiatives on the artistic presentation of the book, cover selections, typeface, paper and other factors of editorial success. . . . He, the director now of Mundo Latino” (“prurito de mangonear una editorial y desarrollar en ella sus iniciativas modernas en punto a presentación artística del libro, elección de cubiertas, tipo de letra, papel y demás factores del éxito editorial. . . . Él, el director ahora de Mundo Latino”; 358).

<sup>72</sup> Cansinos-Asséns (1882-1964) was a Spanish novelist, poet, translator, and literary critic.

<sup>73</sup> All editions of the collection *Los frutos ácidos* contain the short novels *El laberinto* (The Labyrinth), *La piel*, and *Los muertos* (The Dead), except for the 1928 edition, which does not contain *El laberinto* but adds *El viaje sin fin* (The Unending Voyage) and *El cristiano errante* (The Errant Christian). The 1953 edition contains the initial three short novels and adds, in whole or in part, other short novels such as *El sembrador de sal* (The Sower of Salt), *El drama de la Señorita Occidente* (The Drama of Lady Occident), *El tercer Fausto* (The Third Faust), and *Fuegos Fatuos* (Fatuous Fires). The illustration on the title page of the 1915 edition of *Los frutos ácidos* depicts a human skeleton wrapped in a cloak standing

Madrid by Mundo Latino—the publishing house that Hernández-Catá directed at the time—with no illustrations, no review, the same dedication, and the same prologue without an opening address to the reader but still addressing said reader later in the prologue’s text.<sup>74</sup>

The shift from featuring the 1913 version of *La piel* in the literary magazine *El libro popular* to incorporating the following editions into the collection of short novels *Los frutos ácidos* speaks to the kind of reception that Hernández-Catá envisioned for the text. *El libro popular*, for instance, was part of the boom in mass print culture in Silver Age Spain from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, which consisted of short novels, novelized films, plays, and poetry that sold out in kiosks at low prices to a cross-class and diverse readership including workers, women, and children inside and outside urban centers, nationally and internationally (Zamostny 10). This phenomenon came to be known as *literatura de quiosco* (kiosk literature), “diverse in theme, style, and ideology” and it drew from other forms of literature (3). Kiosk novels, for example, were informed by “magazines, newspapers, legal statutes, feminist essays, medical treatises, popular sexology and erotica, and film

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under a fruit tree, like a ghost or the Grim Reaper without the scythe, representing death. It holds the arms of a toddler wearing only underwear and attempting to play by, or pick fruit from, the tree away from the skeleton’s grasp.

<sup>74</sup> *El libro popular* was a literary magazine published from 1912 to 1914 in Madrid, Paris, and Buenos Aires that every Tuesday featured a complete and unpublished novel with illustrations. Prior to Hernández-Catá, it had published recognized authors such as Eduardo Zamacois, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent, and Hernández-Catá’s brother-in-law, Alberto Insúa. The previous year, in 1912, it had published prominent writers such as Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán, Carmen de Burgos, the Guatemalan literary critic and diplomat Enrique Gómez Carrillo, among others. The novel’s last page bears Hernández-Catá’s signature. There is a 1919 digitized edition published in Madrid by Atenea that includes an additional dedication handwritten by Hernández-Catá but that is illegible. Otherwise, it is the same as the 1915 edition. There is also a seventh edition in print published in 1931 but it is the same as the 1928 edition, therefore establishing the latter (i.e., 1928) as the latest, definitive version of the text. The 1931 edition was published in Madrid as well but, unlike the 1928 edition, it was also published in Barcelona and Buenos Aires. According to Cansinos-Asséns, Hernández-Catá directed Mundo Latino whereby he published other acclaimed works of his such as *El bebedor de lágrimas* (The Drinker of Tears; 1926) and the 1928 and 1929 editions of *El ángel de Sodoma*, the first and second editions respectively (358, 360). He does not specify for how long he was its director but one can guess that he held that position from at least the time of the publication of his novel *El placer de sufrir* (The Pleasure of Suffering) in 1921 to the publication of the seventh edition of *Los frutos ácidos* in 1931, that is, during the time that his works were published by Mundo Latino. Other titles of his that were published by Mundo Latino during that time frame include the definitive 1922 edition of *Pelayo González* (first published in 1910), *La muerte nueva* (The New Death; 1922), *La casa de fieras: bestiario* (The House of Beasts: Bestiary; 1922), *El corazón* (The Heart; 1923), the translation to Spanish of Colette’s *La maison de Claudine* (*La casa de Claudina; Claudine’s House*; 1923), *Libro de amor* (Book of Love; 1924), and *Piedras preciosas* (Precious Gems; 1927).

culture ... In the process, they reveal continuities and ruptures of theme and form between a range of cultural objects” (6). Zamostny describes it as follows:

[T]he most successful series [of kiosk literature] focused on characters and situations relevant to evolving social realities of their time. Thus, kiosk texts provided readers a means of grappling with the instabilities of modern life even as the collections themselves, with their planned obsolescence, materially embodied those same instabilities. To play on the name of one famous collection, *La Novela de Hoy* (1922-32), ‘today’s novel’ sought to capture the present, but it was destined to become yesterday’s novel and, in many instances, tomorrow’s dust. (3)

The fear of being cast into oblivion perhaps motivated Hernández-Catá to transition into publishing his texts in full-length books and to target a different, more learned, audience.

As Zamostny notes, kiosk literature suffered harsh criticism by many intellectuals and literary critics “on the grounds that [it] sacrificed aesthetic merit to commercial appeal and degraded the taste of Spanish readers by peddling erotica, pornography, and anarchist propaganda” (8). Writing about said topics led to the censorship of some Spanish writers such as Álvaro Retana, Artemio Precioso, and Joaquín Belda during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera in Spain (1923-30) (9). Hernández-Catá, nevertheless, was reserved in the way he handled delicate or controversial topics, and the sale of *La piel* by *El libro popular* would have put the text in the hands of a wider readership, thus granting it recognition in the future as a book.

Starting December 1912, *El libro popular* included signed works by prestigious writers in a section titled “Gazetilla Semanal” (Weekly Gazette) and literary texts were added to issues in addition to the usual short novel. Hernández-Catá’s poems “Estrofas” (Stanzas), for example, was one of these added literary works. Julio Milego writes the following in his review of *El libro popular*: “So, as such, the release of *El libro popular* should be celebrated by all of us who call ourselves journalists. It coincides with the constitution of the anticipated Society of journalists. These are all signs of the times on which everyone should meditate” (“Así, pues, la salida de «El libro popular» debe ser festejada por todos los que nos llamamos periodistas. Viene a coincidir con la constitución de la Sociedad previsor de periodistas. Todo ello señales de los tiempos son que deben hacer

meditar a todos”; 3). A sign of the magazine’s success was the editorial notes frequently included in the publication announcing that certain numbers had sold out (Correa Ramón 28). Recognition of the magazine would have dovetailed with exposure to the novels it featured, therefore Hernández-Catá may have submitted *La piel* to the magazine as a springboard for later editions, adding to the zeal he already put into disseminating his literature. He would continue to contribute to kiosk magazines by submitting short novels and stories such as *El aborto* (The Abortion; 1922) to the magazine *La Novela Corta* (The Short Novel), and *El cristiano errante* (The Errant Christian; 1927) and *La niña débil* (The Frail Girl; 1931) to *La Novela de Hoy* (The Novel of Today), among others. At one point he tried to merge his interest in social issues with kiosk literature by directing a series with poet and journalist Luis de Oteyza, *La Novela Vivida* (The Lived Novel), covering catastrophes and current events (Zamostny 42).

Hernández-Catá’s preoccupation with publishing goes back as early as 1912, just before the publication of *La piel*, in a letter to Cuban writer and dramaturge José Antonio Ramos (1885-1946),<sup>75</sup> and this concern persisted throughout most of his career as stated in a letter to Cuban intellectual and lawyer Mariano Aramburu y Machado (1879-1941), dated 12 October 1928:

I work a lot on small literary projects to help myself since my salary is minimal and the necessities multiply as the children grow. Since I don’t write novels for the masses, my books are barely sold, therefore I should appeal to collaborations and similar projects in which I can disperse my energy. I don’t complain: there are worse destinies. But I would like a couple of years of peace before I die to attempt something that’s most invigorating. I read and think daily, and I consider everything I’ve done up to here to be a learning process.

Trabajo mucho, en menudas tareas literarias, para ayudarme, pues el sueldo es mínimo y las necesidades aumentan al crecer los hijos. Como yo no escribo novelas para el gran público, mis libros se venden poco, así que he de apelar a colaboraciones y trabajos similares en los cuales la energía se desperdiga. No me quejo: hay destinos peores. Pero quisiera siquiera un par de años de paz antes de morirme para intentar algo de mayor aliento. Leo y pienso diariamente, y considero todo lo hecho hasta aquí como aprendizaje. (Romero 97)

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<sup>75</sup> See Romero’s *Compañeros de viaje*, pp. 22-26.

Although he had a diplomat's salary, Hernández-Catá also had five children and a wife to support, therefore he depended on the publication and distribution of his works in order to gain royalties from their sales. He expressed on occasion in letters to colleagues and friends his frustration with the slow or low publication and distribution of his books. As Hernández-Catá admitted, he wanted to target a specific audience and, as such, tried to publish his works as books instead of in magazines with more established publishing houses such as Renacimiento in Madrid, Garnier Hermanos in Paris, and his very own Mundo Latino, but the profit from kiosk literature would have favored him more. He probably managed to publish seven editions of *La piel* due in no small part to its initial dissemination by *El libro popular*. Yet while he understood the immediate financial relief that kiosk literature could afford him, he was much more interested in stirring the consciousness of his readers as we will see in the prologue to *Los frutos ácidos*.

The proliferation of literary collections in Spain during the first decades of the twentieth century was part of a renewal in literature and the utilization of mass market production geared towards promoting “the middle classes’ exposure to what was called ‘new literature’” (“el acercamiento de las clases medias a lo que se denominaba «nueva literatura»”; Correa Ramón 30). As Zamostny explains, kiosk literature sometimes “displayed a sophisticated interplay of marketing and aesthetic strategies” (8). *El libro popular*, for instance, followed the publishing model of the pioneering *El Cuento Semanal* (1907-12) directed by Cuban-Spanish novelist Eduardo Zamacois (1873-1971).<sup>76</sup> Soon after its proprietor committed suicide due to financial ruin, Zamacois launched an identical magazine, *Los Contemporáneos*, which published an impressive 879 issues. Zamacois’s magazine included all the elements that we see in *El libro popular*: “front cover displaying the name of the collection, the title of the work and the name of its author, and an illustration with the author’s

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<sup>76</sup> According to Zamostny, “*El Cuento Semanal* was the first novel collection by Spanish authors to take the form of a magazine rather than a book” (34).

photograph or caricature ... Later on, the image of the author was replaced by a color drawing related to the novel” (Zamostny 35).

Such is the case with the cover art for *La piel* in *El libro popular*. Technological advances and commercial growth of literature led to high demand for graphic artists, especially for short novel collections and graphic weeklies. Zamacois’s *El Cuento Semanal*, in particular, used the latest graphic art techniques and technologies, making it one of the first to catapult the graphic artist profession. Publishing directors, like Zamacois, “made sure they relied on top-of-the-line graphic artists for their publications and sought to attain the notable quality of their printed drawings, as they were aware of the effective profitability of their product sales” (“procuraron contar con artistas gráficos de primera línea para sus publicaciones y conseguir una notable calidad en la impresión de sus dibujos, sabedores de la efectiva rentabilización en la cifra de ventas de su producto”; Vela Cervera 21). The more well-known the artist, the more likely readers were to buy a magazine that featured their art, thus placing a level of expectations on the artist to deliver, particularly if the work in which the art is featured is also of quality (54).

According to Vela Cervera, Hernández-Catá’s *La piel* is a standout example of when the literary merit of the narrative corresponds with the high artistic quality of its illustrations (59). The cover art and in-text illustrations of the first edition of *La piel* complement the descriptions in the story in addition to giving the reader a visual of what people at the beginning of the twentieth century might have worn for clothing and how artists may have intended to depict them (see “Appendix,” Figure 4). They were eliminated in later editions perhaps at the discretion of the publisher or on Hernández-Catá’s request in order to target a different audience.<sup>77</sup> In fact, most of

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<sup>77</sup> Cansinos-Asséns writes that Hernández-Catá was very particular about the design of the books that Mundo Latino published under his direction, particularly his own, and that he often was very critical of the artists that contributed to his projects. In public they lauded the Cuban writer for his know-how but then hypocritically complained about him to others behind his back (360).

the texts that were published under his direction had very little or no illustrations, with the exception of the short story collection *Manicomio* (1929).

A few of the novels and stories that he wrote were first published in literary magazines. Normally, these were illustrated editions that appealed to a wider public of readers interested in more accessible literature. However, subsequent editions of his works, especially the ones published during his direction of the Mundo Latino press, did not include illustrations. Their front covers might have included an artistic rendering of their titles but the rest was only text; and we can only speculate on the reasons for their elimination in later editions of *La piel* because Hernández-Catá left no written explanation. Nevertheless, we can assume that Hernández-Catá had a significant degree of involvement in the editing and publishing processes based on how well the cover art of his novels matched their content and the textual mark he left in each work, whether through his signature or a paratext of some sort, such as a prologue or epilogue.

### 1.2.2. An Inverted Aesthetic: Intersecting Art, Literature, and Race in the 1913 edition of *La piel*

In light of the circumstances of publication, the art accompanying the first and second editions of *La piel* is worth discussing because that is where we notice the workings of inversion for the first time. The artist of the images in the first edition of 1913 was Spanish writer and illustrator Salvador Bartolozzi Rubio (1882-1950), who became one of the most valuable, sought-out, and distinguished graphic artists in Madrid during the second decade of the twentieth century, the same time that *El libro popular* was published. Bartolozzi's art is imbricated with historical and political content and aesthetically follows the artistic trends of the period, from modernism to the avant-garde. Vela Cervera describes his art as reflecting a very personal reading of literature that addresses the dominant sociopolitical themes and historical events of the day:

...the woman, the contrast between the marginal world and cosmopolitan environments, the interpretation of the regional and chasticism of Madrid, the impact of the World War, etc.—.

Bartolozzi equally shares the condition of 'plastic journalists,' which illustrators assume are experienced interpreters of the present and of the historical events of the period, not only via the political caricature, but in the variety sections or in the actual illustrations, like witnesses of the becoming of attitudes and fashions of their time.

...la mujer, el contraste entre el mundo marginal y los ambientes cosmopolitas, la interpretación de lo regional y del casticismo madrileño, el impacto de la Guerra Mundial, etc.—. Participa igualmente Bartolozzi de la condición de "periodistas plásticos" que asumen los dibujantes como avezados intérpretes de la actualidad y de los hechos históricos del periodo, no sólo desde la caricatura política, sino en las secciones de variedades o en las propias ilustraciones, como testigos del devenir de actitudes y modas de su tiempo. (17)

The front cover of the first edition follows Vela Cervera's description by depicting what appears to be a female figure, based on the shape of its bust, although this could be a result of the way the clothing falls against the belt around the waist, otherwise it can also be a man (Figure 2). Another indication that it could be a woman is the figure's holding of what seems like a loom for weaving, although this practice can be traced to men as in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii where they served as carders (or combers) and weavers, while women were spinners. Sometimes men wove for market production while women were often relegated to domestic spaces (Thompson 217-22). The practice was also a part of life in the South Pacific as Fischer has pointed out (72, 78).



Figure 2. Front cover art of the first edition of *La piel* (1913) by Salvador Bartolozzi as featured in the literary magazine *El libro popular*.

Vera Cervera postulates, however, that the figure is holding a “rudimentary” stringed instrument, like a lyre or small harp (59). This interpretation is more plausible considering the otherwise elaborate design of the sides of the instrument and that there are eight strings shown on only the left side of it as opposed to those of a loom, which would have strings covering the entire space in-between, and sometimes in place of, the side panels. The gestures of the figure’s arms and hands also emulate that of a musician. Seeing that the figure is black, barefoot, and wearing simple, monochromatic, and tattered clothing, it could be that the portrait is a depiction of a poor native. The white color silhouetting the figure’s black skin, specifically the right hand, legs, and hair could be part of the lighting projected onto the figure that is creating the black shadow to the right of the frame. The parts of the garment that seem torn actually resemble the woven strings on the bottom of the lyre, which bleed into the ragged parts of the white attire as well as the figure’s left hand to the extent that we cannot tell if the white garment is being patched to its original white color, thus giving more importance to the white clothing, or if the white garment is being undone and reworked from the black skin of the figure.

The juxtaposition and symbiosis of whiteness and blackness in the front cover’s image is perhaps a parallel to Eulogio’s story, in which the doing or undoing of the white garment is the becoming and unbecoming of the character. It seems to me, however, that the value of blackness is what is at stake. For instance, the figure is given a shadow, one obviously produced from an external light. The direction of the illumination is important because it is not facing the figure, instead it is projected onto its side. In my view, this is strategic in order to symbolically place blackness and whiteness adjacent to each other in the perception of the viewer. Furthermore, the shadow is quite prominent. Normally shadows do not appear as exact, life-size, and equal reflections of their source. Seeing that the shadow is tall and prominent, it probably is being reflected on a wall instead of solely on open ground, in which case it would extend itself horizontally instead of vertically. The depiction

and vertical position of the shadow and the stance of the figure seem affected or planned, as though the artist wanted to design the figure as posing for a portrait. As such, the image may come across as contrived.

Many of the 106 issues of *El libro popular* showed an image of its featured novels in their front covers, usually under their titles, in order to complement their content. As such the cover art of *La piel* could very well reflect Eulogio's character as another example of a person who embodies the ambiguity of the black/white racial dichotomy. The lyre that the figure holds, for example, may represent the creative process of literary production and poetic inspiration brought about by the black muse that will orchestrate the novel's complex story of race and blackness. Perhaps this is why the figure's stance is almost mechanical because the focus is as much on itself as it is on, not only the creator of the image, but, more important, the writer of the story. This planned posturing resembles the making of portraits. At the same time, these aspects of the art piece can be saying more than this if linked to Eulogio's story and his characterization. If we notice, the figure has no visible facial features, despite facing the light that creates its shadow. This points to one of the main problems of the story—the identity of the racialized subject. Who is this figure? Are we to identify it based solely on the color of its skin and/or the white clothes it wears? If they are tattered and woven, does this and the figure's bare feet imply that the person is of low socioeconomic status, or a native/slave? Does the faceless person with tattered clothing exacerbate the inhumanity of poverty and the dehumanization of slavery? Or is the figure's black skin and its prominent shadow, posture and role as a musician grounds for a more individualized subjectivity and autonomous form of human dignity?

