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The Secularization of the Divine in *fin de siglo* Mexico: Religion and Modernity in Prose Works by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Federico Gamboa, and Amado Nervo

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by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2012

Dedication

In loving memory of Lucinda García-Vassell,

la Lucinda del mundo.

Acknowledgements

Le debo mi más profundo agradecimiento al supervisor de mi tesis Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba por su apoyo inquebrantable a lo largo de este proyecto. Sus seminarios sobre la teoría queer y el modernismo me sirvieron de una base fundamental para mi investigación y mis lecturas de los textos. A Naomi Lindstrom le agradezco su buena disposición de leer versiones preliminares de algunos capítulos. Sus comentarios me eran imprescindibles. A Jill Robbins y a César Salgado les doy gracias por su participación en mi comité y por sus comentarios sabios y acertados sobre mi trabajo. *En plus, je voudrais remercie Alexandra Wettlaufer pour avoir partagé son expertise sur la littérature française*.

Además, los intercambios con mis colegas en el departamento han contribuido bastante a mi desarrollo intelectual. Les agradezco especialmente a Alanna Breen (*my fairy god-daughter*), Rebeca Castellanos, María Cavazos, Cuitlahuac Chávez, Meredith Clark, Medardo de la Cruz, Rocío del Águila, Karla González, Memoria James, Belinda Mora García, Adriana Pacheco, Verónica Ríos, Rachel Showstack, Scott Spinks, y Omar Vargas.

Finally, I send out my appreciation to family and friends near and far who have lent moral support at various times during this endeavor, especially my parents, Chet and Elda García, Robert Carnaghi, Ken Rose, Judy McCarver, Marla Koosed, Kandi Ash, Richard Ribb, Ramsey Wiggins, Jane Barnholdt, Charla Patton, Candace Smith, Nazrul Islam, and my dear friend and spiritual advisor Anne Osburn.

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Publication No._____

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine literary representations of religiosity and the spiritual realm in late nineteenth-century Mexico, in prose works by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895), Federico Gamboa (1864-1939), and Amado Nervo (1870-1919). Through an analysis of selected texts by these authors, I will explore how they articulated the Roman Catholicism that permeated their cultural context, amid the processes of modernization. I will also show how they expressed subjective spiritual experiences, independent of the doctrinal precepts of the Church. All three of these writers devoted attention to the pervasive religiosity of their milieu, and wrestled with the question regarding the relevance of the Church in modernity. However, each one presents

a distinct vision for the role that institutional religion should play. Each of these authors also portrays his own individual experiences of the metaphysical realm.

Part One is based on an analysis of selected articles, chronicles, and short stories by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. This author utilizes the *modernista* aesthetic of the era to transform the religious impulse into subjective expressions of the Divine. In this regard, he presents a secular form of spirituality, although his texts often contain undertones of a lingering Catholicism. Part Two addresses the tension between religious orthodoxy and modernity in three novels by Federico Gamboa, narratives that reflect the author's close adherence to Church dictates. In these stories the protagonists often come into conflict with the prevailing religious discourse that attempts to thwart their autonomy. Yet the narratives ultimately reaffirm and uphold Catholic values. In Part Three of this study I turn my attention to a selection of articles, chronicles, short stories, and novellas by Amado Nervo, the most spiritually inclined of the three authors. His early novellas present similar themes as Gamboa's novels regarding the interference of the Church in the lives of the characters. However, Nervo's later texts reveal that he did not feel compelled to remain within the limits of Church doctrine. Instead, he follows Nájera's lead in exploring alternative perspectives of the Divine, such as spiritualist practices and the other religious traditions.