As Vera Cervera asserts, Bartolozzi's art is best defined by its convergence of opposites: “difficult simplicity, mixture of ingenuity and perversion, infantilism and cruelty... In his best drawings, the Madrilenian is capable of showing *both sides* of an issue, provoking at the same time

attraction and repulsion, disentailing elegance and vulgarity simultaneously” (“difícil sencillez, mixtura de ingenuidad y perversión, infantilismo y crueldad... En sus mejores dibujos, el madrileño es capaz de mostrar *el haz y el envés* de un asunto, provocando al tiempo atracción y repulsión, desentrañando al tiempo la elegancia y la vulgaridad”; 45; ellipsis in original; emphasis added). This description aligns with the general definition of *inversion* or *reversal*, marking the transition from one side of an entity to its opposite side (“el haz y el envés”) as well as the interdependence between the two. It also aligns with the definition of symbolic inversion mentioned in chapter one (page 42), which converges what would otherwise be two contradictory symbols or elements.

The cover art to *La piel* depicts the convergence of whiteness and blackness, provoking the inversion of blackness to whiteness and vice versa. It also begs the question of personhood and subjectivity as it relates to how being and subjects are constructed by society and brought into existence via symbolic referents and discourse; and of identity in the ways that subjects are defined by language and semiotic categories. As Álvarez Amargós insightfully notes, *La piel* follows the thought of Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo* and José Enrique Rodó’s *Ariel* regarding “the continuous search for belonging based on the question of who we are, inherent in the colonized man” (“la búsqueda continua del espacio propio a partir de la pregunta de quiénes somos, inherente al hombre colonizado”; 4). Vera Cervera’s assertion about Bartolozzi’s cover art to the novel adds to this discussion as it pertains to civilization/barbarism and colonizer/colonized when he writes: “Bartolozzi follows very freely the details of the plot’s intrigue [in *La piel*], especially highlighting the contrasts between the primitivism of Tahiti and the two faces of civilized Europe, depressive Birmingham, and the more amiable Parisian life” (“Bartolozzi sigue muy libremente el pormenor de la intriga [de *La piel*], marcando especialmente los contrastes entre el primitivismo de Taití y las dos caras de la civilizada Europa, la deprimente Birmingham y la más amable vida parisina: elementos claves para desentrañar el sentido de la novela y de la evolución del personaje”; 59).

Following this logic, it could be said that Eulogio Valdés, the novel's protagonist, embodies the aforementioned dichotomies as a former slave in and native of Tahiti who straddles the “primitivism” (“barbarism”) of the Tahitians and the “civilized” spaces of England and France. Nonetheless, as Vera Cervera points out, there are two faces to the civilization portrayed in the novel, one of which is drawn along hypocritical racial lines. The racism and corruption that Eulogio encounters in the European cities shows the inverted, treasonous side of “civilization,” jeopardizing his sense of belonging and self-realization. More important to note is the fact that Eulogio neither entirely leans towards one pole of the barbarian/civilized binary because he is learned, nor towards the colonizer/colonized dichotomy because he destabilizes it when he becomes a political leader.

### 1.2.3. Acidic Fruits: The Regeneration of the “Inverted Subject” and the 1915 edition of *La piel*

Hernández-Catá inverts concepts to mark their difference, underscore their interdependence, or deconstruct them to offer an alternative. As a result, two entities that are apparent opposites merge into each other, disperse, or transform into something else so as to offer an alternate reality, and/or to disclose an oftentimes paradoxical truth. We see this in the cover art to the 1913 edition of *La piel*, which deconstructs the barbarism/civilization binary in order to reveal the “two-faced” nature of civilization that hides its own viciousness in order to criticize the “primitiveness of the savage.” This idea is replicated in the cover art to the second edition of the novel, published in 1915 as part of Hernández-Catá's collection of short novels, *Los frutos ácidos* (Acidic Fruits). It depicts death personified as a living human skeleton dressed in a heavily draped and shadowy cloak (like the Grim Reaper, but without the scythe) restraining a child from playing by, or being assisted or restrained from picking fruit off a tree (Figure 3). The child could represent the unripe fruit while the skeleton could represent death and that which rots. The cover art is not exclusive to *La piel* but representative of the short novel collection as a whole, the stories of which deal with other topics

other than race. However, it gives continuity to the barbarism/civilization binary portrayed in the cover art of the 1913 edition by depicting the barely clothed and young-aged child as a symbol of the primitiveness that comes with a lack of knowledge and exposure to civilization. I argue that Hernández-Catá problematizes this binary in *La piel* by dealing with the complexities of pain and death in Eulogio's life, universal themes that are depicted in the image to the second edition of 1915.

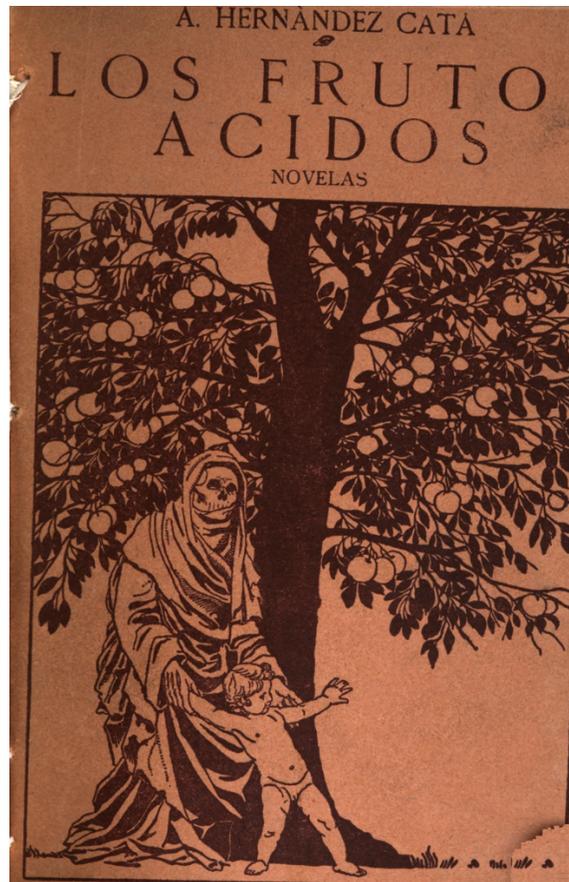


Figure 3. Front cover art of the 1915 edition of *Los frutos ácidos*.

In *La piel*, he portrays death not so much as a tragic finality but as a revelatory truth of human experience that highlights the painful path leading to it and a person's response to its inevitability, like the skeleton's grip on the child. At the same time, the child's resistance to death's pull demonstrates its ability to act on its own will, whereby it will have to find the inner strength to face life's challenges regardless of circumstances that attempt to control its fate. Eulogio must do the

same whereby he must learn how to overcome his own critical perceptions of primitivism and internalized racism—and that of other—in order to survive and achieve self-fulfillment. This process entails dismantling the determinism of the barbarism/civilization divide in order to prove the worth and value of *his own* determination. The prologue to the collection makes clearer the meaning of this conflict in relation to its cover art and title, whereby Hernández-Catá inverts symbols that further complicate the oppositional binaries underlying subjectivity, race, and agency in the story.

Appearing for the first time in the 1915 edition and in the ones published thereafter, the prologue states that the nexus uniting all the novels in *Los frutos ácidos* are their two protagonists: Pain and Death (“el Dolor y la Muerte”; 6). Hernández-Catá relies on inverting sweet fruit to the bitter kind in order to contrast the experience of pleasure and life with that of pain and death:

And after such a long preamble, reader, I open the door of the garden that I cultivated for you—and for me as well, believe it or not—with love. Since it is my garden, I cannot tell you if the shade will be pleasing to you nor if you will be able to stop your anxieties in order to sadden you with those of fictional beings made of passions and with features of real beings. The door is already open: look at the white walls, the ground where the autumn breeze drags crispy gold leaves; that is the tree of the acidic fruits, reader. You can extend your hand and pick the ones you like; I give you what I have. When the fruit is more pure and sweeter, I will also give it to you.

Y luego de tan largo preámbulo, lector, te abro la puerta del huerto que cultivé para ti—y para mí también, no creas—amorosamente. Como es mi huerto, no puedo decirte si la sombra te será grata ni si podrás hacer un alto en tus preocupaciones para entristecerte con las de seres fingidos hechos de pasiones y de facciones de seres reales. Ya está abierta la puerta: mira las tapias blancas, el suelo por donde arrastra la brisa otoñal hojas de oro crujiente; aquel es el árbol de los frutos ácidos, lector. Puedes tender la mano y coger los que gustes; te doy lo que tengo. Cuando los frutos sean más acendrados y dulces, también te daré. (6-7)

The prologue, as this excerpt shows, also reads like a preface because it not only “establishes the situation in which the tales will be told,” it also introduces the author’s intentions and discussion on the contents of the work (Beckson 164, 165).<sup>78</sup> Indeed, what’s revelatory about this excerpt is the

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<sup>78</sup> Gérard Genette uses the term *preface* “to designate any type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it” and he includes the prologue in a list of prefatorial forms of communication (161).

tone, perspective, and direction of Hernández-Catá's narrative voice. Its tone is honest about the somber nature of the book's content, while it also is inviting in a non-threatening way as a result of the play with the inversion of the sweetness/bitter binary.

The title of the collection, on the one hand, seems contradictory because we normally associate fruit with sweetness and not bitterness due to its sugar content. On the other, it appears to be evident that fruit, in general, is acidic, particularly citrus fruit, such as grapefruit and strawberries. Something that is acidic can also be sour, sharp-tasting, or insipid. At the same time (and what is the first conceptual inversion that we see in the text), we know that fruit, even the sweetest kind, is acidic when it is unripe or rotten. Some fruit remains acidic from its unripe stage to its rotting, therefore representing the immutability of time as though it were infinite, in a constant present. The fruit of Eulogio's life can be seen in this way whereby its beginning and end do not completely define him but rather what occurs in the in-between, throughout the process of his becoming as a person. In fact, pain, like acidity, is a process, often unexpected. At the same time, the inevitability of pain and death allows one to reevaluate and learn from the past and alter the future. Therefore, the commencement and finality of Eulogio's life is not always predetermined by nature and fate, or primitivism and fatalism, as is often thought of Hernández-Catá's characters. Although his characterization reproduces stereotypes of blackness, and circumstantial forces seem to dictate his painful "destiny," his response to these developments indicates that he has not entirely lost control of his agency and ability to decide how to resist or accept them.

This brings us back to the cover art. Death is personified as the skeleton holding the hand of the toddler, a metaphor to the deadly nature of the acidic fruit hanging from the tree. The child represents the innocence and naiveté of young age, unrestrained to experiment and adventure, and lacking the wisdom of lived experience. The only options for the child are a life full of suffering and death in what seems like a morbidly predetermined fate. However, death is not shown as keeping the

child from the tree in a more protective gesture, such as an embrace, nor is the child looking to death as a safeguard from danger. Instead, the child seems to be resisting death's grip. While this visual can stress the idea that life is beholden to suffering and the inevitability of death, the child's resistance underscores the choice of experiencing life's acidity, bitterness, and suffering *at will*, even in the case of death assisting the child to pick the fruit.

This interpretation turns the focus of the image's meaning from one of finality to one of a process that unfolds and that can be changed by the will of the individual, like the narrative of *La piel* in which Eulogio's past memories are told as if occurring in an unfolding present. The focus on the unfolding, the present becoming of events and the ability to change the course of life detracts from the otherwise eschatological and naturalistic interpretations of Hernández-Catá's works by turning the reader's attention less to the tragic ends of its protagonists and more to the processes that lead to them, much like the acidity of fruit. Pain and death are realities of life that few people want to dwell on, yet Hernández-Catá urges his readers to reflect on their meaning and importance to human existence and realization. Such a reflection, furthermore, has moral and ethical import, particularly in delineating the value and dignity of Eulogio's blackness and personhood.

While the prologue to the book (the 'long preamble') is its actual opening, the garden as a metaphor to the book is also an aperture; an opening within an opening. In other words, the book is also a garden of text where author and reader meet, both taking a journey beyond the story itself, from the portrayal of fictional characters into the shade of passions and concerns of real people. As literary critic Cansinos-Asséns states in his review of the book: "As such, this Hernández-Catá ... now gives us, and by the diversity of chance, these *Acidic Fruits*, full of realist bitterness, and he confirms himself as inconstant, eclectic and opportune, with a bit of irony and a bit of sentimentalism, like a serene spectator of life" ("Así, este Hernández-Catá ... nos da ahora, y por diversidad del acaso, estos *Frutos ácidos*, llenos de acerbidad realista, y se nos confirma así vario,

ecléctico y oportuno, con un poco de ironía y un poco de sentimentalismo, como un sereno espectador de la vida”; 14).

Cansinos-Asséns accurately describes the Cuban novelist as an observant of life. Perhaps for this reason Hernández-Catá has a specific reader in mind for *Los frutos ácidos*. He leaves the door of his garden open so that the reader can empathize with the protagonists Pain and Death under the shade of the tree with acidic fruit, hence leaving room for self-reflection on the current state of being in the world, as Hernández-Catá did when writing his stories. Therefore, pain and death are not final destinations but windows into the garden of a person’s emotions, desires, successes, and failures:

It’s not about killing time, which in the end kills us. If a book isn’t an incorruptible arch under which the soul preserves, during some time—even during eternity, if God could give that gift—its wishes and experiences, it is paper that is written on in vain. In spite of its *diverse content*, this book has one profound nexus: they aren’t three novels collected at random; and although the characters change from one to the other, the two ideal protagonists—Pain and Death—will accompany you from the first page to the last.

No se trata de matar el tiempo, que a la larga nos mata, y si un libro no es arca incorruptible donde preserve el alma durante algún tiempo—y aun durante la eternidad si Dios otorgara ese don—sus anhelos y experiencias, es papel vano. A pesar de *la diversidad material*, tiene este libro un nexo profundo: no son tres novelas reunidas al azar; y aunque los personajes cambian de una a otra, los dos protagonistas ideales—el Dolor y la Muerte—te acompañarán desde la primera página hasta la última. (“Prólogo” 5-6; emphasis added)

Hernández-Catá has not written a book for pure pleasure but one meant to awaken the emotions of readers and raise their level of consciousness to the actual, albeit devastating, experiences of life.

Such is the garden that he has cultivated. It is not kept only for private pleasure and contemplation, nor is it enclosed, therefore transcending time and order; for the door to the garden is open to the world outside its walls, and its autumn leaves and pathway to death lead to an inevitable end but with revelatory possibilities (Ronnberg 146). This delineation of space takes us from the outer walls of the garden (the world outside; the public; Hernández-Catá’s sociohistorical context) to the door of its inner white enclosures (the book, *Los frutos ácidos*; the author, Hernández-Catá; the private), which would then lead us to the tree that rests in the center of the garden (life; the self; the

characters in the stories; the reader), and the fruit that hangs from it (the stories in the book; pain and death; the experiences of life).

There are conceptual inversions that can already be seen in this metaphoric picture: public/private, outside/inside, author-text/reader, and the inner mind/experience of the outside world. As Ronnberg postulates:

The garden paradise is the imagined locus of our beginning and end, the original matrix and *mandala* of life, fed by underground sources of living waters. ... Just as in processes of individuation one repeatedly circles the more accessible aspects of the personality, only gradually moving closer to the center, so in dream or myth one might have to circumambulate the outer garden wall many times before the portal to the interior garden is revealed. Physical or imaginal, gardens are often arranged to reflect designs of wholeness, a *quaternary form*, for example, with a fountain, *tree* or image of a deity in the center. (*ibid.*; emphasis added).

Although Hernández-Catá's garden could be shaped like a mandala, with a center and the four walls as its quaternary form (from the word *quaternity*, meaning a quadruple thing or multiple of four, such as a cross, a star, a square, an octagon, etc.), it does not have underground living waters as its life source, which is evidenced by the decaying leaves and the tree with putrid fruit (Jung 183). His garden has a beginning and end via the book he writes, which leads to death, but it is far from paradisaical, as in ideal, idyllic, or heavenly, and its wholeness is not felt in the stories of *Los frutos ácidos*, which portray fragmented characters that struggle to find complete self-fulfillment. Yet this is what Hernández-Catá wanted. Why?

Like the alchemists, Ronnberg argues for the tree's capability to renew and regenerate even in decay: "The tree knows how to find nourishment even in the dead stuff, assimilates its own deciduous rot and the earth's animal and vegetable decay" (130). According to Watson Weatherstone, decomposition and decay "are the yin to the yang of growth." This is the idea that Hernández-Catá tries to convey in the prologue to *Los frutos ácidos* when he cites the French writer, M. Elémir Bourges: "Apre et bon fruit" ("Bitter and good fruit"; 6). If we return to the cover art of the 1915 edition, we notice that the tree with acidic fruit is blooming. It does not look wilted or

drab. What is more, in the prologue, Hernández-Catá contrasts the bitter fruit harvested in the off-season (“fueron cogidos en agraz”) against the fruit that is harvested when it is pure and sweet (“Cuando los frutos sean más *acendrados* y dulces”; emphasis added). The word *acendrado* means, “Puro y sin mancha ni defecto” (“Pure and without tarnish or defect”; DAE). In other words, the fruit could be unsuitable for consumption or decaying, yet that is the fruit that Hernández-Catá offers to the reader. He even uses the hope of harvesting purer and sweeter fruit as a point of persuasion so that the reader does not forego eating the bitter or rotten kind first: “If they leave an astringent flavor on your lips, don’t think that the same tree will always produce them like that” (“Si te dejan en los labios un sabor astringente, no pienses que el mismo árbol ha de producirlos siempre”; 6). In other words, the tree will regenerate and renew its bounty to totality.

The tree that serves as a metaphor for the self in the garden—the center of the mandala—could be decaying as well. In myths, however, humans transform into trees, exhibiting their likeness, “upright in the trunk, long-armed, slender-fingered, toeing the earth. ... The tree shows us how, from a tiny, bare seed of potential, the self can come into existence, centered and contained, around which occur incessant processes of metabolism, multiplying, perishing and self-renewal” (Ronnberg 128). From perishing to self-renewing, we see an inversion of death to life. Trees symbolize regeneration, “a cosmos encompassing psychic spheres of refreshment, creativity and initiation transcending space and time” (130). For alchemists, the tree also signifies the inner life and induction into new existence, but it also represents suffering, “mythic suspensions of sacrifice, ordeal, suicide, execution and *reversal* ... the beautiful symmetry of the tree’s corona signifying *the union of opposites* ... followed by new cycles of desiccation and growth” (*ibid.*; emphasis added). In order to illustrate this analogy, Ronnberg reproduces the image of the inverted “Tree of Bliss” depicted in an eighteenth-century Turkish prayer book that symbolizes psychic life and its sacred symbols, “rooted in invisible realms extending beyond the boundaries of consciousness” (131).

The problem with Eulogio in *La piel* is that he does not find wholeness but emptiness due in large part to the dissociation between his conscious and unconscious self. This dissociation is narrated at the end of the second part of the novel when Eulogio has a nightmare in which his conscious and unconscious selves come to life when he looks into a mirror:

That night he had a horrifying nightmare. ... Immense terror impelled him to walk, to run, to flee without knowing from whom..., from no one: from the prolonging emptiness around him. As soon as he looked in front of him, hopeful, believing what he saw: no..., it was his own image copied in the mirror. ... Then, full of fright, not daring to wait nightfall, he ran in the stillness and solitude on the way to the elevated bridge hovering over a pond, in the outskirts, willing to end that nightmare in suicide.

Aquella noche tuvo una pesadilla espantosa. ... Un pavor inmenso lo impelía a andar, a correr, a huir, sin saber de quién..., de nadie: del vacío que se prolongaba en torno suyo. Una vez miró frente a sí, ilusionado, creyendo ver: no... era su propia imagen copiada en un espejo. ... Entonces, despavorido, sin atreverse a esperar la noche, corrió en la quietud y en la soledad, camino del elevado puente tendido sobre un estanque, en las afueras, dispuesto a terminar con el suicidio aquella pesadilla. (200-01; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ellipses in original)

Once more, space, nature, and selfhood are intertwined in this excerpt (like the mandala-shaped garden) in which Eulogio's terrifying dream immerses him in the vacuity of his unconscious, leading him to thoughts of suicide; again, to death. That feeling of emptiness is reflected in his image in the mirror, thus serving as a reminder of the desolation he feels in his real life and the disassociation from psychic totality that he experiences. From the mirror of his inner self, we are taken to the outskirts of the city to the outside bridge where he contemplates suicide. The bridge rises above the pond of death between the world of the living and that of the dead. The juxtaposition of suicide with the pond as a symbol of decayed stagnation harkens back to the absence of water sustaining the life of the tree with acidic fruit. Therefore, what could be the mandala of totality between Eulogio's inner and outside experience of the world is not whole but fragmented.

### 1.3. “The Beginning of (His)tory”: Reinscribing the Memory of Colonization and Rediscovering the Racialized Subject

Fragmentation in the novel is contrasted with the uniform, unchanging, ahistorical memory of the beginning of Eulogio’s life in the first five pages of the novel. Here we get a sense of the boundaries of Eulogio’s consciousness, and its transcendence of history, when in the first sentence of the novel’s narration the events of his life are evoked by a virtually posthumous spell of the memory: “Every Friday afternoon, Eulogio Valdés, who was a methodical man, devoted time to remembering. He would climb up to the rooftop terrace, sit on a rocking chair with his shirt unbuttoned and, with the fan made out of palm tree on his legs and his eyes shut halfway, he would start abstracting himself little by little from the present and follow the course of his past life” (“Todos los viernes, por la tarde, Eulogio Valdés, que era hombre metódico, se dedicaba a recordar. Subía a la azotea, y sentado en una mecedora, con la camisa desabrochada, el abanico de palma sobre las piernas y los ojos a medio cerrar, iba poco a poco abstrayéndose del presente y remontando el curso de su vida anterior”; 157). The omniscient narrator of this excerpt recounts Eulogio’s story as happening in the past. Meanwhile, that same story is about remembering the past as a continuous work of the memory that is done every Friday, on the same rooftop, as though it were separate to Eulogio’s previous finite existence. It is a story narrated in the past about the past. In other words, the narrator tells Eulogio’s (his)tory by placing the reader in the character’s mind as he himself recalls his past, as though he had never died and became someone else, maybe a specter of the man he was before. He, and not the narrator, is telling it through free indirect speech, which allows the reader to witness his thoughts, perceptions, and desires as his own in this scene and throughout the novel. Therefore, the present, repetitive, and ongoing act of remembering simultaneously situates the reader within a historical account of Eulogio’s past life and in an ahistorical cycle of time that seems to have no end, if only through rememory (a term that I will return to shortly).

In the first five pages of *La piel* (157-61), the adult Eulogio remembers his life at his house in Tahiti. Then the reader is taken back in time to his childhood when he was a slave and he suffers a hemorrhage that almost kills him. The illness virtually puts him in a vegetative state after which he must regain his selfhood. Following the telling of his childhood in the slave plantation is, again, the Eulogio who recalls his life and gets reacquainted with his black body when he looks at it in a mirror. After the first section of the first five pages, there is a small blank space separating it from the next one, which begins with the following historical statement: “Al abolirse la esclavitud...” (“When slavery is abolished...”; 161). This gap indicates the passing of time from Eulogio’s childhood as a slave to his young adulthood as a freeman. Therefore, it also marks the transition from Eulogio’s memory of the past to a collective one (from individuation to socialization), from a personal history to one shared by both the colonizer and the colonized.

A closer look at the this first section blurs the lines between the past and what seems like the unending present of Eulogio’s life. It ambiguously presents him as a character abstracted from history due to the fantastical representation of real time and space in the narrative’s overture, where the cover art to the 1915 edition is alluded to and the symbols of the natural world are inverted, rendering Eulogio as a figure of the past but also as a timeless archetype to be remembered. Through this portrayal, Hernández-Catá may have risked encasing Eulogio’s subjectivity within the limits of archetypal fictional representation, made to fit into the mold of a constructed troubled identity, incapable of overcoming racial prejudice. However, when that representation is itself ambiguous and abstracted, it is consequently problematized and turned into a statement about the complexity and excess of subjectivity that escape predetermined notions and discourses of self-making and domination.

Problematizing representation as a form that narrativizes a “subject”—in both the topical and ontological meanings of the word—also disrupts historical discourse. Although *La piel* is not a

historical document, it directly mentions and alludes to historical events and realities (the topical subjects) that are pertinent to specific time periods and places. By leading the novel with a narration of how and what Eulogio remembers, Hernández-Catá prioritizes the memory of personal experience (of the personalized subject) in order to reevaluate its historical contextualization. *La piel* is *his*-story, told from the vantage point of a subaltern subject, the way that *Eulogio* remembers and experienced it. As a result, history is placed on a second plane to be reinscribed within the memorialized account of the marginalized individual. An individual who experiences two childhoods and whose knowledge of self is psychologically and geographically displaced by external forces that attempt to truncate his self-realization and sociopolitical resistance.

In the first few pages of his story, Eulogio's house stands as a memorial of his past. Once a week, he sits on its rooftop terrace to dedicate time to the method of memory work, then committing himself to remembering as he moves through the rooms that store the memories of who he was and his present self. In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine describes memory like "a great field or spacious palace, a storehouse," "vast mansions ... where are treasured innumerable images ... The huge repository ... with its secrets and unimaginable caverns" (1961: 214; 1998: 204-05). In *La piel*, Eulogio's house in Tahiti stands as a metaphor of memory that symbolizes the homeland and the place of origin. At the same time, it is described as a voyage evoking the recollection of acts or events in ways that parallel the images conjured by Saint Augustine's memory power, as seen emphasized in italics in the side-by-side English translation below:

La barca del recuerdo tardaba, a veces, mucho tiempo en hallar el rumbo, entorpecida por preocupaciones inoportunas; pero en cuanto el viento de la evocación henchía las velas, las playas de lo actual quedaban detrás, borrábanse; y cada vez era un delicioso viaje al través de hechos que, de pronto, se presentaban como desconocidos; que iban lentamente detallándose, hasta aparecer, tamizados por la distancia y desprovistos del sentido perentorio que tuvieron un día, con ese hechizo que suponemos podríamos imprimir a nuestra existencia si nos fuera otorgado el milagro de volverla a vivir.

Recordaba la finca de campo donde transcurrió su niñez...

Sometimes, *the ship of the memory* took a long time to find its course, retarded by inauspicious concerns; but once the evoking wind expanded its sails, *the beaches of the present* stayed behind, vanishing; and every time it was a delicious voyage through *events* that, all of a sudden, presented themselves as unknown; that slowly were becoming clearer, until appearing, sifted by distance and deprived of the peremptory feeling they had one day, *with that spell that we surmise we can brand to our existence if we were to be granted the miracle of living again. He remembered the plantation where he spent his childhood...* (*La piel*, 157-58)

All this goes on inside me, in *the vast cloisters of my memory. In it are the sky, the earth, and the sea, ready at my summons*, together with everything that I have ever perceived in them by my senses, except the things which I have forgotten. *In it I meet myself as well. ... In my memory, too, are all the events that I remember ... based either upon my own experience or upon what I find credible because it tallies with my own experience. I can fit them into the general picture of the past; from them I can make a surmise of actions and events and hopes for the future*, and I can

contemplate them all over again as if they were actually present. (*Confessions*, 1961: 215-16)

Eulogio's memory work presents similar ideas about the present, past, distances, hopes, and self-recognition that Saint Augustine's memory sets forth. In his voyage of remembrance, Eulogio's memory is a distant ship from his past that abstracts him from the beaches of the present. In other words, the past that he remembers is the one he lived in Europe away from the tropics of Tahiti, where he currently finds himself. At first the memories of '*hechos*' ('events' or 'acts') are foreign to the place of origin, but it is that separation in time and space that make them clearer as they merge with his current state of reflection.

According to its introducer Frigga Haugh and other developers, memory-work as a method is meant to break down the barriers between subject and object through an intersubjective process that explores the duality of the self. In phase one, a person self-reflects and in phase two it responds to others response to it. The phases, in particular, are not meant to imply that the "individual construction is logically or temporally prior to the social," nor to the material or affective. Instead memories are a collection of entities that "put the agent, the actor, back into psychology—in both method and theory—without falling into psychological individualism" (Onyx 775-76). While the method of memory-work is an exercise between people, it can also be applied to an individual's interactions with objects and environmental forces. It is individualism and agency that is at stake in Eulogio's voyage through his past, wishing that the acts (on which agency depends) and the events

(in which he and other entities are involved [non-individualism]) that he remembers could be part of a spellbound idyll so that he can live his life again, different to how he lived it in the past, which he now recalls. Based on the immediate transition from the last sentence of the second paragraph to the third about the plantation where he spent his childhood, it is understood that his life as a slave and freeman is the past he is referring to and that he wishes—like Saint Augustine’s hopes for the future—that he could live it differently in a new cycle of existence.

In an article regarding the consequentiality of childhood to adulthood, Ashraf H. A. Rushdy analyzes two types of anamnesis (recollection) that are present in the overture to *La piel*: recollection as “a genuine act of self-presencing” or as “an act of displacement or reconstruction” (300). According to Rushdy, the former is one that English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850) espouses in his poem “My Heart Leaps Up” (1802) in which the verse “The Child is the father of the Man” sings of memory as “an agency for revival and rehabilitation” (*ibid.*). Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) addresses the latter meaning of recollection in his work “An Outline of Psychoanalysis” (1940). Since the Austrian neurologist considers childhood as “a period of latency and ennui,” memory is an agency for constructing fantasies “in order to rid oneself of the residual neurosis of an imagined distress” (*ibid.*). Freud theorizes that these distresses are contained in primal scenes that a child recollects, which are mainly sexual, such as parents having intercourse or castration. Rushdy argues, however, that a primal scene need not be sexual but that it can be more broadly any episode of significance that an individual would recollect “at the crucial moment when driven to re-evaluate her or his life.” That recollection, according to Rushdy, becomes an opportunity for discovery of the self, and as African American writer Toni Morrison would have it, a *re*-discovery via “rememory,” a term she coins to refer to “a magical anamnesis [in narrative] available to one not involved in the originary act” (304). Therefore, rememory is interpersonal, similar to the phases of Haugh’s memory-work method. In *La piel*, however, interpersonality can also be intersubjective since through

a hint of fantasy we are given two Eulogios, the one detached from his historicized self and the one he recalls from his past, as though he were interacting with two versions of him within himself. Rememory is also spatial, where the historicized Eulogio disembarks from the ship of memory onto the shores of the house of the ahistorical Eulogio, while both remember Eulogio's past in the rooms of that space of recollection.

### 1.3.1. The Ethics of Rememory, Belonging, and Invisibility

In the beginning scene of *La piel*, Eulogio conjures the duality of the self in his memory-work, which converges various forms of time, space, subjectivity, and otherness all in one conflict of identity and self-realization. When his present and past converge, his present idyllic place of origin (the tropics of his unified self) turns into, or is *inverted* with, what it was in the past during colonization by Europeans (his dual, biracial/black self). It is a moment when Eulogio discovers *and* rediscovers himself through the repetitive act of recalling who he was. As Rushdy observes, Morrison's novel's "are concerned with how anamnesis serves and conserves a sense of self" (303). A methodical man, Eulogio comprehends the importance of memory work, as opposed to forgetting, in the interest of self-preservation and recognition of himself and his world. Considering that he does so every week, there is a separation between the Eulogio doing the remembering and the past Eulogio that he remembers, the stories of which are separate as well. The former then becomes a response to the latter, therefore framing the Eulogio of the past within a practice and ethics of remembering, acknowledgment, and agency that beckons critical postcolonial reflection of the implications of forgetting on the marginal subject's personhood and sense of belonging. As such, rememory is a practice of the characters in *La piel* and its readers, allowing both groups to discover Eulogio through his memory and then rediscover him through his narrative construction.

In her article on Edgar Reitz's 1984 film chronicle *Heimat*, Barbara Gabriel examines Germany's place as a nation in twentieth-century history, indicating that the myth of the *Heimat* (homeland) and the *Fremde* (foreigner) "who threatens to invade and disrupt it" is an "escape from ethical responsibility: not memory work but, rather, *forgetting* in a way that directly repeats the silences and evasions of the immediate postwar period" (151). By writing a text like *La piel*, whose premise of reversing one's racial identity from black to white is instantiated by the act of remembering, Hernández-Catá propounds an ethics of responsibility that demands a recognition of, and a toiling with, the consequences of colonization on the black subject in the margins, their humanity, self-worth, and autonomy. In citing Shotter's presentation of reflection as agency, Onyx underscores that it is by remembering that one can assume control of one's self-formation and resist structures of power that have claimed subjecthood: 'If we refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures, or to the social relations within which we have formed us, if we search instead for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our past experience, then the usual mode of social-scientific research, in which individuals figure exclusively as objects of the process of research, has to be abandoned.' (774). In this sense, *La piel* is a transmodern text that problematizes modernity's early reliance on established disciplines such as the social, biological, and physical sciences in order to usher in and comprehend a period of technological, industrial, and economic advancement. It is, rather, an example of the turn to unconventional forms of knowing and meaning that create subaltern narratives molded to capture the lack of uniformity and fractures in modern subjectivity, nationalism, and socioeconomic "progress." While the novel takes place as processes of modernity are underway, Eulogio's distant memory on the aftermath is characteristic of a transmodern reflection that situates the text and its author beyond their time and in the currents of postcolonial critique. His new reality can be interpreted as a temporal and spatial detachment that once a week is disrupted by his commitment

to not forgetting the consequences of natives' contact with Europeans and his consequential biracial, black identity.

Like Frederick Douglass' autobiographies, Eulogio starts his story with his upbringing. Similar to the race of the American abolitionist's parents, Eulogio's mother is a black native of Tahiti while his father is believed to be the white European slave owner of the plantation. The slave owner eschews paternal responsibility to Eulogio and sees him like any other slave. This is a result of the legal ramifications of paternal misrecognition and hierarchical caste of the slave system, which is the crux of the main argument of Cirilo Villaverde's magnum opus, *Cecilia Valdés*.<sup>79</sup> It tells the story of the interracial love between the mulatta Cecilia Valdés and the white man Leonardo Gamboa amidst the racial and class inequities in society in nineteenth-century Havana. Cecilia is born out of wedlock after the tryst between Leonardo's father, the Spanish slaveowner Cándido Gamboa, and Cecilia's black mother, Rosario. Since slavery prohibited interracial marriage, the father's last name is suppressed in order to prevent disclosing Cecilia's origin. Instead of taking her father's last name (Gamboa), she is named Cecilia Valdés, which ultimately marks her as an illegitimate product of miscegenation, and the love she has for Leonardo as incestuous since both share the same father: "Valdés" is the name that all abandoned children were given (López Cruz 60).

Méndez Rodenas points out that the suppression of the paternal name signals "the crossing between white and mulatto families" (90). As such, Cándido Gamboa has two families: a white one that he has with Doña Rosa, a white creole woman that he marries and that births Leonardo, and a racially black and ethnically mixed family with Rosario into which Cecilia is born. Under the system of slavery and the law, the former is socially privileged and legitimate while the latter is not, although

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<sup>79</sup> The first part of *Cecilia Valdés* appeared in the Cuban magazine *La Siempreviva* (roughly translate to "The Houseleek" or "The Sempervivum," which is in reference to the plant species) in the late 1830s before the definitive edition was published in its entirety in 1882, which allowed Villaverde to offer "a panoramic vision of most of the nineteenth century" ("una vision panorámica de la mayor parte del siglo XIX") and of real life in Cuba (López Cruz 60).

sexual intimacy between white men and mulattas was commonplace and socially acceptable to a degree, in addition to being “neither placed outside of the law, nor protected by it” (89). Only relationships between whites and their families were “real,” while others remained taboo or non-existent.<sup>80</sup> As a result, Cecilia’s birth is “concealed from society” while the master continues to have ownership of black and mulatta women’s bodies in a relationship that is mediated by power and desire: “Consequently, natural law [desire] and social law [jurisprudence] become confused, particularly for the intermediate layer of mulattos who really belong neither to one race nor to the other. This chaotic situation at the origin(s) leads to a filiation bred by concealment and ambiguity, the blurry origin of the mulatto woman represented by Cecilia” (88).

Such is the case with Eulogio, whose father denies him an existence legitimated by the law and that limits the emotional ties of kinship between him and his biological family (his mother and sister). The erasure of the black subject is brought about by a dismissal mixed in the act of forgetting that negates personhood. There is an insinuation of kinship in the first pages of the story but it is negated by disparaging black womanhood and motherhood. The priest asks him: “And this one is your son too?” (“—Y éste, ¿también es hijo tuyo?”). He responds: “Bah, all the women that get pregnant say the same thing; and I don’t understand their motives because it’s the same to me, and I beat with equal pleasure a child of mine as I would one of yours, if you had one” (“—Bah, todas las que salen embarazadas dicen lo mismo; y no sé el interés que tienen, porque a mí me da igual y apaleo con igual gusto a un hijo mío que a uno tuyo, si lo tuvieras”; 159). The slave owner’s relationship with his offspring is based on the preservation of his power and selfish desire as long as he can get his way. He is the ultimate authority that has the power to even punish the children of others. At the same time, he does not distinguish between children since he sees them as all the

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<sup>80</sup> Although Méndez Rodenas argues that Cecilia’s family acquires emotional realness as a result of the desire between Cándido and Rosario in contrast to the insipid relationship between him and his wife, Doña Rosa (88).

same under the whip of domination. As a result, they are, in his eyes, deprived of individuality, dignity, and value if only subservient to his own profit and gain. Outside of that, they are invisible and deprived of their humanity and of recognition. The paternal figure is significant to Eulogio's perception of self as it is connected to the social and legal ramifications of the neocolonial legacy of enslavement that is tied to the broader transnational system of coercion that jeopardizes his life, family, and Tahitian compatriots. As such, visibility and invisibility are paramount in the novel, particularly in the way that Eulogio is only visible to the white and mulatto male gaze insofar that he is made invisible by sending him away from his homeland, thus deterring his ascent to power and influence.