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Introduction

Contemporary scholars of modern Spanish American culture often characterize the end of the nineteenth century as a period of sweeping transformation in many of the recently formed republics in the hemisphere. Secularization was one of the fundamental changes taking place during that time, although this was not a seamless process. As the Roman Catholic Church had been an integral arm of the ruling class throughout the colonial era, the institution had amassed a significant amount of political and economic influence. Furthermore, due to the three hundred year presence of the institution, Christian religious beliefs were deeply woven into the social fabric of the region. As a result of these circumstances, *fin de siglo* literature often reflects the tensions between secular and religious discourses. Julio Ramos depicts the era as a time of crisis, resulting from the autonomization of aesthetic fields. As literary production, in particular, became disconnected from the agendas of Church and State, intellectuals were in the position of having to define the role of literature in modernity (8). Angel Rama notes that, as positivism questioned and challenged religious beliefs, intellectuals often took on a priestly role in an effort to address matters of the spirit in a secular society: "…componen una doctrina adaptada a la circunstancia y asumen, en reemplazo de los sacerdotes, la conducción espiritual" (111). Graciela Montaldo identifies the changing function of aesthetic practices as a central characteristic of the *fin de siglo* sensitivity. As a result of secularization, she explains, traditional cultural forms, such as religiosity, lose their original meaning yet continue to exist with new significations. "El Fin de Siglo verá la transformación del impulso religioso en otras formas culturales: la religión del arte y la proliferación de ritos esotéricos" (17-18). Octavio Paz likewise highlights a religious tone in the literature of the era, stating that for Spanish American *modernistas* "el arte es una pasión, en el sentido religioso de la palabra, que exige un sacrificio como todas las pasiones" (*Cuadrivio* 14). However, Paz finds that the spirituality they express is distinct from the Christian conception

of spirit. In his view, this generation of poets was not concerned with the salvation of the individual soul, but sought instead to restore the unity between humankind and the cosmos (19). The purpose of this study is to examine the persistent religiosity in *fin de siglo* literature that these scholars have identified. Focusing on Mexico City as one of the centers in which the cultural transformations of modernity were occurring, I will present an analysis of prose works by three writers who are representative of that place and time, –Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895), Federico Gamboa (1864-1939), and Amado Nervo (1870-1919). This study will address the following questions: How do the authors articulate religious values as cultural artifacts in their texts? How do they transform religiosity into other aesthetic expressions? How are subjective experiences of the immaterial realm portrayed in these texts? Is there a theological intervention in *modernismo*? Or a *modernista* intervention in theology?

I have selected these three writers because they have all, in some way, devoted attention to the pervasive religiosity in Mexican culture during the period of modernization. All three have contributed to Mexico's literary canon, Nájera and Nervo as *modernista* poets and prose writers, and Gamboa as an author of realist narratives. As intellectuals in Mexico City, they often attended the same literary and artistic *tertulias*, and were exposed to the latest aesthetic trends and ideas that were circulating in the metropolitan press. As journalists, they all had the opportunity to offer their commentary on the broad social, cultural, and technological changes of the era. In regard to literary style, Nájera served as a mentor for the other two, as he did for many of the younger writers in the capital. All three of these writers looked to Europe, France in particular, for literary models. However, their texts show that they did not blindly imitate those models, but instead participated in a transnational dialogue in regard to cultural changes taking place throughout the West. Their depictions of religiosity also reveal the tension between traditional beliefs and positivist science, the prevailing philosophy of secularization. This study will show that religious imagery appears in these texts, ranging from an undertone of lingering Catholicism,

to an affirmation of the religious doctrines of the institutional Church, to a rearticulation of the religious impulse channeled into artistic creation. In addition to this, all three of these writers wrestled with the question of what role, if any, the Catholic Church should play in modernity. Granted, these were not the only authors of the period who share these characteristics. But among the three, their texts span the *fin de siglo* era (c. 1875-1910), and each body of work presents a distinct vision of the place of institutional religion in modern society, as well as of subjective experiences of the metaphysical domain.