In the same fashion as Douglass' writings, Eulogio recounts the bildungsroman of his life, from a childhood in slavery to the tumult of living in freedom as an adult. It is upon a jogging of the memory that we are introduced to the young Eulogio living in a plantation with his mother, sister, and the children of other slave women. Aside from hunting lizards and glow worms, he would run in search of fruit, perhaps a nod to the child in the book's cover art discussed in the previous section. That is the moment when we learn about the hemorrhage that nearly kills eight-year-old Eulogio: "His mother and sister worked in the kitchen, and he, with the children of the other slave women, ran in search of fruit, on the hunt for lizards or glow worms in order to trap them in a bottle that, at night, was a living lamp... At the age of eight—without the cause of an accident—a terrible hemorrhage extenuated him, almost leaving him dead" ("Su madre y su hermana trabajaban en la cocina, y él, con los hijos de otras esclavas, correteaba en busca de frutas, a caza de lagartos o de gusanos de luz, para encerrarlos en un frasco que, de noche, era lámpara viva... A los ocho años, sin que accidente alguno la originara, una hemorragia terrible le extenuó hasta dejarlo sin vida"; 158; ellipsis in original). The mention of fruit can be said to be in juxtaposition with death, once again

giving continuity to the depiction in the cover art of the book of the child wanting to pick acidic fruit from the tree.

Indeed, the hemorrhage is the first serious bout of pain and near death that Eulogio experiences, causing him to lose his memory, ideas, and mobility. He essentially becomes a *tabula rasa*: “And he had to learn again how to walk, to situate himself with respect to basic phenomena, to stammer syllables that little by little came together, enunciating persons and things, formulating ideas. This incident caught the attention of the master and of a priest who visited the plantation assiduously” (“Y hubo de aprender de nuevo a andar, a situarse con respecto a los fenómenos elementales, a balbucir sílabas, que fueron poco a poco juntándose, enunciando personas o cosas, formulando ideas. Este hecho atrajo sobre él la atención del amo y la de un sacerdote, visita asidua de la quinta”; 157-58). As Eulogio recuperates his motor skills and cognition, the farm master and priest are introduced in the story, marking a new stage in the boy’s life when two of the most influential institutions of colonization—slavery and the Church—mold his cognitive development: “Once he had recuperated, don Antonio often called [Eulogio] to teach him how to read ... The slave owner listened in silence and smiled with that smile!... In a storybook, the child was able to find the image of those two faces unexpectedly leaning over him to observe his life” (“Luego que se hubo restablecido, don Antonio lo llamaba [a Eulogio] a menudo para darle lecciones de lectura ... El amo escuchaba en silencio y sonreía ¡con aquella sonrisa!... En un libro de cuentos el niño pudo hallar la imagen de aquellos dos rostros inesperadamente inclinados para observar su vida”; 159-60; second ellipsis in original). These two representatives of colonization cast their gaze over the “other” in order to observe him, as though he were a scientific anomaly. The priest teaches him how to read and the slave owner instructs him in geography and arithmetic, subjects that prove to be consequential throughout Eulogio’s life as an avid reader, diplomat, and in his involvement in Mr. Vatan’s financial scheme.

The priest and plantation owner represent the two systems of subjection that greatly influence how Eulogio perceives and navigates his self and environment. While the priest is benevolent in his eyes, there is a mistrust toward the slave owner of which Eulogio is weary: “Don Antonio was affable, with a serious countenance and solemn expressions; with regard to the master it was never known whether he spoke with anger or not ... a caustic intention could be seen through his words; he always smiled and punished the slaves with cruelty” (“Don Antonio era afable, de semblante serio y tardos ademanes solemnes; del amo nunca podía saberse si hablaba enfadado o no ... traslucíase tras sus palabras una intención mordaz; sonreía siempre y castigaba con saña a los esclavos”; 158-59). Although the slave owner provides Eulogio with instruction, he does so to feign kindness when, in truth, he manipulates the boy’s psyche and body by depriving him of basic needs:

He remembered how, feigning to acquiesce to Don Antonio’s desires, the master called him [Eulogio] to his direct service, taught him Geography, Arithmetic, and, according to his intelligence, as he [Eulogio] would glimpse new clarity, he [the master] took pleasure in sidetracking it with dry jokes that destroyed in an instant the effort [Eulogio’s] of several hours of tension to comprehend. One day he sat him [Eulogio] at his table, coddled him, and suddenly, without cause, he’d let him go without food and obligated him, with his belt raised high, to clean his boots; he brought him a little suit from the city, but he never let him wear it. He’d tell him, “When you become a man, I’ll take you to Paris with me and you’ll have teachers, cars, theaters, books, jewelry, women, everything... except food. One must follow pater’s [Father Antonio’s] advice, who swears that man does not live by bread alone. In the end, only the superfluous is necessary; you’ll see.” Eulogio opened his little, astonished eyes, frightened more by the gesture and by the smile than by the words...

Recordaba cómo, fingiendo acceder a los deseos de don Antonio, el amo lo tomó [a Eulogio] a su servicio directo, le enseñó Geografía, Aritmética, y, según su inteligencia, iba entreviendo nuevas claridades, complacíase en despistarla con bromas secas que destruían en un momento el esfuerzo [de Eulogio] de varias horas de tensión para comprender. Un día lo sentaba [Eulogio] a su mesa, lo mimaba, y de súbito, sin causa alguna, lo dejaba sin comer y le obligaba con el cinto en alto a limpiar las botas; le trajo un trajecito de la ciudad, pero no se lo dejó vestir nunca. «Cuando seas hombre, le decía, te llevaré conmigo a París y tendrás profesores, coches, teatros, libros, joyas, mujeres, todo... menos comida. Hay que seguir el consejo del pater [del Padre Antonio], que jura que no sólo de pan vive el hombre. Al fin, sólo lo superfluo es necesario; ya verás.» Eulogio abría sus ojitos atónitos, amedrentado más por el gesto y por la sonrisa que por las palabras... (160; ellipses in original)

The roles that the priest and owner play in Eulogio’s life illustrate the precarity of the protagonist’s humanity, dignity, and survival during slavery and its aftermath. For example, the scene above is a primal ‘scene of subjection,’ to borrow Saidiya V. Hartman’s title phrase in their book on

terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America. It also references Douglass' 1845 autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, in order to highlight how the famous scene of the beating of his Aunt Hester is an example of the making of the slave as an act of violence inborn to the enslaved, who simply for being born and for the color of their skin are subjected to the power and authority of others (3). Hartman does not reproduce the vicious scene in her book, in the same way that *La piel* only mentions in passing how Eulogio's slave owner beat slaves. Instead of spotlighting the theatrical narrations of these brutal scenes, Hartman's study focuses on the mundane forms of terror during slavery and its lingering legacy after abolition, specifically in efforts to restore the humanity and rights of slaves during Reconstruction: "[H]ow does one give expression to these outrages without exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the numbing spectacle or contend with the narcissistic identification that obliterates the other or the prurience that too often is the response to such displays? ... I am concerned with the savage encroachments of power that take place through notions of reform, consent, and protection" (4, 5). Although the owner in *La piel* treats other slaves with cruelty, such a dramatic spectacle illustrates more the theatrics of violence that Hartman's study puts on the back burner in order to frontload, instead, the psychological, ideological, and institutional forms of coercion and the passive witnessing (the spectators of the spectacle) of these latent forms of subjection that keep the formerly enslaved from living in freedom and reaching self-realization.

*La piel* does not include a scene of violence against the protagonist, although the threat is there with the foreboding presence of his owner. It does not go further than a threat, nevertheless, because Eulogio is treated differently perhaps due to his young age and illness. Once they realize that Eulogio is reacquiring cognitive skills on his own, the priest and owner see this as an opportunity to groom him for the priesthood and servitude. Perhaps Don Antonio saw the priesthood as a way to get Eulogio out of enslavement, and his direct service to the owner as a

method of appeasing him. Regardless of his perceived kindness, the priest takes advantage of the child's vulnerability in order to instrumentalize him to the Christian faith (the priest urges him to attend seminary as well), whose theology the slave owner distorts by misappropriating the priest's endorsement and making Eulogio believe that the Christian faith condones mistreating slaves through violence and privation. Furthermore, of what use superfluous pleasures and commodities in Europe would be to Eulogio if his body would be deprived of the physical nourishment, emotional nurture, and freedom necessary to enjoy them? On the one hand, the owner's offer foreshadows Eulogio's turn to the comfort of women and frivolous activities later in the short novel. On the other, he does so in order to assuage the estrangement he feels in the foreign settings of England and France as well as the sentiments of nostalgia that augment his yearning to return to French Polynesia.

The legacy of slavery follows him as he literally and figuratively embodies the deprivation of nourishment, the food necessary to sustain him not only physically when he goes broke in Europe but also spiritually when he is unable to narrow the distance that keeps him from Tahiti; the *Heimat* or place of origin where through social justice he could find self-fulfillment. It would be a return to the primal scene of subjection where he could right the wrongs of colonization carried over into the island's incipient neocolonial system of government. However, from the start the priest's instruction and the owner's psychological manipulation derail him from this future endeavor since the priesthood and enslavement are designed to keep him within the bounds of institutionalized subjection. They also stump his emotional development seeing that slavery restructures kinship by breaking the bonds of the enslaved family. This dismantling has lasting consequences in Eulogio's life as a freeman as he strives to reconcile the legacy of slavery with his relationship with his mother and the people of Tahiti:

The desperation grew even more in his house, where he saw his sister and mother, whom he rescued from servitude, sustaining concubinages behind his back, without any other norm of fidelity than

caprice; disdainful all moral ideals and asking him in every one of his exhortations why, if he were such a saint, he hadn't stayed in Seminary. They only thought of putting on hats, of putting on rice powder, of clandestinely accepting offerings that he rejected, of justifying in every step the dictation of the imitating monkey of the oppressive race. And in these domestic scenes Eulogio saw a synthesis of his entire race yearning to place itself at the level of the white one, or above it, without improving itself. It could be foreseen in the black commanders, who were the envy of the bribes, of the prevarications and negotiations brought on by the whites. Because in Tahiti, as in other less barbarous countries, or those deemed as such, government was synonymous to plunder...

La desesperación acrecentábase aún más en su casa, donde veía a su hermana y a su madre, rescatadas por él de la servidumbre, sosteniendo concubinatos a espaldas suyas, sin otra norma de fidelidad que el capricho; desdeñando toda idea de moral y llegando a preguntarle a cada exhortación suya, por qué no se había quedado en el Seminario si tan santo era. Sólo pensaban en ponerse sombreros, en echarse polvos de arroz, en aceptar clandestinamente ofrendas que él rechazaba, en justificar a cada paso el dictado de mono de imitación de la raza opresora. Y en estas escenas domésticas veía Eulogio una síntesis de toda su raza desosa de ponerse al nivel de la blanca, o sobre ella, sin mejorarse. Adivinábase en los caudillos negros, envidia de los cohechos, de las prevaricaciones y negocios realizados por los blancos. Porque en Taití, como en otros países menos bárbaros, o tenidos por tales, gobierno era sinónimo de botín... (168-69; ellipsis in original)

In this excerpt, Eulogio is not a passive bystander of the oppression and inferiority complex brought on by the violence and economic exploitation of colonization in Tahiti. Instead, his desperation over Tahitians' assimilation with and mimicry of the colonizer prompts him to develop a sense of worth and dignity that contrasts the avarice and corruption of the black leaders. Contrary to previous studies that have attributed Eulogio's inability to overcome adversity to his own lacks and weaknesses, from the excerpt above one understands that he is up against a great amount of opposition, not just from the white foreigners but from his own kind. The latter is one of the main obstacles that makes his self-realization and quest for justice even more difficult because he realizes that not even his people have mustered enough resistance to stop the machine of neocolonialism. Their own leaders oil the gears that keep it in motion in pursuit of their own economic and political interests, which is why they attempt to curtail Eulogio's influence.

The unequal power dynamic is sustained by racial prejudice in light of the precarious position of the mulatto in post-slavery society. According to Méndez Rodenas: "If the weight of society falls on the black [i.e., slavery], then the newly formed class of freed slaves and mulattos had to negotiate to gain economic and social advantage within a fundamentally marginal position, both

because the free black continued to carry the stigma of race in a slave society and because of the precarious nature of his status as a free man” (86). Racialized differentiation permeates every one of Eulogio’s relationships and interactions with white and mulatto members of the Tahitian political party, those of which use it to their sociopolitical gain against him.

In his ethnographic study on Tahitian social categories in Pape'ete (the capital of French Polynesia) and in a rural district of Tahiti from 1959 to 1960, Paul Kay identifies three racial categories that Tahitians used to classify individuals: Tahitian, mixed-blood, and European (83). The use of each depended on the context or circumstance in which they were employed and the intentions of the speakers: “I have heard many Papeete residents at one time contrast themselves with the ‘uneducated natives’ and at another with the ‘avaricious mixed-bloods’” (*ibid.*). He highlights the responses of an informant who classified himself as a mixed-blood in order to contrast himself with the lifestyle of an aboriginal Tahitian and with the immorality of a European tenant of his in a dispute over rented property. However, when a similar dispute occurred between the informant and a mixed-blood, the informant classified himself as a native Tahitian in order to emphasize the avarice and immorality of the mixed-blood (*ibid.*).

Although *La piel* was written decades before Kay’s ethnography, a similar model of racial classification exists in the story. Members of the Tahitian political party, instead of having proper names, are referred to as “mestizo” or “mulato,” that is, mixed-blood, and Tahitians and Europeans are categorized as black or white respectively. In the novel, the aboriginal Tahitians are in the lower rung of the social ladder, Europeans are at the top, and the mestizos and mulattos, or mixed-blood, are in the middle. This racially- and class-based stratification is similar to the Hispanic American hierarchy of power based on the bloodlines of the slave system, which Hernández-Catá is most familiar with: “The base of the pyramid is the enslaved work force, that ‘potencia de sangre’ (blood power) which turns the machinery of sugar production. At the top of the pyramid stands the creole

bourgeoisie, owners of sugar estates, who control all the means of production. Though they wield economic power, the creole landowners lack political power, given restrictions of Spanish colonial authority. ... The black and mulatto bourgeoisie, along with freed slaves, constituted an intermediate layer between the two extremes of master and slave” (Méndez Rodenas 86). This triangular hierarchy continued to define social relations after slavery, when the mulatto remained as a trans figure between bondage and freedom, blackness and whiteness, native and European, and colony and metropole.

Like in *Cecilia Valdés*, the mulatto turned into “an *inverted* symbol of Cuban nationality” (*ibid.*). The same can be said of Eulogio who is constantly negotiating the racial and sociopolitical binaries of personhood and statehood. His navigation through the racial pyramid reflects how he negotiates his biracial subjectivity, which starts as a point of contention between him and his mother. In the following passage, Eulogio begrudges his mother for not being clear about his paternal origins, which pushes him to reevaluate his own difference, positionality, and moral ideals:

And why was he different? Who transmitted to him the aspiration for moral order that he felt since childhood? One night, anxious to clarify that constant doubt, he interrogated his mother; she stammered, acquired that ashy color that blacks get when they stammer, and after saying two or three names she shrugged her shoulders. He hushed her and, confused, swallowed, in addition to his humiliation, the one that his mother was incapable of feeling. Those doubts about who could be the author of his sad life had, nonetheless, a gleam of certitude: Eulogio really felt that his father had been a man of another race... and he inadvertently thought with horror of his owner’s hateful words that he heard as a kid while he feigned to sleep on the bed as a convalescent.

¿Y por qué era él tan distinto? ¿Quién le transmitía la aspiración de orden moral sentida desde la niñez? Una noche, ansioso de esclarecer esta constante duda, interrogó a su madre; ella titubeó, adquirió ese color cenizo que toman los negros al turbarse, y después de pronunciar dos o tres nombres se encogió de hombros. Él la hizo callar y, confuso, tragó además de su afrenta la que su madre era incapaz de sentir. Aquellas dudas acerca de quién pudiera ser el autor de su pobre vida tenían, sin embargo, una luz de certidumbre: Eulogio sentía bien que su padre había sido un hombre de otra raza... y, sin querer, pensaba con horror en las odiosas palabras del amo, que oyó de niño mientras fingía dormir en su cama de enfermo. (169; ellipsis in original)

Even though the frightening presence of the owner is no longer a threat, Eulogio inherits the oppressive terror that the owner inculcated in him under his surveillance: “Every morning they entered his [Eulogio’s] room to ask about his health. When Don Antonio would come alone,

Eulogio would cheer up and responded to his questions; but he was afraid of the owner, and many mornings, upon seeing him, he'd close his eyes so that he would not talk to him" ("Todas las mañanas entraban en su cuarto a preguntarle por la salud; cuando venía don Antonio solo, Eulogio se alegraba y respondía a sus preguntas; pero el amo le daba miedo, y muchas mañanas, al verlo, cerraba los ojos para que no le hablase"; 159). This behavior is illustrated in the images Eulogio sees in the aforementioned storybook, which remind him of the faces of his slave owner and the priest, Don Antonio, comparing them to a house of nib sugar and lumberjacks respectively, thus serving as metaphors of class and status in slave society.

Nib sugar is the kind that is crystallized, the color of which can range from a translucent white to a dark, earthy tone. The slave master perhaps owned a sugar cane plantation while the priest represents the labor of men. Eulogio, therefore, makes associations that reflect his condition as a slave: "Don Antonio's face was surly, but like that of honorable woodcutters, and the master's like the house with walls of nib sugar where the witch hid..." ("el de don Antonio era la cara hosca, pero honrada de los leñadores, y el del amo la casa de paredes de azúcar cande donde se ocultaba la hechicera..."; 160; ellipsis in original). In this excerpt, we see the slow and steady process of contact between the colonizer and the colonized in a moment of vulnerability and inexperience in Eulogio's life. Like a tree, Eulogio the child physically goes through a cycle of decay and regeneration after almost dying from the hemorrhage, but he also experiences this process symbolically when the farm owner is killed, his body crucified to a tree no less: "One day the master showed up dead in the field, without anyone knowing who the assassin had been. They had strangled him with a cord and then nailed him to a tree with knives; a blade pierced his neck and another his gut" ("Un día el amo apareció muerto en el campo, sin que jamás pudiera conocerse al asesino. Lo habían estrangulado con una cuerda y luego lo clavaron con cuchillos en un árbol; una hoja le atravesaba el cuello y otra el vientre"; 160). Instead of Eulogio's torture or death, it is that of the figure of authority that is

described in brief, yet gory, detail, contrary to the violent spectacles against slaves that Hartman mentions. Yet, although there is a reversal here of the power of the colonizer over the colonized, it is not at the hands of Eulogio as personal retribution against his owner for the wrongs inflicted on him. He was too young and convalescent to plan the assassination and he was not completely developed psychologically to fully understand its implications. These interactions are reflected in the history of colonization in the South Pacific, further illuminating the influential roles that slavery and religion played in subjecting the “other,” and underscoring the extent to which they allegorically effect Eulogio’s life.