This study is based on a selection of articles, chronicles, short stories, and novellas by Nájera and Nervo and three novels by Gamboa. In these works, I will examine their literary representations of religiosity as a cultural artifact, with an emphasis on the transformation of religious content and imagery in the context of modernization. In Nájera's texts, the *modernista* aesthetic emerges as an alternative and autonomous perspective on the divine, a secularization of spirituality. Although he does not express anti-clerical rhetoric, the author distances himself from the doctrines of institutional religion in order to contemplate the metaphysical domain as a source of artistic inspiration, on the one hand, and as a means for transcending the material realm, on the other. When he does present religious themes in his narratives, his representations of Catholicism often limit the Church's influence to the domestic sphere, the domain of women and children. Gamboa's narratives tend to adhere more closely to doctrinal Catholicism, and even reflect the author's own return to the religion of his youth. The rhetoric of the Church looms over the characters in his novels, often in the form of the daunting standard of its moral code, particularly in regard to sexual expression. These narratives also vigorously examine the tension between traditional religious beliefs and the spirit of intellectual inquiry, one of the defining characteristics of modernity. Nervo, as the most spiritually inclined of the three authors, presents more varied representations of religion and the spiritual realm. Like Gamboa, Nervo's early narratives portray characters wrestling with the moral dictates of the Church. His later texts, however, follow

Nájera's lead in expressing a spirituality that transcends institutional religion, a spirituality that serves as a two-fold path, toward a subjective experience of immateriality and the unconscious, on the one hand, and toward a re-enchantment of secular society, on the other.

As this study will be focused on the presence of religious content and imagery in the prose works by Nájera, Gamboa, and Nervo, within the context of modernization, I will first provide an historical overview of the relationship between Church and State in Mexico, and then outline some of the defining characteristics of Mexico's modernity, in order to locate these authors within that context.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHURCH AND STATE IN MEXICO

Although the secularization of ruling institutions is one of the objectives of western modernity, determining the role of the Roman Catholic Church in modern Mexico had been a point of contention among political leaders throughout the nineteenth century, from the very inception of the struggle for independence from Spain. This dilemma is rooted in the close association between the Spanish Crown and the Church during the process of colonization in the western hemisphere. The devoutly Catholic Habsburg monarchs, Carlos V (reigned 1516-56) and Felipe II (reigned 1556-98), in addition to combating the spread of Protestantism in Europe, channeled their religious zeal into a dynamic project of evangelization in the newly acquired transatlantic territories. The first Franciscan friars arrived in Mexico in 1524 to take on the task of converting the indigenous peoples to the Christian faith. Within the next decade they were followed by Dominicans and Augustinians. Members of the recently formed Jesuit order arrived in 1571. For nearly two centuries the Church functioned in Mexico, the viceroyalty of New Spain, as an arm of the state. Ecclesiastical authorities together with representatives of the Spanish monarchy formed the upper echelon of the social hierarchy. Within the context of this administrative structure, the Church soon became one of the more pervasive of colonial

institutions, consequently leaving a deep imprint on the culture (Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 160-63).

This close relationship between Church and State began to weaken with the advent of the Bourbon dynasty in Spain, which began with the reign of Felipe d'Anjou (1700-46). Whereas Church authorities had previously functioned as equal partners with the vice regal government, under the Bourbons they would now be subordinate to the Crown's administrators. Tensions between the two branches of hegemonic authority intensified during the reign of Carlos III (1759-88), who had an unharmonious relationship with the Vatican. His unease with the wealth and power of the Church, and of the Society of Jesus in particular, culminated in the 1767 expulsion of the Jesuit Order from all his dominions. In addition to the monarch's tense relationship with the Church, he also exhibited an affinity for the enlightened principles of modern philosophies, which he incorporated into his governance.

Another product of the Enlightenment era that entered Spain and her colonies during the eighteenth century, challenging the spiritual hegemony of the Church, was the fraternal organization of Freemasonry. Masonic lodges served as an alternative space in which to explore metaphysical and philosophical questions and restore a sense of agency over religious ritual. In addition to these practices, the secret gatherings also provided a place to discuss subversive political ideas. Needless to say, Masons within Spanish dominions on both sides of the Atlantic were persecuted by the Inquisition as well as the Crown (Reyes 56-58). As was the case in the US and French revolutions, Masons played a role in Mexico's struggle for political independence from Spain, although it is difficult to determine the extent of their participation, given the clandestine nature of the organization (Reyes 65-69). There is much speculation that many of the central organizers of the initial insurgency were Masons, including Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811), Ignacio Allende (1769-1811), and Miguel Domínguez (1756-1830) and his wife, doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (1773-1829). This, however, remains in the realm of legend, as

scholars have been unable to produce documentation to definitively establish this point one way or the other (Cobos 63). In any case, whether or not these leaders were Masons, their activities were certainly influenced by the political and social treatises of French philosophers, such as Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). These texts made their way into New Spain and circulated surreptitiously among intellectuals of the *criollo* class, people of Spanish descent born in the New World. The presence of these ideas is evident in the *Grito de Dolores*, the impromptu sermon delivered by the parish priest Miguel Hidalgo in which he exhorted his parishioners in the town of Dolores, Guanajuato to rise up against Spanish domination. As this was an oral speech, there are various versions of it that have been recorded. But the spirit of it echoes the French Revolution's rhetoric of political liberty and the rights of man [sic] (Hidalgo 54-57).

Although the insurgents had been inspired by the French Revolution, not all of the participants promoted the separation of Church and State as one of its objectives. The struggle began as a popular uprising of mestizo and indigenous peoples, at the urging of Hidalgo. However, alongside his revolutionary rhetoric, the Father of modern Mexico declared the movement in the name of the Catholic religion, under the banner of "nuestra sagrada patrona, la santísima virgen de Guadalupe" (58). The mestizo cleric José María Morelos (1765-1815), who carried on the cause of the masses after Hidalgo's capture and subsequent execution, likewise maintained the continued presence of the Church as part of the agenda for independence from Spain. The political and social program that he outlined in his treatise entitled "Sentimientos de la nación" (1813) includes an article that declares Catholicism to be the official state religion: "Que la religión católica sea la única, sin tolerancia de otra" (111). The movement was later co-opted by a faction of military leaders who had defected from the royalist troops. This group of upper-class *criollo*s was not striving to form a republic at all. They merely wanted to attain the same level of prestige and privileges as the *peninsulares*, within the existing social order (Meyer,

Sherman, and Deeds 260-61). Ultimately, it was the *criollo*s who prevailed and, under the Plan de Iguala of 1821, created a constitutional monarchy, with Agustín de Iturbide (1783-1824) as emperor. In this way, they achieved their objective of equal status with the peninsulares, and allowed the Church to retain its privileges. Upon the failure of the empire in 1823, political leaders formed a federal republic in this next stage of Mexico's project of nation-building. In 1824 the framers of the first Constitution tackled the question of separating Church and State, but ultimately declared Roman Catholicism to be the official state religion. Many delegates argued that Catholic doctrine had such a wide-reaching influence throughout the culture that it functioned as an "ancestral creed," a core component in the construction of Mexico's national identity (Santillán 189).

At mid-century Freemasonry again emerges from the shadows to challenge the religious hegemony of the Church. In fact, two of the principal political leaders of this era, Benito Juárez (1806-1872) and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (1812-1861), were both initiates of the National Mexican Rite of Freemasonry (Reyes 112-15). Spearheading a liberal reform movement, Masons utilized language, symbols, and rituals, to construct a secular spirituality, which would contribute to a sense of national unity (Reyes 82). In an effort to reduce the political influence of the Church, Juárez and Lerdo de Tejada drafted legislation in 1856 that impacted the Church politically, socially, and economically. This series of laws, which were later incorporated into the Constitution of 1857, revoked the clergy's privilege of legal immunity under civil law, nationalized Church properties, placed restrictions on public religious ceremonies and ordered the closure of convents and monastic orders. They created a secular education system, as well as a civil registry of births, marriages and deaths (Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 332-33). Although the reform laws managed to curtail the political and economic privileges of the Church, they were unable to diminish the social influence of an institution that had been entrenched in the culture for three hundred years. There was still much cultural and political resistance to the process of

secularization, even among moderate liberals. The tensions that arose from the reform program eventually led to two civil wars: the War of the Reform (1858-1861) and the French Intervention (1862-1867), supported by Mexican conservatives and the Church hierarchy in Mexico. These were essentially Mexico's wars of religion, not unlike those that took place in northern Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although they were not fighting in defense of specific doctrines, as European Protestant movements had done, Mexican liberals were fighting, in part, to reduce the Church's role in political affairs and allow religious freedom. Conservatives, on the other hand, were fighting in defense of the Church, against the spread of what they considered to be the heresies of the liberal reform.

When Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) came to power in 1876 he adopted a conciliatory policy in regard to the Reform Laws. As long as the Church remained subordinate to civil law in general, and to the personal authority of Díaz in particular, the dictator assured the ecclesiastical authorities that he would not strictly enforce the anti-clerical articles of the Constitution. In return the Church leaders agreed that they would no longer censure citizens who complied with the civil laws. They no longer forbade parents to send children to state schools, provided that Catholic instruction could be maintained in private. In an effort to support the Díaz régime, the clergy discouraged parishioners from engaging in political matters, urging them instead to participate in what they called "social Catholicism." This consisted of activities directed toward combating social vices, such as corruption, alcoholism, and prostitution, the very ills of modernity that, in the Church's view, resulted from liberal secularization and industrial capitalism (Garner 119-120). As a result of Diaz's policy of reconciliation, the Church continued to dominate public life, socially and intellectually, and still enjoyed considerable influence toward the end of the century.

The continued presence of the Church in Porfirian society is not just a contradiction of Mexico's program of modernization. The question regarding the role of religion in modernity had existed throughout the Enlightenment era in Europe. Christianity had served as a philosophical

base in European culture for centuries, and its value system was still influential among liberal intellectuals, even as they were intent on constructing a secular society. The desire on the part of many Enlightenment philosophers to reduce the Church's privileged social status did not necessarily mean that they were all atheists. Many, including Voltaire and Rousseau, professed a belief in God even though their conception of the Supreme Being was emptied of its traditional Christian content (Dupré 14). In Mexico, however, the relative success of Díaz's conciliatory policy toward the Church reveals that there was still much resistance to the principle of secularization. Nevertheless, the dialogue that Díaz established between civil and ecclesiastical authorities was a means to an end. His ultimate goal was to pacify political tensions in the country in order to advance his ambitious program of modernization. Except for the four year presidential term of Manuel González (1880-84), Díaz remained in power in Mexico for the next three decades, until his resignation in 1911, in the aftermath of the *maderista* phase of the Revolution. His régime came to dominate political, economic, and cultural life for well over a quarter of a century, to such an extent that the fin de siglo era in Mexico bears his name: *el porfiriato*.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL MODERNITY IN MEXICO

Néstor García Canclini identifies four basic components that comprise western modernity: the emancipation or secularization of cultural fields, the expansion of scientific knowledge and industrial methods of production, technological and artistic innovation, and the democratization of society based on education and the diffusion of specialized knowledge (31-32). Diaz's process of modernization was most successful in the area of technological innovation. He introduced advances in transportation and communication to Mexico and modernized industrial production. In terms of scientific knowledge, the régime adopted the positivism of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) as the philosophical foundation for its political, economic, and social policies. In 1868 Gabino Barreda (1818-1881), an ardent admirer of Comte, had