### 1.3.2. At the Heels of a Tumultuous Transatlantic History

Since the early sixteenth century, Polynesia allured explorers and colonizers, starting with the Spanish expedition of García Jofre de Loaysa (1490-1526), whose crew, it is argued, intermixed with natives of Eastern Polynesia, “significantly influencing Polynesia’s languages, culture and genetic pool” (Fischer 85). The Spanish explored and settled other territories in the Pacific. At the news of English settlers exploring the Pacific, such as British cartographer James Cook (1728-79), the Spanish embarked to Tahiti in 1772 by orders of the viceroy of Peru, Manuel de Amat y Junyent (1707-82), to Captain Domingo de Boenechea (1713-75), who led an expedition to the island. The natives gave him a friendly reception and he instructed his crew to respect them, their property, and women, that even Cook later attested to the amicable relationship between them and the Tahitians (Rodríguez 9). A second voyage was dispatched in 1774, this time with the intention of establishing a mission-colony in order to evangelize the natives and convert them as subjects of the Spanish Crown. Two missionary priests accompanied Captain Boenechea: Catalan Friar Jerónimo Clota and Extremaduran Friar Narciso González. Also, on the ship, was interpreter for the Spanish to the Tahitians, Máximo Rodríguez, who, together with pilot Juan de Hervé and the help of Tahitians

Pautu and Tetuanui, created a Spanish-Tahitian *Diccionario* and *Interrogatorio* or survey with 100 questions about various topics that would later be drafted into a report about the island and its inhabitants (Rodríguez 13). Boenechea invited Pautu and Tetuanui to Peru in 1773. They were housed in the viceroy's palace and educated under Spanish custom. Rodríguez might have been one of their tutors, which is how he perhaps learned their language. They were also baptized with the names Tomás and Manuel respectively, and then confirmed under the Catholic faith (Rodríguez 12). The Spanish presence in Tahiti could explain why Eulogio speaks Spanish instead of Tahitian or French, or English for that matter. In fact, he depends on language in order to fit in in Birmingham. He attempts to learn English by enrolling in a Berlitz school there but the learning curve is too slow to climb.<sup>81</sup>

Tahiti not only caught the attention of the Spanish, but also of the British and French. As previously mentioned, Hernández-Catá was consul of Cuba in Le Havre, France from 1909 to 1911. Then he was transferred to Birmingham, England from 1911 to 1913, the same time of the publication of the first edition of *La piel*. This explains why the story takes place in Birmingham and Paris and Le Havre, making it very easy for Hernández-Catá to have been cognizant of the history of, and socioeconomic and political activities in, these places. Since the 1700s, Tahiti had acquired legendary status in the French and British imaginaries. On one end, European explorers and sailors exoticized its natural beauty and its peoples, particularly its women. As Aldrich points out, “the availability of Tahitian women for sex [was] the key to the legend of Tahiti” (2). Prostitution, however, was not the norm. Instead, Tahitian chieftains often traded lower-caste girls for luxury goods and as a strategy to “safeguard their villages from plunder and firearm attacks” (*ibid.*). On the other end were missionaries who created another image of the islanders. Since the first Christian

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<sup>81</sup> The Berlitz Corporation was founded in 1878 by Maximilian Berlitz in Providence, Rhode Island. Its headquarters are now in Princeton, New Jersey. That Eulogio enrolled in one of its schools is another indication that the novel takes place between 1850 and 1900.

arrivals in the 1770s, the natives of Polynesia were regarded as heathens and savages in need of evangelization and redemption. After the abandonment of the Spanish mission there in 1775, the London Missionary Society (LMS) began sending Protestant missionaries in 1797, despite Polynesians' resistance to conversion: "the missionaries were attacked, harassed, and killed with regularity" (19).

France also sent missionaries. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the French Navy (Division Navale de l'Océan Pacifique) had established its headquarters in the early 1800s in Chile where many French émigrés lived. French Catholics also migrated there. Already in close proximity to the South Pacific islands, they began missions in Polynesia in 1834. This created violent political tensions with the British empire and its Protestant missionaries. For instance, in 1835 French missionaries were denied entry into Tahiti. The following year, the Tahitian chieftainess, Queen Pomaré, permitted them to land after charging them a fee. British LMS pastor, George Pritchard (1796-1883), opposed their presence, which led to further enmity between the British and the French over trade agreements and land ownership (20-22). France, nonetheless, eventually gained the upper hand in Tahiti when in 1843 the island became a French protectorate.

Papeete, the capital of French Polynesia, was the center of the Catholic church. By 1877, approximately 25 churches had been built around the islands, therefore "the missionaries served as a forward guard of French interests in Oceania, and the French government on several occasions used the necessity of protecting religious interests as a pretext for intervention" (19). They built schools, worked closely with the natives, and indoctrinated them, which meant getting rid of their customs, such as nudity, pagan dances, singing, festivals, and cannibalism, and replacing them, although not entirely, with Roman Catholic rituals and iconography: masses, benedictions, processions, sacraments, altars and statues of saints, holy medals, and rosaries. Secular instruction consisted of "reading, writing, and arithmetic in local languages and French (or English)" (45-46). Aldrich

stresses that in Tahiti, missionaries were “crucial in French conquest. . . . The priests were a political force wherever they were installed, allying with or opposing administrators, island chiefs, colonists. At various moments, they had an even more precise political role, as educators . . . With their medical care, economic activities, and, above all, education, the missionaries had indeed ‘won’ thousands of Pacific souls” (67, 68).

The Protestant denominations, nevertheless, had a stronger hold on the islanders, resulting in the institution of the Protestant faith as the national religion of Tahiti in 1860, in the 1884 legal recognition of the church, and in the establishment of the Conseil Supérieur des Eglises Tahitiennes (Supreme Council of Tahitian Churches) that same year (55, 63). Natives and colonists alike also favored the freedom and simpler practices of Protestant liturgy over the Catholic one, often proving to be less amenable to the Baroque-style devotion and ritual of Catholicism, even preferring to stay away from religious matters altogether, ergo attending to their own secular and personal affairs: “Convicts, revolutionaries, soldiers-of-fortune and sailors did not make for an ideal Christian population in the missionaries’ eyes” (50). In quoting some priests’ accounts of their missionary work with both natives and non-natives, Aldrich also underscores how the efficiency of Catholicism was evaluated through racial lines. For example, Father Testory states the following: “The great danger for the indigenes of New Caledonia [as in other parts of the South Pacific] is the scandal of the whites who flock here, with an unknown past, greedy, violent and debauched. It is obvious that the sad example shown by such a population is hardly appropriate to give the indigenes an elevated notion of Christian and civilised life’ (*ibid.*). Father Rougeyron is cited echoing his words in the following statement: ‘I have a great deal to do in this colony where there are two races to convert: the black and white: the latter, save several exceptions, has as much need of it as the former’ (*ibid.*).

In June 1880, the protectorate turned into an annexation, granting France complete sovereignty over Polynesia and neighboring islands. The growing influence of colonization and

religion facilitated this transition. Although subtle and stated briefly, *La piel* reflects these developments in Eulogio's life as a native. Despite his good intentions, Don Antonio works together with the slave owner to keep Eulogio under the guises of the Church and Western paradigms of knowledge and power. While the priest encourages the slave owner to recognize his paternity, the owner utilizes his authority through words and coercive practices to oppress the child, depriving him of his humanity and individual rights. The irony is that he is killed with knives piercing his throat and stomach, the same body parts through and to which he causes pain to Eulogio, either by his punitive words or by depriving him of food. It is also ironic that the priest, despite pushing Eulogio into the priesthood—in some respects, another form of servitude and disadvantageous for a black seminarian due to racial prejudice—posthumously leaves him his inheritance, perhaps to pay off his manumission, or to provide him with capital in order to be self-sufficient. This may be how Don Antonio redeems himself, while the owner's crucifixion and his haunting presence later in the novel could symbolically represent the sins of the father that Eulogio must redeem in order to overcome his own racial turmoil. This will be seen in the protagonist's self-projection as a savior of Tahitians.

Eulogio struggles internally to overcome the racial stereotypes and stigmas against his blackness that were instilled in him from childhood, especially by his slave owner. Furthermore, the priest's inheritance implants in Eulogio a sense of loyalty to his humanist legacy and to the Church, while the slave owner's assassination exacerbates the terror that others felt toward the formerly enslaved out of fear of another rebellion. All this is at play against the historic backdrop of the dwindling of the Catholic church in Polynesia during the 1880s, together with the abolition of slavery, which are representative of the weakening of systems of colonization in *La piel*. At the same time, this decadence poses a threat to Western powers that seek to hold on to the establishments and institutions of knowledge and capital that are jeopardized as a result of decolonization as seen in the attempts made by white members of political parties to curtail Eulogio's influence on civic

affairs in Tahiti. This parallels France's historic sovereignty over French Polynesia that are then reflected in Mr. Vatan's corrupt business dealings in Tahiti. The priest, the slave owner, and Mr. Vatan attempt to either reform Eulogio or protect him for their own gains, which gives weight to Hartman's emphasis on the encroachment of power and the false promises of freedom and justice that characterized the post-chattel slavery era.

Don Antonio, in particular, is an exception to an extent because the text seems to imply that his intentions are innocent, despite acting in ways that reproduce European hegemony. Therefore, the following statement he makes could either encourage Eulogio to believe in his potential to succeed in life or as misguiding him to not confront the hostile reality of his circumstances and environment: "Boy, you have more probabilities than anyone of being happy, because you have had two childhoods" ("«Muchacho, tú tienes más probabilidades que nadie para ser feliz, porque has tenido dos infancias»"; 159). Indeed, two childhoods, but both under duress. Is Eulogio to be grateful that he was born into slavery and that he was being indoctrinated into a Western model of "civilization"? Perhaps he thought that by going to seminary and giving him his inheritance Eulogio could acquire the knowledge and have the means to reform from within systemic oppression. However, the text does not directly state the priest's motives, and as the short novel progresses, Eulogio becomes more critical of Don Antonio and considers more deeply not completely abandoning his blackness and Tahitian heritage. If the slave revolt in Haiti, for instance, accomplished more than the freedom of an entire nation of slaves, it was the fiercer backlash that it would generate in intractable colonists and owners unwilling to relinquish their socioeconomic power and the institutionalization of more robust, systemic measures to keep the black subject oppressed beyond national independence. James Franklin's book *The Present State of Hayti* (1828) and other French writers are examples of critical stances condemning the revolt and the great losses that it cost France (Frick 2).

The fact that Eulogio obtains freedom by his owner's demise, before abolition, and that the killer is not found, intensifies the threat that enslaved and free blacks posed against white supremacy in what has been regarded as the "Black Terror." In August 1791, bands of rebelling slaves in Saint Domingue, the Black Jacobins, systematically and successfully revolted against whites and soldiers, murdering their owners and burning down plantations, under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture in a 12-year struggle against French rule, a Spanish invasion, and British and French expeditions of about 60,000 men each. As a result, the Negro state of Haiti was established (James ix). The Jacobins—or the Société des Jacobins, amis de la liberté et de l'égalité (Society of the Jacobins, Friends of Freedom and Equality)—were a political group that became radical in the wake of the French Revolution in order to violently protest the monarchy in what became known as the Reign of Terror or The Terror (1792-94). Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James (1901-89) writes about The Terror alongside the slave revolt in Saint Domingue—hence the title of his book *The Black Jacobins*—upon showing the parallels between both events and how they informed the discontent and uproar that the masses of the working class in France and the enslaved in the Caribbean felt toward social injustice: "Rejected in France, humiliated at home, the Mulattoes organised a revolt. It was the quarrel between bourgeoisie and monarchy that brought the Paris masses on the political stage. It was the quarrel between whites and Mulattoes that woke the sleeping slaves" (73).

In discussing women's responses to the slave revolts in Saint Domingue, Doris Y. Kadish takes The Terror and its correlation with the black Jacobins to juxtapose "Black" and "Terror" in the way that James insinuates in his study. The memory of the violent uprisings in France and its colonies during the 1790s created mistrust and fear of workers and slaves (a terror) that exacerbated the already deep-seated discrimination and inequality against them in Europe and the Americas; for these two groups "became inextricably linked in the European political *unconscious* on the basis of what was perceived as their common propensity to rebellion and destruction" (Kadish 668-69;

emphasis added). Geography, memory, and the unconscious become significant dimensions of Eulogio's subject formation—as seen already in the first five pages of the story—in relation to the tensions between his blackness and the mulattoes and whites he is up against. For instance, when Eulogio accepts Mr. Vatan's offer to help him appease the Tahitians, Mr. Vatan arranges for him to depart to Tahiti from Le Havre, the last layover on his return home (according to the text), therefore precluding any attempts of escape: “he didn't want to pay heed to the fact that departing on a ship from Le Havre, three hours from Paris, the last port stop to embark to Tahiti had been chosen in order to avoid possible retractions” (“no quiso parar mientes en que saliendo el buque de El Havre, a tres horas de París, se eligió precisamente para embarcarlo el ultimo puerto de escala ante Taití, para evitar arrepentimientos posibles; ni por un instante pasó por su idea la de que el señor Vatan le hubiera engañado”; 221).<sup>82</sup>

The port at Le Havre, in particular, is significant in the novel in connection with the transatlantic slave trade and French colonization. Le Havre was founded in 1517 to serve as a port city and to respond to the military, royal, and commercial needs of Rouen, which in the tenth century was the most important port city in France, located on the other, eastern side of the Seine river. In the early eighteenth century, royal decrees opened up commerce and freed Le Havre from its dependence on Rouen, which made it flourish as a supplier of exotic products. The port at Le Havre also helped to solidify France's colonial power in the Antilles. Once it acquired autonomy, Le Havre partook in the transatlantic slave trade as early as 1716, particularly in Saint Domingue. Between 1768 and 1776 alone, 80 French ships had transported more than 21,000 black slaves from most of the western coast of Africa to the Antilles, and by the last quarter of the eighteenth century

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<sup>82</sup> After this citation the text states that Eulogio leaves from La Pallice: “Al salir de La Pallice, Eulogio Valdés suspiró diciendo adiós a las tierras inhospitalarias de Europa” (“Upon departing from La Pallice, Eulogio Valdés expired, saying goodbye to the inhospitable lands of Europe”; 221). La Pallice was also a port city in France about 513km (~320mi) south of Le Havre by car. This may be the place that the text refers to, therefore making it the last layover stop, and not Le Havre, before Tahiti. This discrepancy shows, nonetheless, how important Le Havre was at the time and in Hernández-Catá's imagination.

it had surpassed Rouen's supply of imports such as cotton, sugar, and coffee (Malon 19). In 1794, the National Convention passed a law to free slaves in France's overseas possessions but the slave trade continued and Napoleon reinstated it ten years after. It was not until 1848 that an official decree was passed to abolish slavery just a year after the main railway station in Le Havre had opened. After other industrial advances and growing urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century, the port city became the second largest port in France (after Marseilles) and the eighth largest in the world (Malon 19).

Eulogio's acquisition of knowledge and freedom are threats to the economic and political interests of his slave owner, Don Antonio, and Mr. Vatan, which is why all three curtail his possibilities to escape their grasp either on an ideological or social plain. They also previewed the potential for slave revolts as a result of the owner's assassination, henceforth urging Don Antonio to send Eulogio to seminary and Mr. Vatan to blackmail him into misusing his political clout to appease the discontent of the Tahitians. The owner's assassination symbolically marks the end of the first cycle of Eulogio's life under the subjection of slavery in order to immediately transition into another cycle of oppression: the racialization of his blackness as inferior to his whiteness as a freeman. This transition is introduced in the last paragraph of the first five pages of the short novel, subsequent to the owner's death.

#### **1.4. Eulogio's Blackness, Double Consciousness, and the Politics of Racial Inversion**

Eulogio is in a dreamlike state between his unconscious and conscious self when "the sweetness of memory and the warmth were loosening the ties that held the spirit to reality ... and sleepiness came at last; a sleepiness in which the same distant images renewed themselves, and from which he was awoken by ... the breeze that came from the sea at the start of twilight" ("la dulcedumbre del recuerdo y el calor iban aflojando los lazos que sujetaban el espíritu a la realidad ...

y el sueño venía al fin; un sueño en el cual se renovaban las mismas imágenes lejanas, y del que lo despertaban ... la brisa venida del mar al iniciarse el crepúsculo”; 161). Twilight or dusk is the interval between day and night when consciousness “may yield to the psychic tow of the unconscious, [and] senses and perceptions attune themselves differently and the psychic landscape undergo[es] a blurring and blending of things” (Ronnberg 94). Such is the path that Eulogio traverses, from the rooftop of his house to its rooms below, as memories blur into slumber and dreams, passing through perceptions of himself in a repetition of the thematic symbiosis of space, nature, and selfhood.

From the breeze of the twilight sky reflected on the darkness of the sea, evoking an “unseen, felt spirit of generation [and] inspiration,” Eulogio descends from room to room, like the quarternary spaces of the garden of *Los frutos ácidos* (60). He sees his image reproduced in a mirror whereby we are brought into the depths of his split psyche and perception of his blackness as a form of otherness from which he is estranged:

In the room that he normally went to, there was amongst other old junk, a mirrored wardrobe; and every Friday Eulogio Valdés once again took hold of himself in that split and dusty mirror. He looked at his bulky lips, his wide nose, his hair curled in minuscule rings, his black skin... And as if every time he would be painfully surprised of who he was, he would stop for a moment and set free a sigh before going to the other rooms...

[Blank space indicating a new section of the story.]

Once slavery was abolished, Don Antonio, on the pretext of being interested in Eulogio’s aptitudes for study, obtained his mother’s permission to allow him to go with him to the city to get into Seminary. En el cuarto adonde iba a parar, había, entre otros trastos viejos, un armario de luna; y en ese espejo

hendido y empolvado, colocado allí por un azar irónico, Eulogio Valdés tomaba de nuevo, cada viernes, posesión de sí mismo. Miraba sus labios abultados, su nariz ancha, su pelo rizado en mil minúsculas sortijas, su piel negra... Y como si cada vez se sorprendiese dolorosamente de ser quien era, se detenía un momento y dejaba libre un suspiro antes de seguir hacia las otras habitaciones... [Espacio en blanco indicando una sección nueva en la historia.]

Al abolirse la esclavitud, don Antonio, pretextando interés por las aptitudes de Eulogio para el estudio, consiguió de su madre permiso para dejarlo ir con él a la ciudad a internarlo en el Seminario. (161-62; ellipses in original)

When looking into a mirror, we see an inverted image of ourselves. Likewise, Eulogio’s reflection is inverted, paralleling the inversion of day to night enveloped by twilight. A mirror’s source of power

is light, yet the light that penetrates his house is twilight, that is, a shaded or faded type of illumination that is between lightness and darkness, thus serving as a metaphor of his biraciality. It is the physiognomic split between whiteness and blackness that takes on psychic dimensions, dovetailing with the diminishing power of his blackness in tandem with the dwindling light in the dusk. Could Eulogio's blackness perhaps be the bitterness of the acidic fruit with which he must come to terms?

Ultimately, Hernández-Catá inverts concepts to not only mark their difference but to also underscore their interdependence so as to offer an alternative. Evidently, he cannot vie for the acidic fruit without contrasting it with the sweet kind. However, he uses an obvious contrast to legitimize another otherwise contradictory idea: that acidic fruit can be as good as it is sweet. This idea serves as an analogy to *La piel* because Eulogio's racial duality goes through transformations, sometimes corporeal, that reproduce racial stereotypes but that also reveal the complexity of selfhood and identity in relation to how otherness is constructed during his attempts to overcome prejudice.

When Eulogio looks at himself in the mirror, he gets reacquainted with himself in Lacanian fashion insofar that this act is juxtaposed with the primal scene of subjection during his childhood that commences the destabilization of his racial identity and the terror that results from it. According to French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan (1901-81), the symbolic importance of an infant's reflection in the mirror is significant to an understanding of identification. The mirror has a dual function for the infant: its mental development, which has a historical value, and its libidinal relationship with the body image:

This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual's formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an “orthopedic” form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (97)

The dual relationship is conflicted because it creates tension between the ego and the body as well as the imaginary and the real, wherein misrecognition takes place since the subject is thought to see its own reflection when in reality it is being alienated from itself in the imaginary. Therefore, the image in the mirror is a fiction that forms the subject and the fragmented body of the infant sustains it by attempting to find wholeness in it. In other words, the imaginary order established by the mirror image, insofar as it is an image, creates an aesthetic recognition in the form of the reflected image that deludes the infant into a sense of totality of self through a false identification and misrecognition.

Although Eulogio is already an adult when he looks at his reflection in the mirror, he experiences the separation between his mental state and his body that began as a child under the gazes of the priest and slave owner. His consciousness, that which encompasses his selfhood, dissociates from his body, and that threshold of dissociation is embodied by his black skin. However, contrary to Lacanian theory, Eulogio does not misrecognize or perceive of his reflection as a false identification. He recognizes well what he sees by the fact that he still is surprised by his own image. He is also well aware of the impact it has, *and bad*, on his life. Despite being of mixed blood, his appearance, that reflection in the mirror of a black other, causes him pain that produces a sigh of regret. He keeps those feelings stored in the room with the mirror so that he can proceed to the other parts of his house where his memory ceases to remember. Yet, every Friday he goes to the room with the mirror, periodically experiencing the pain that his black skin generated in the past, stressing the value that he places on remembering, despite the grief it causes him. Therefore, what seems like an act of dissociation is also an exercise working against the disavowal and fragmentation of his blackness. Although his blackness is the kernel of suffering, the acidic fruit that produces psychological fragmentation, it is that moment when he takes possession of himself that gives him a sense of wholeness. This begs the question of whether his black shame is responsible for the

hardship in his life or if his environment and others that inflicted the pain on him for being black are to blame. Closer scrutiny of the split in Eulogio's consciousness would help us delve deeper into this quandary of nature versus nurture.

According to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) by German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), consciousness is in fact always a double-consciousness in that it is constituted by a self-consciousness that is conscious of itself and of itself as other:

From now on, consciousness, as self-consciousness, has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however is marked *for it* with the *character of the negative*, and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true *essence*, and is present initially only in the opposition of the first object. In this, self-consciousness presents itself as the movement in which this opposition is sublated and the equality of itself with itself arises for it. (73)

In other words, consciousness is self-consciousness insofar that it is in a unity with and in opposition to itself in the form of a double-consciousness, which is to say that “‘true self-consciousness,’ is *in itself* double-consciousness” (Adell 16). However, Hegel seems to privilege true consciousness as a self-consciousness that sublates (sublimates) the opposition or otherness (the ‘negative’) into a reconciliation within itself, as opposed to a self-consciousness that maintains the disparity between the equality of itself *with itself* and its opposition. Virtually, there are two self-consciousnesses, the one in which otherness is assimilated into it and the one in which it is not. Hegel writes: “There is for self-consciousness another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: *first*, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* essence; *secondly*, in doing so it has sublated the other, for it does not see the other as an essence either, but in the *other* sees *its own self*” (76).

Hegel presents these two forms of self-consciousness, that is *double-consciousness*, in a “lordship and bondage” relationship and as the *unhappy consciousness*. According to Adell, the lordship and bondage relationship “was an important paradigm” for pro-abolitionists in that it argued for the supersession of another self-consciousness (its otherness) by a self-consciousness that is in certainty

of itself. Therefore, in the “lordship and bondage” relationship, “self-consciousness is both independent of and dependent on an *other*” (16). As Hegel would have it: “[Self-consciousness] must sublimate this *otherness* of itself; this is the sublation of the first double sense, and is therefore itself a second double sense; *first*, it must proceed to sublimate *the other* independent essence in order thereby to become certain *of itself* as the essence; *secondly*, in so doing it proceeds to sublimate *its own self*, for this other is itself” (77). In this framework, the lord in the “lordship and bondage” relationship is the self-consciousness that is certain of itself, a certainty that it can only achieve when it bonds the thing of the *other* self-consciousness on which its certainty depends. It becomes a ‘life-and-death’ struggle in which each “individual self-consciousness must struggle to rid itself of its ‘self-externality’ or otherness; for it is only through such a struggle that their ‘certainty of being *for themselves*’ can be raised to truth” (Adell 17). However, since death is the negation of the consciousness of life, the truth of certainty is negated as well and not achieved:

What emerges instead is an independent (lord) and a dependent (bondsmen) consciousness. ... It is the lord’s desire for the thing that makes the bondsmen dependent on him, for the bondsmen is the one who forms and gives permanence to it. In so doing, he also realizes himself as an ‘alienated existence’ whose *being-for-self* is actualized only through the thing and the work he performs on it. His is, therefore, a servile consciousness and not yet a true self-consciousness since the lord is its essential reality. (*ibid.*)

In other words, the lord’s object of desire is not the bondsmen himself but whatever thing the bondsmen represents so as to legitimize, complete, or verify his own will, power, or independence over the slave. The bondsmen works on the object of desire, the thing that the slave owner wants from him: servitude, allegiance, labor, capital, power, etc. Based on this premise, the bondsmen, on the other hand, has an independent self-conscience that he relinquishes to the lord, making it independent no more, and instead, dependent on his owner. By doing so, he negates his freedom, living in contradiction to it—the *unhappy consciousness*.

Hegel defines unhappy consciousness as “consciousness of itself as the double, merely

contradictory essence,” the two self-consciousnesses (or double-consciousness) that a being is always attempting to reconcile within itself: “that as one undivided consciousness it is a duplicated consciousness: it itself *is* the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and it itself *is* both, and the unity of both is also to it the essence; but *for itself* it is not yet this essence itself, not yet the unity of the two self-consciousnesses” (86). As Adell explains, W. E. B. Du Bois recontextualizes Hegel’s philosophical tenets on the unhappy consciousness into his own philosophy about the problem of the color line in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

Therefore, in this philosophical paradigm, the Otherness with which the Negro seeks to reconcile himself is one of the elements that constitutes his essence as a social and psychological being. . . . As such, the “other world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” is, in fact, the Negro’s world. And the irreconcilability of the Negro with that world is an essential part of the Negro’s being-in-the-world. (19)

Considering the allusions to Douglass and other black figures in *La piel*, it is very likely that Hernández-Catá, if not read, was at least familiar with Du Bois and the paradigm of double-consciousness in his work, thus possibly serving as a basis for Eulogio’s racial conflict. If so, one would have to revisit Hegel’s propositions, specifically with regard to the lord and bondsman relationship and the unhappy consciousness.

In Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, the relationship between the lord and bondsman is hierarchical and privileging the domination of the owner over the slave. However, the owner’s domination is as dependent on the object of the desire, the thing mediating between him and his slave, as the slave is dependent on the conservation of that object or thing in order for the unequal relationship to subsist. In *La piel*, there is an inversion of this power dynamic as a result of the owner’s assassination (most likely at the hands of rebel slaves) and the abolition of slavery, after which Eulogio takes a lead role in advocating for the dignity and rights of the emancipated. One can say, however, that he embodies the double-consciousness that Hegel and Du Bois propose, in which the power dynamic of inferiority and subjection that he experienced under the onus of slavery is recontextualized in his

own abjection toward his blackness and the discrimination from others that he suffers. After emancipation, he experiences the life and death struggle between the lord and the bondsman in his own double-consciousness, where the one “other” self-consciousness is the color of his skin, as he himself begrudgingly observes in the mirror of his memory. This is what Adell suggests regarding Du Bois’ philosophy on black folk, that is, the self-abjection that translates to refusal of one’s own culture; and the “barbarism” of that culture, the ‘Negro world,’ refuses one in return. Since the ‘Negro world’ is one in which blackness is negated, both the Negro and the white person refuse it.

However, this is not always the case with all the black folk in Tahiti. In *La piel*, the Tahitians, for the most part, stick to their African roots and preserve the customs of their black culture. Eulogio does not do the same, at first. It is worth looking into this closer because the short novel itself admits to the complexity of race relations and racial ideologies that echo Du Bois’ preoccupation with the black soul:

[Eulogio] kept a seed of catholic fatalism from his cloistered life, and believing that he was an instrument of divine will, he sacrificed his personal inclinations in order to rise as the redeemer of his race. His first steps were triumphant. Yes, he would be the guide of his people and, with the devotion of the good shepherd, he’d make the flock of sheep sweetly walk up the path; but the complexity of life soon opposed him with the first obstacles.

De su vida claustral [Eulogio] guardaba un germen de fatalismo católico, y creyéndose instrumento de la voluntad divina, sacrificó sus preferencias personales para erigirse en redentor de su raza. Sus primeros pasos fueron de triunfo. Sí, él sería el guía de los suyos y, con solicitud de buen pastor, haría que el rebaño subiera dulcemente el sendero; mas la complejidad de la vida le opuso pronto los primeros obstáculos. (166)

The excerpt above comes at a pivotal point in Eulogio’s life. The short novel has just transitioned from the section where Eulogio reflects on his double-consciousness to the part when slavery is abolished and he leaves his home and his family to enter seminary. He has not reached puberty yet when he begins his internship in the monastery and his racial duality is externalized for the first time by his professors and other seminarians. The very first night of his arrival, others sneer and laugh at him because of the color of his skin: “The night of his ingress, there was awkwardly contained

laughter in the refectory; ... even the rector and the precentor of the cathedral, who dined to his right, turned to each other to hide their laughter; the house servants laughed too..." ("En el refectorio, la noche de su ingreso, hubo risas contenidas torpemente; ... hasta el rector y el chantre de la catedral, que cenaba a su diestra, se volvían para disimular la risa; los fámulos reían también..."); 162; 2<sup>nd</sup> ellipsis in original).

The professors admire his zeal to learn, however they doubt that as a black man he could be intelligent: "The professors grew fond of him for his zeal, for his easy disposition to learn; but, almost without knowing it, they continually offended him, puzzled that he could be intelligent as a black man" ("Los profesores le tomaron apego por su celo, por su fácil disposición para aprender; mas, casi sin sospecharlo, le ofendían de continuo, extrañándose de que siendo negro pudiera ser inteligente"; *ibid.*). Eulogio also suffers the fear toward his cross-eyed roommate, who he thinks wants to physically hurt him, a fear that might have brought back the trauma of slavery: "only a cross-eyed boy maintained his disdain during the seven years that they lived together. ... and Eulogio felt all that boy's malignant and vigilant attention on his life" ("sólo un muchacho bizco mantuvo su odio durante los siete años que vivieron juntos. ... y Eulogio sentía toda la atención de aquel mozo, maligna y vigilante, puesta en su vida"; 163). It is reminiscent as well of the priest and slave owner who stared at him as he convalesced from the hemorrhage. Even his own people mock him in public for being a black seminarian: "Tolerated by the best of them, but not getting to be particularly liked by anyone, he concluded not to go out in line with everyone in order to avoid the taunts of the peoples, even from his own race, which laughed to see a black man dressed like a seminarian" ("Tolerado por los mejores, pero sin llegar a ser particularmente querido de ninguno, había concluido por no salir a la calle con la fila, para evitar las burlas de las gentes, aun la de su propia raza, que reían al ver a un negro vestido de seminarista"; *ibid.*). Eulogio does not feel loved, not even accepted, just tolerated, like when one has no other choice but to put up with someone

against one's will. The only traits that others acknowledge him for are his strength and kindness, and not together, but separately, as though he could only either be strong or kind but not both: "Since he was robust and good-natured, some were captured by his kindness and other by his strength" "Como era robusto y bondadoso, unos fueron captados por su bondad y otros por su fuerza"; *ibid.*). One can see that very early on Eulogio is affected by the racial discrimination and lack of morale in the Church and the public in Tahiti, even in his own kind. He tried to find solace in reading and augmenting his knowledge, which allows him to discover other historical figures that were able to overcome racial prejudice:

Sometimes, from any reading, a stimulus came and gave him strength to resist many days. Had not Frederick Douglass, in spite of being black, achieved great prestige? Was not Edmonia Lewis, afflicted by the inferiority of color as well as sex, able to obtain admiration for her sculptures? If he could achieve, like Alexandre Dumas had, to be looked at underneath the skin! And he studied with effort, without ceasing...

A veces, de cualquier lectura, surgía un estímulo y le daba fuerzas para resistir varios días. ¿No había Federico Douglas, a pesar de ser negro, logrado gran prestigio? ¿No consiguió Edmunda Lewis, afligida además de la inferioridad del color por la del sexo, que fueran sus esculturas admiradas? ¿Si él lograra, como logró Alejandro Dumas, que lo miraran «por debajo de la piel!» Y estudiaba con ahinco [sic], sin tregua... (162; ellipsis in original)

As mentioned earlier, this passage states the main thesis of the novel, not only with regards to Eulogio's ability to overcome racism, but also in its allusion to racial prejudice as a historical problem. While the allusions to Douglass, Lewis, and Dumas validate the historicization of Eulogio's memory, they confirm the historical contextualization of the short novel. They create an inextricable relation between subjectivity and historicity in the narrative whereby one must consider both Eulogio's subject formation and position in symbiosis with the historical references, and how his conflict is not an isolated psychological case but one tied to the effects of current events and the influence of his environment.

As Adell has argued, Du Bois' concerns over the souls of black folk are "moral and ethical" (20). Du Bois saw the Negro College as elevating the black man through knowledge of the self and culture, above obstacles that hamper the development of his soul:

The function of the Negro college, then, is clear: it must maintain the standards of popular education, it must seek the social regeneration of the Negro, and it must help in the solution of problems of race contact and co-operation. And finally, beyond all this, it must develop men. Above our modern socialism, and out of the worship of the mass, must persist and evolve that higher individualism which the centres of culture protect; there must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new. ... Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange renderings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. And to themselves in these the days that try their souls, the chance to soar in the dim blue air above the smoke is to their finer spirits boon and guerdon for what they lose on earth by being black. (82-3)

The respect for black longing is what *La piel* embodies, both as a literary project and in Eulogio's characterization. From the mirror scene to the novel's tragic end, Eulogio's longing is immortalized. Much of this longing is assuaged by his thirst for knowledge and acculturation, which is why he enters seminary and university, and reads incessantly. He also projects his own desires for success and prestige onto historical black figures who achieved these aims, of whom he learned through reading, such as Douglass, who was an American orator and abolitionist; Lewis, who was the first woman of African American and Native American descent to acquire international fame as a sculptor; and Dumas, who was a famous French playwright and novelist, known for classics such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1838) and *The Three Musketeers* (1844). Like Du Bois' higher individualism, Eulogio sets these figures apart, epitomizing their singular accomplishments against the tide of the masses. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on evolution based on knowledge of the self, both the richness and bitterness of life, the mystery and ruptures of nature, the internal and external depths of experience that lead to the transcendence of racial strife and the color line. Eulogio sees learning as the pathway to overcoming these barriers:

Upon reaching puberty and feeling his true nature, he confessed that his docility, his great need for affection, his hopes for justice, were enough to make him a good man, but insufficient to convert him into a good minister of God. ... Eulogio thought then in University. Perhaps there... He announced his decision to the rector of the Seminary and no one tried to retain him. Eulogio's first deep pain was born upon convincing himself that, during those seven years, he had not achieved to ignite not one caress capable of crossing the borders of the races.

[A]l entrar en la pubertad y sentir su verdadera naturaleza, confesóse que su mansedumbre, su gran necesidad de afectos, sus anhelos de justicia, eran bastantes para hacer de él un hombre bueno, pero insuficientes para convertirlo en un buen ministro de Dios. ... Eulogio pensó entonces en la Universidad. Acaso allá... Anunció al rector del Seminario su decisión y nadie intentó retenerle. El primer dolor hondo de Eulogio nació al convencerse de que, durante siete años, no había logrado encender un solo cariño capaz de desbordar las fronteras de las razas. (164; 2<sup>nd</sup> ellipsis in original)

The ironic anticlericalism in this passage is apparent by the way that Eulogio's good traits are disassociated from the Church's characterization. Aside from the vow of celibacy, being docile, giving affection, and yearning for justice are all characteristics that a good minister *should* have but that Eulogio sees himself as incapable of acquiring through the priesthood. Instead, he seeks the transcendence of his soul through secular knowledge. Once more we see proof of Eulogio's resistance and ability to enact his agency by developing his intellect in order to combat the foolishness in the seminary. He even pretends not to know the lessons in order to not aggravate the envy of his fellow seminarians and the menacing presence of his roommate. It takes another death, that of Don Antonio, for him to embark on a journey much more satisfying.

Don Antonio's death has significant meaning in Eulogio's life for contrary reasons. Not only does the priest bestow upon him a sizeable fortune, he also teaches him how to read and serves as a father-figure considering that his mother and sister were living as servants in Papeete, the capital of Tahiti. Therefore, when the cleric dies, Eulogio feels deserted, and his demise is one of the deciding factors that lead him to leave seminary. Contrarily, the priest's passing marks the end of the Church's direct influence over Eulogio, while the prospects of going to university dissipates whatever feelings of helplessness and hopelessness he felt as a result. It also brings him closer to his family, which would fill the affective void he feels: "His mother and sister were servants in the capital, and in their letters, which they dictated to an amanuensis, they always asked him to go live

with them” (“Su madre y su hermana estaban sirviendo en la capital, y en las cartas, que dictaban a un memorialista, pedíanle siempre que fuera a vivir junto a ellas”; *ibid.*).

Eulogio’s subjectivity and subject position creates various points of connection between his self and the world. His valuing of knowledge, love, and justice are tied to his perception of himself and self-worth as well as those around him. They also inform how he approaches life and the sociopolitical circumstances in Tahiti. These connections cannot be divorced from each other because they are inextricably linked to how Eulogio responds to his biracial identity and blackness and to others’ perceptions of race. Nevertheless, complexities arise that on the surface may seem contradictory or dichotomous but that are more complicated if examined more closely through the concept of inversion in both its symbolic and materialized forms. As discussed previously, Hernández-Catá symbolically inverts concepts and themes via literary devices in order to destabilize meaning and truth and offer different or alternative knowledge that problematize hegemony and dichotomous paradigms. One of these inversions lies in the binary “civilization/barbarism” made famous in the text *Facundo o civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* (1845) (*Facundo or Civilization and Barbarism: The Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga*; 1868) by Argentine writer and politician Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-88).

Juan Facundo Quiroga (1788-1835), dictator of Argentina during the 1820s and 30s, is the titular character that represents the barbarism of *caudillismo*, or autocratic leadership. Sarmiento used Quiroga as a figure to exemplify and criticize the savagery of the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877) during the 1830s and 40s and its support by the peasantry of the Argentine pampas. According to the text, *caudillismo* also represented the current state of Latin America after interdependence and its consequential demoralization and decay, advocating for the regeneration of society and the nation through the cultivation of a “more civilized” way of life modeled after the urban cosmopolitanism of Europe and North America. As Kimberly Ball puts it: “Civilization is

identified with northern Europe, North America, cities, Unitarians, Paz, and Rivadavia; barbarism is identified with Latin America, Spain, Asia, the Middle East, the countryside, Federalists, Facundo, and Rosas” (177).

The contrast to Sarmiento’s philosophy can be found in the essay *Ariel* (1900) by Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó (1871-1917). It is based on the main characters of the play *The Tempest* (1610 or 11) by William Shakespeare (1564-1616): Prospero, a sorcerer and Duke of Milan; Ariel, a spiritual being that Prospero saves from the witch Sycorax in exchange for his service; and Caliban, the son of Sycorax and an aboriginal monster that Prospero enslaves. In later reinterpretations of the play, Ariel has often been characterized as a representation of civilization and Caliban as a representation of barbarism:

[I]n *The Tempest*, Ariel and Caliban function based on the principles of the Nietzschean matrix of tragedy: Ariel, luminous, orderly, the incarnation of serenity and clarity, and the classical image of Greek beauty and the Apollonian; and Caliban, son of a witch, monstrous, irrational, libidinous, excessive, uninhibited, defiant of political power, inebriated and, finally, the personification of the Dionysian principle: Civilization and barbarism.

[E]n *The Tempest*, Ariel y Calibán funcionan como los principios de la matriz nietzscheana de la tragedia: Ariel, luminoso, ordenador, encarnación de la serenidad y la claridad, e imagen clásica de la belleza griega y lo apolíneo; y Calibán, hijo de una bruja, monstruoso, irracional, libidinoso, excesivo, desbordante, desafiante del poder político, borracho y, en fin, personificación del principio dionisiaco: Civilización y barbarie. (Jáuregui 311-12)

With regard to *La piel*, the complexity lies in how Eulogio embodies both Ariel and Caliban. Like Caliban, he is enslaved and taught the language of his owner. Seeing that Eulogio speaks Spanish and not Tahitian, his native language, Hernández-Catá perhaps was inspired by the history and processes of Spanish (de)colonization. Rodó interprets the play as an allegory of the loss of cultural identity in Latin America as a consequence of colonization, modernization, imperialism, and the increasing influx of immigrants, in the same way that Tahiti was influenced by these circumstances.

In *La piel*, Tahiti is described in a similar vein:

News about the revolutions that were shaking the country were vaguely reaching Eulogio. Bloody and regular, Tahiti’s destiny was immutably developing: a tyrant was substituted by another, a horde

of gorged robbers by a horde of famished ones... . . . Because in Tahiti, like in other less barbarous countries, or ones considered as such, government was synonymous with plunder...

Vagamente llegaban hasta él [Eulogio] noticias de las revoluciones que conmovían al país. Sangriento y regular, el destino de Taití iba desarrollándose inmutablemente: se sustituía un tirano con otro, una horda de ladrones ahítos por una horda de ladrones famélicos... . . . Porque en Taití, como en otros países menos bárbaros, o tenidos por tales, gobierno era sinónimo de botín... (163, 169; 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ellipses in original)

Eulogio expresses this dilemma in the first part of the story, when he tries to lead the Tahitians away from the “barbarism” of their African roots:

And he [Eulogio] suffered, not only from seeing the others prosper, while he was stuck, reducing himself to be a decorative idol; he suffered, even more, for those whom he thought of redeeming, whose destiny would be to constitute the perennial cannon fodder in the revolutions, to be a pedestal to the profiteers, pariahs happy with the savage troupes that every year the governors let celebrate in Carnival. His opposition to these festivities ended up destroying his prestige. He continued being a congressman; but upon feeling that he couldn't represent his own people, he didn't want to intervene in the debates. He was the first to arrive to Congress and the last to leave. Sad, silent, like an ebony sculpture, he remained in his seat during sessions. Those who were jealous of him in his own party, organized a protest that passed by his house thrusting insults, shrieks, and concluded like all things of the [black] race: in lubricious dances; those dances where the pantomime of love and homicide are exalted, are confused and are like supplications and holocausts to an infernal Eros.

Y [Eulogio] sufrió, no sólo por ver a los otros medrar, mientras él se estancaba reduciéndose a ser un ídolo decorativo; sufrió, más aún, por aquellos a quienes pensó redimir, cuyo destino sería constituir la perenne carne de cañón en las revoluciones, ser pedestal de logreros, parias contentos con las comparsas salvajes que cada año, en Carnaval, dejábanles celebrar los gobernadores. Su oposición a estas fiestas concluyó de arruinar su prestigio. Seguía siendo diputado; pero al sentir que no podía asumir la representación de los suyos, no quiso intervenir en los debates. Era el primero que llegaba al Congreso y el último que se marchaba. Triste, silencioso, como una escultura de ébano, permanecía en su escaño durante las sesiones. Envidiosos de su mismo campo, organizaron una manifestación que pasó ante su casa lanzando denuetos, alaridos, y concluyó como todas las cosas de la raza [negra]: en danzas lúbricas; esas danzas donde la pantomima del amor y del homicidio se exaltan, se confunden y son como plegarias y holocaustos a un Eros infernal. (170-71)

In the passage above, the criticism of black Tahitian culture may read as a rejection of it; however, such a rejection is prompted by an ethos that is tied to suppressive violence. What he realizes is that the world he inhabits is meant to reduce him to nothingness to the extent that his opponents would not care if he were dead. In his rearticulation of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Fred Moten reexamines the wretchedness of blackness according to Afro-pessimism in order to make his own claim that blackness is a pathogen because it “bears or is the potential to end the world” (739). He interrogates the pathological standpoint of the morbid body and argues, by way of Orlando

Patterson's work on slavery, that black life is not social death but political death in that "Social death is not imposed upon blackness by or from the standpoint or positionality of the political; rather, *it is the field of the political*, from which blackness is relegated to the supposedly undifferentiated mass or blob of the social" (740). In the scene above, black dance is undifferentiated from the neocolonial imperative of the Tahitian party. Tahitian culture has been co-opted by the individuals working for neocolonial interests.

### **1.5. The Cycle of Rememory: Justice and the Agency of the Inverted Black Subject**

Eulogio acts on his own volition to make an imprint on the sociopolitical fabric of Tahiti and the colonizing entities that try to exploit its peoples, therefore demonstrating the advantages of an otherwise unpleasant situation or the reversal of the shame he feels towards his blackness into his most powerful asset (the paradoxical goodness of bitter fruit). First, he is described as having "anhelos de justicia" ("yearnings for justice") and becomes leader of the black political party; second, he delivers public speeches promoting equality; and lastly, he writes a letter in one of the local newspapers that decries the corrupt economic interests of Europeans in the island. This reflects his ability to think autonomously and use the written and spoken word accordingly in acts that demonstrate his agency and willpower for justice, what he feels in his heart is his true life calling. These attributes are especially significant in his decision to sacrifice his own ambitions for the redemption of his people. Even if this mission is an illusory and misguided quest based on a complex of black inferiority, it points to an essential trait of Eulogio's personality that proves to be very consequential: hubris.

The emphasis on Eulogio's pride towards the end of the narrative demonstrates that there is an element of self-preservation and resistance against the colonizer that Álvarez Amargós' article misses in its conclusion, which reads as follows:

Out of the loss of what is one's own, what is original, what is authentic will arise the colonized man, a fiction of civilization, provided, as Calibán, with the weapons of his master in order to curse him. However, the opposites in this framework imply that there are two zones constituted in spaces of learning, in apparent vacancies where the character actually discovers his anxieties and shortcomings.

En la pérdida de lo propio, de lo original, de lo auténtico estará el surgimiento del hombre colonizado, ficción de la civilización, *provisto al igual que Calibán de las armas de su amo para maldecirlo*. Sin embargo, los opuestos en este cuadro implican dos zonas que se constituyen en espacios de aprendizaje, en vacíos aparentes donde realmente el personaje descubrirá sus inquietudes y carencias. (10-11; emphasis mine)

That Eulogio, like Calibán, is provided with the weapons of the colonizer in order to avenge his colonized status harkens back to Gutiérrez de la Solana's assertion that Eulogio could have used the education he received as a tool to rebel: "The protagonist is an educated and intellectually disciplined man, with superior preparation... How is it that he doesn't make use of those excellent qualities and conditions?" ("El protagonista es un hombre de estudios y de disciplina intelectual, con una preparación muy superior... ¿Cómo es que no hace uso de esas excelentes cualidades y condiciones?"; 206). The answer to this question is that he does, in fact, attempt to use his skills to triumph over prejudice, but the conditions, contrary to how Gutiérrez de la Solana describes them, are far from excellent and are not limited to Eulogio's status but to an inhospitable environment.

Although Gutiérrez de la Solana attributes Eulogio's misfortune to the racism of others, he seems more inclined to blame the protagonist for not being able to find the strength and capability within himself to overcome adversity. However, from a very early age, others mislead him against reaching his own potential, such as Don Antonio who attempts to keep Eulogio's political influence at bay by secluding him in a seminary. A closer look at how Eulogio perceives and constructs his blackness and biracial identity would assist in understanding better the tensions between his subjectivity and his agency. The beginning scene of Eulogio remembering his past as a movement through the rooms of the storehouse of his memory repeats itself throughout the short novel, guiding the reader into further exploration of these themes.

Towards the short novel's denouement, Eulogio's hubris is compared to Don Quijote's, with illusions to save the world, similar to heroic tales of messianic proportions. It is the moment right before the final scene of the novel where we meet again with the Eulogio who remembers his past at the beginning of the text, thus completing the circle of rememory that encloses the cyclical narrative:

Don Quijote is the idea of absolute good and valor. And to those who have a hint of Quijote in their spirit, Sancho's words are in vain. Eulogio didn't stop to consider that he had almost been sequestered for two days in Paris, that he was going from Paris to Bourdeaux as a prisoner, without being able to, not even for an instant, get rid of his philanthropic protector; ... not even for an instant did the thought cross his mind that Mr. Vatan had fooled him. If someone had gone to tell him: "Mr. Vatan plays low like a sneak and has been, for a long time, the hidden culprit of all the uproar in Tahiti"; if someone had told him the truth, he would have protested with fire. After leaving La Palice, Eulogio Valdés exhaled, saying goodbye to the inhospitable lands of Europe, and almost laid back on his extendible chair, he contemplated the sky...

Don Quijote es la idea del bien y del valor absolutos. Y para el que tiene un germen de Quijote en su espíritu, las voces de Sancho son baldías. Eulogio no se detuvo a considerar que había estado dos días en París casi secuestrado, que iba de París a Burdeos como preso, sin poder desasirse ni un instante de su filantrópico protector; ... Si alguien hubiese ido a decirle: «El señor Vatan juega a la baja y es, desde hace tiempo, el autor de todos los disturbios en Taití»; si alguien hubiera ido a decirle tal verdad, habría protestado con fuego. Al salir de La Palice, Eulogio Valdés suspiró diciendo adiós a las tierras inhospitalarias de Europa, y casi tendido en su silla extensible, se puso a contemplar el cielo... (220-21; 2<sup>nd</sup> ellipsis in original)

Although Eulogio is portrayed as a man who comes of age (unlike Don Quijote), he goes on a journey that tests his pride and free will, and most important his heart, contrary to notions of automatism. For example, there are three instances when he must sacrifice his comfort and relinquish his pride in favor of both the Tahitians and the welfare of his mother and sister: (1) when he becomes leader of the political party in order to save his people from "barbarism" and European exploitation; (2) when he decides to give up his position as leader of the black political party in order to become consul in Birmingham; and (3) towards the end of the novel when he accepts Mr. Vatan's offer to once again become leader of the Tahitians, despite his protector's betrayal. In all of these moments, Eulogio is given the chance to weigh his options of subverting or acquiescing to other's desires, therefore showing that he is not a marionette unable to cut the strings that control his autonomy despite the fateful circumstances leading to his tragic death.

Such misgivings are tied to Eulogio's yearnings for justice in the midst of his racial ambiguity, which can be traced back to a key moment in the text when he falls ill after he experiences the aforementioned backlash of the Tahitian political party that passes by his house to attack his leadership:

Eulogio fell ill. Already convalescent, the doctor, upon noticing that his skin was changing, told him:

—You're going to rise up as another man.

Eulogio looked at the new skin, gleaming under the old one that wrinkled as it came off, and he replied:

—Doctor, do you know if one can change one's heart?

—My man, with time and in the light of surgical advancements... Colleagues in Paris are certain that...

And he was going to explicate a theory, when Eulogio, with a painful gesture, interrupted him:

—No, doctor... Even if it were possible, I wouldn't change my heart. In the depth of a heart that has suffered a lot, there's pride, like a flag ripped to shreds in combat...

Eulogio cayó enfermo. Ya convaleciente, el médico, al observar que estaba mudando la piel, le dijo:

—Se va usted a levantar, hecho otro hombre.

Eulogio miró la nueva piel, reluciente bajo la piel Antigua que se arrugaba al desprenderse, y repuso:

—¿Sabe usted, doctor, si puede cambiarse el corazón?

—Hombre, con el tiempo y dados los adelantos quirúrgicos... Compañeros de París aseguran...

E iba a explicar una teoría, cuando Eulogio, con un gesto doloroso, lo interrumpió:

—No, doctor... Aunque pudiera ser, yo no me cambiaría el corazón. En el fondo de un corazón que ha sufrido mucho, se está orgulloso, como de una bandera que salió hecha jirones del combate... (171; all ellipses in original)

Throughout most of the novel, Eulogio's colorblindness is understated due to his racial ambivalence. The passage above, however, is a watershed moment in the narrative because for a brief moment he realizes that, despite the change from skin that is old, wrinkled, and dark to a shiny and brighter kind (i.e., black to white), what matters most to him is the integrity of his heart, the passion for his native land, and the call to justice. In a protest against the authority of science, Eulogio denies the doctor's suggestion to undergo surgery in order to change his heart in the same way that his skin has. In other words, he refuses to disavow his blackness. What occurs here is an inversion of inversion (notwithstanding the redundancy), which is to say that the pathological

inversion of his skin is not replicated in his heart. He prefers that his being, ergo his subjectivity, remain intact despite the external forces that attempt to derail his resolve to fight for his people, which is repeated in similar fashion in the final scene of the novel.

At the end of the novel, we are left with the affirmation of Eulogio's blackness as vindication for the perplexed and racially fragmented Eulogio that remembers his life from the rooftop of his home in Tahiti. For instance, immediately following the passage cited above, which reminded the reader of the quixotic Eulogio and the rememory of his past life at the beginning of the novel, is the excerpt below where the worth and the symbolic resistance of the protagonist's blackness is reinstated and reinscribed as a subversive act against the State:

Since the two days before the ship's arrival, capcious new stories were beginning to circulate: those stories that the Press calls rumors and that have the virtue of creating truths mixed with lies. It would've been difficult to designate the occult power that launched them; but everyone in Tahiti, during those days, depended on them.

By just saying that a reception of a racial kind was being projected in honor of Eugenio Valdés, one was organized and the authorities were frightened. Since the morning, a multitude of blacks filled the docks. The Police attempted in vain to contain it. It was a deluge that broke every barrier and that, sometimes, had tornados of eruption in its center ... A subversive banner surged over the undulating mass of people. The Police, upon feeling impotent, wanted to multiply its forces, and then panic ensued. Disparate voices made themselves heard: "They're assassinating us! Defend yourselves! Defend yourselves! Long live Eulogio Valdés!"

Desde dos días antes de llegar el buque, comenzaron a circular noticias capciosas: esas noticias que la Prensa llama rumores y que tienen la virtud de crear verdades con mentiras. Hubiera sido difícil designar la potencia oculta que las lanzaba; pero todos en Taití, durante aquellos dos días, dependieron de ellas.

Con sólo decir que se proyectaba un recibimiento de carácter racial en honor de Eugenio Valdés, se consiguió organizarlo y amedrentar a las autoridades.<sup>83</sup> Desde por la mañana una multitud de negros llenaba los muelles. La Policía intentaba en vano contenerla. Era un alud que quebrantaba toda barrera y que, a veces, tenía en su centro torbellinos de erupción ... Sobre la masa ondulante surgió un pendón subversivo. La Policía, al sentirse impotente, quiso multiplicar sus fuerzas, y entonces se originó el pánico. Voces dispersas se hicieron oír: «¡Nos asesinan!» «¡A defenderse!» «¡A defenderse!» «¡Viva Eulogio Valdés!» (221-22)

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<sup>83</sup> It is unclear whether Hernández-Catá is referring to Eulogio here as opposed to a so-called Eugenio because this passage mentions how the press often distorts information and is given to gossip. Nonetheless, given the lack of quotation marks to indicate that the name is part of a cited press release, it could be that Hernández-Catá, or the publisher, misnamed the protagonist as the result of a typographical error.

There is a variety of inversions that occur in this passage, from what we see at the beginning of the novel to its ending. Previously it had been stated that Eulogio wrote an article against the new colonizing government in the island that caused dissent in his political party and that jeopardized his position of leadership. Here we see the influence of the press once more in fomenting questionable political opinion and falsely characterizing the Tahitian community. The Tahitians, however, use it to envision and constitute their own nationalism along racial lines that affirm blackness, as seen in the increasing number of blacks and the augmenting threat they pose at Eulogio's reception. This is the main line of analysis in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* in which nation is defined as "an imagined political community" (6).

As an imagined community, nationhood relies on the cultural systems that feed the imagination of its constituents toward community cohesion, which leads to a sense of nationalism: "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being" (12). In *La piel*, the Tahitians and Eulogio work for and against blackness in relation to black culture, a sociocultural dynamic that is at the core of the political turmoil that disturbs Tahiti. However, when preserving blackness entails co-opting it in order to acquiesce to the white settler's demands, then Eulogio is obliged to distance himself from his own people until they realize that they have been led into submission by the impending government. The imminent confrontation between the Tahitians and the State coincides with Eulogio's return to his homeland, prompted no less by the media outlets announcing his return. In this sense, we see an inverted response to the instruments of modernity, whereby the Tahitians use the press to their advantage in order to reinstate Eulogio as their leader, despite his intimidating presence in the island. They also reverse their assimilation into the white man's culture, which is represented by the banner of subversion that arises from the multitude.

What starts out as a disavowal of blackness in the beginning of *La piel* turns into a vindication of it with the cry “Long live Eulogio Valdés” at the end of the novel. While at first the Tahitians betray Eulogio and disavow his abilities and leadership as a result of his blackness, in the end they learn to accept him as one of their own. Their culminating call to fight inverts the devaluation and discredit against him to the effect that when the reader is presented with the Eulogio from the tropics that remembers his previous life, it is an Eulogio that does not regret his past experience in the new context of revolution. Instead, he looks up to the sky, “not knowing that through that sky electric slings, vassals serving good and evil, like all the conquests of man, went to announce to Tahiti his arrival” (“no sabía que por aquel cielo iban hondas eléctricas, avasalladas para servir al bien y al mal, como todas las conquistas del hombre, a anunciar a Taití su llegada”; 221).<sup>84</sup> While the first part of the novel starts with “The Departure,” the last part ends with an arrival that is headed by its title “The Port.” It is an arrival that represents his (be)coming into himself. It is through the port of the vindication of the inverted self—the port itself as a symbol of transitivity—and the reorientation of modernizing systems that propel the transformative revolt in Tahiti, which repeats itself in the cyclical memory of Eulogio’s biraciality. In this sense, modernism is revitalized continuously in new iterations of transness. As such, the resistance that characterizes racial inversion is a transversal phenomenon that oscillates between whiteness and blackness in cycles of remembrance, urging us to reinscribe and reencounter Eulogio again and again in the tropics of transmodernity.

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<sup>84</sup> This excerpt is also reminiscent of the sling shot that Hernández-Catá mentions in his autobiographical story “La Quinina,” which he used as a child when he pretended to be a Cuban rebel fighting against the Spanish army.

## CONCLUSION. An “About-Face” Toward Transmodernist Inversions

By focusing on the inversion of subjects, in both their topical and embodied forms, this dissertation revalorizes the significant contribution that Hernández-Catá’s novels make to modernist, queer, and critical race studies as it centers the study and lived reality of sex, gender, and race as phenomena that continue, even today, to define and shape the modern discourse and experience of tradition and progress in the global sociocultural and political arena from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. It critically examines literature’s ability to capture the dualities of the modern individual’s body and subjectivity beyond their constrictive binaries into the transitive and transversal movement of other, subaltern, and plural meanings, ontologies, and orientations. It argues that one cannot understand the transformations of modernity without considering trans-sexual, trans-gender, and trans-racial bodies, subjectivities, and expressions and the way that through time and transmodernist cultural production they have propelled modernity into other directions that problematize its heteronormative, prejudicial, and hegemonic presuppositions, ideologies, and practices. In this sense, it presents the exclusion and suppression of the transness of inversion as intrinsic, but also as a challenge to the transness of modern change in ways that reflect the five divisional categories of the artwork in the Stonewall-inspired *About Face* exhibition in Wrightwood 659: Transgress, Transfigure, Transpose, Transform, and Transcend.

Like the protagonists of Hernández-Catá’s *El ángel de Sodoma* and *La piel, Inverting (Trans)Modern Subjects* is “about face.” Its central aim is to raise the Levinasian demand of the invert’s face to the attention of the reader’s perceptive and actional recognition of the marginal and oppressed other. This includes recognizing both Hernández-Catá’s unpopular views on the dignity and respect of sexual and ethnic minorities as well as their groundbreaking portrayal in his fiction. By being the first writer that to my knowledge authored novels in the Spanish language that feature gender inversion, same-sex sexuality, and blackness after slavery in male protagonists, Hernández-

Catá transgressed the normative social codes and misleading progressivism of modern initiatives during his time. And so, instead of executing the about-face at the military academy for orphans, he turned his face away from it and instead pursued a career as a writer and diplomat that included many about-faces against repression and injustice. The transfiguration of his characters' racial and sexual constitution transformed literature and influenced perceptions on race, gender, and sexuality. Henceforth, in thinking about protagonists like José-María and Eulogio, we see how Hernández-Catá's image is transposed onto the lives of these main characters in ways that reflect his desire to transcend the unethical dichotomies and inequities of patriarchy and neocolonialism.

In this dissertation, I have traced the inverted constitution of José-María and Eulogio in order to highlight their conflicted identities. Each chapter is about face, that is, about making visible the presence, recognizing the personhood, and affirming the individuality of inverted subjects in order to do an about-face, that is, to destabilize discourses and forces that try to diminish their humanity and authority. In other words, inversion or reversal is what defines their characterization in a narrative directed toward transgressing, transforming, or transcending the limited scope of race, gender, and sexuality of a particular "progressivist" strain of modernism so as to reinvigorate it and create new formulations of tradition and progress that do not take for granted the difference and plurality of queer and black transmodern experience.

## APPENDIX

Table 1. A structural comparison of the three main editions of *La piel* analyzed in this study.

	Place(s) of publication	Publisher	Description	Paratexts	No. of pages of the story	Illustrations	Other
<b>1913</b> (1 <sup>st</sup> ed.)	Madrid, Paris, and Buenos Aires	<i>El Libro Popular</i>	Digitized copy.  Pages are about 8 ½” by 11”	None	27	8 in black and white interspersed in the narrative text.	Holds Hernández-Catá’s signature on the last page of the story.
<b>1915</b> (edition number not specified)	Madrid and Buenos Aires	Renacimiento	Digitized copy.  Part of collection of novels by Hernández-Catá entitled <i>Los frutos ácidos</i>  Pages are about 5” by 7”	The book has inner flaps that review Hernández-Catá’s work.  Book is dedicated to José Antonio González Lanuza.  Book has a prologue that addresses the reader.	69	None in the narrative text.  The collection’s title page has an illustration.	
<b>1928</b> (6 <sup>th</sup> ed.)	Madrid	Mundo Latino: directed by Hernández-Catá	PDF copy.  Part of collection of novels by Hernández-Catá entitled <i>Los frutos ácidos</i>  Pages are about 5” by 7”	Book is dedicated to José Antonio González Lanuza.  Book has a prologue but it is not addressed to the reader.	70	None.	

Figure 2. Front cover art of the 1913, first edition of *La piel* by Salvador Bartolozzi as featured in the literary magazine *El libro popular*.



Figure 3. Front cover art of the 1915 edition of *Los frutos ácidos*.

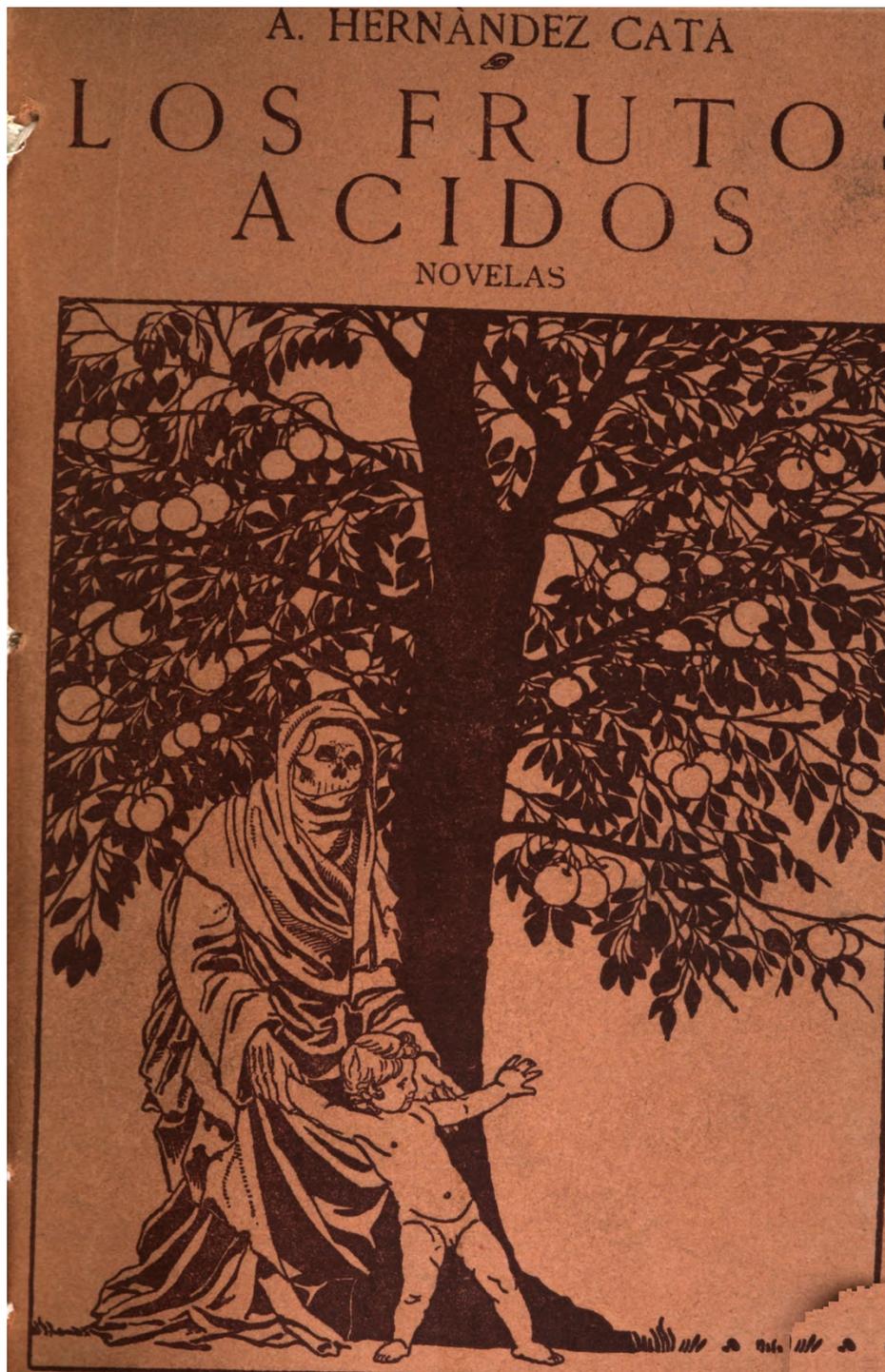
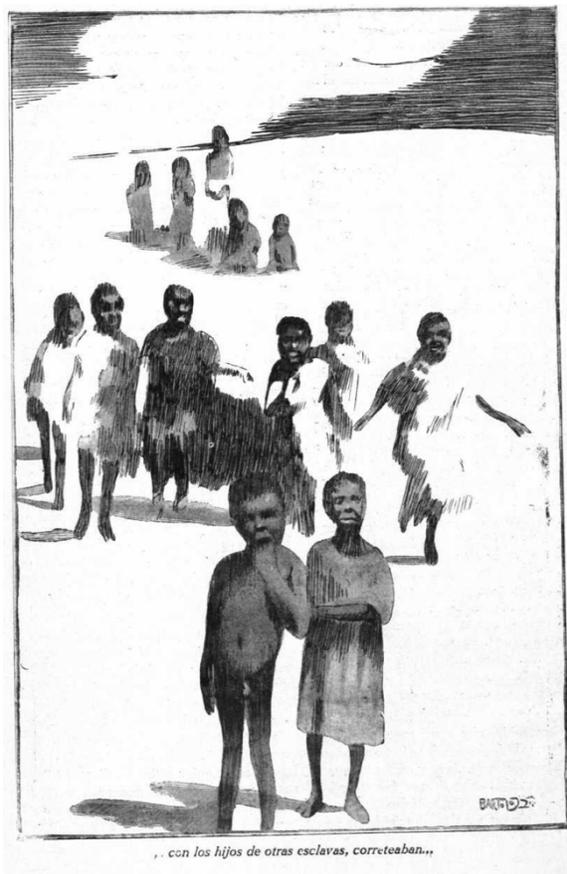


Figure 4. Black and white illustrations by Salvador Bartolozzi in the first edition of *La piel* (1913) as featured in the literary magazine *El libro popular*.



(a) Page 475.



(b) Page 479.

Figure 4, continued



(c) Page 481.



(d) Page 483.

Figure 4, continued

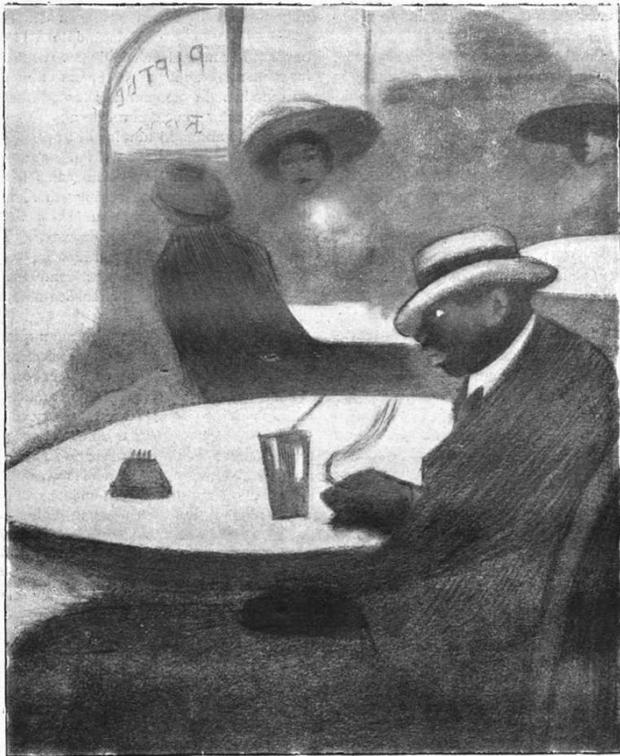


(e) Page 486-47.



(f) Page 491.

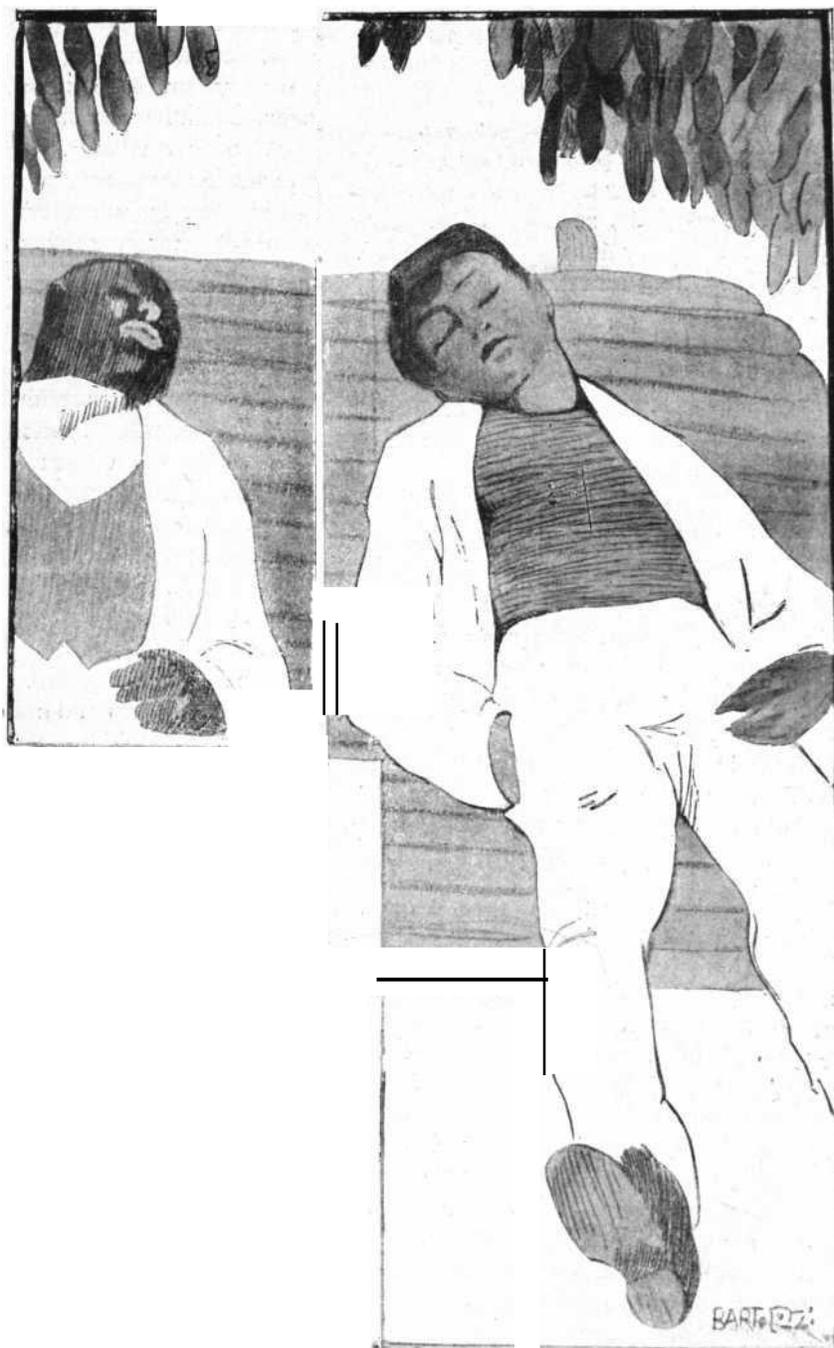
Figure 4, continued



*... sen'arse en las terrazas de los bu'evares...*

(g) Page 495.

Figure 4, continued



(h) Page 499.

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