established the National Preparatory School and structured its curriculum in accordance with positivist ideals. By the time Díaz began his first presidential term, Barreda's educational system had produced a generation of *científicos*, intellectuals who brought a scientific perspective to the rational structuring of society. During the 1880s and 90s, Díaz's secretary of the treasury, José Ives Limantour (1854-1935) applied positivist principles to the nation's finances and succeeded in balancing the budget for the first time in the post-independence era (Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 383-84). Notwithstanding these achievements, as well as the social and economic stability that Díaz brought to the nation, he was not as attentive to other components of the modernizing agenda. In the first place, Díaz consolidated his authority by force, with the development of a militarily-trained national police force known as the *rurales*. His régime manipulated elections, censored the press, and incarcerated any journalists who dared to criticize his actions or policies (394-96). In addition, only a small segment of the population, the *criollo* elite and the emerging middle class, benefited from the régime's economic and material improvements. In other words, the democratization of society suffered under the *Pax Porfiriana*. Díaz was supported in this uneven modernization by a conservative faction within the liberal party, a younger generation of liberals, including Justo Sierra Méndez (1848-1912) and Francisco Bulnes (1847-1924), who had grown weary of the constant armed conflicts that had plagued the nation throughout the post-independence era. Under the influence of positivism, these "conservative liberals" were challenging the excessive idealism of the liberal movement and what they regarded to be the utopian principals of the Enlightenment. Rather than a broad democratization of the political system, they advocated instead constitutional reform and the development of a sturdy central government (Garner 71). They welcomed the strong leadership of Díaz, as well as the political, social, and economic stability that he brought to the nation. This conservative trend, in addition to the régime's leniency toward the anti-clerical Reform Laws, had the effect of solidifying the hierarchized system of the traditional colonial social order that privileged the *criollo* elite, in

contradiction to the modern ideal of egalitarianism. This leads to questions regarding the post-colonial condition in Porfirian culture, structured around the framework of a Eurocentric worldview.

While Latin Americanist scholars are still debating the applicability of the term "postcolonial" to the historical circumstances of the subcontinent (Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 5), many agree that the colonial social order in the region did not end with political independence from Spain. That is, many of the new nation-states in the hemisphere were headed by *criollo* elites, who maintained an internal colonial system in relation to the indigenous masses, legitimizing a "coloniality of power," that is, a model of power based on the supposed superiority of the conquerors over the conquered (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992). Walter Mignolo expands on this thesis in his study on the significance of the term "Latin America," adopted by *criollo* intellectuals in the newly formed republics. The "idea of Latin America," he says, was a means for "white Creole and Mestizo/a elites" to construct a postcolonial identity, by associating themselves with Europe. This ideology contributed to the continuation of the colonial social order by privileging the population of European descent, while simultaneously marginalizing the indigenous, mestizo, and African cultures (58-59). Within this Eurocentric perspective, Mignolo highlights a particular obsession with France and England, characterizing the *criollo*s as being "under the illusion that they were Europeans too." He critiques their failure to render a critical analysis of the effects of colonialism, noting that they devoted themselves instead to "emulating European intellectuals" (66). This is particularly relevant in Mexico, as one of the hallmarks of Porfirian culture was the *afrancesamiento* of society, the desire to cultivate a French aesthetic in all cultural domains, including fashion, literature, art, architecture, and past-times. Víctor Macías also notes the cultural capital that the Mexican *criollo* class garnered through the acquisition of European luxury items, French as well as British. The availability of such goods signified economic stability and "allowed the elite to distance itself from its mestizo roots" (Macías 230).

These assessments coincide with the dynamic that Homi Bhabha identifies as mimicry of the colonial authority by formerly subjugated peoples (122-23). However, the complexity of Mexico's racial and ethnic demographics renders a simple binary opposition between "colonizer" and "colonized" untenable. For this reason, Bhabha's thesis, developed on the basis of the South Asian historical context, cannot be directly transposed onto the Latin American experience without some refinement. While his theory has relevance in regard to the relationship between the mestizo and indigenous masses and the metropolis, *criollo*s in Porfirian society were not simply mimicking the colonial authority; they represented a continuation of that authority.

Still the question remains as to why the upper class looked to Britain and, most significantly, France for cultural models rather than Spain. Most scholars attribute this to a lingering resentment of Spain's three hundred year domination of the former colonies. According to this view, *criollo*s intentionally sought to distance themselves from Spain in order to construct their own post-colonial identity (Mignolo 59; Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 324). To this I would add that Spain's historical relationship with the Roman Catholic Church also played a role in the *criollo* attitude toward the former metropolis. Due to Spain's active participation in the Counter-Reformation, when Enlightenment philosophies entered the Iberian Peninsula during the eighteenth century, they did not flourish to the same extent that they did in other European nations. Despite the tensions between the Bourbon monarchs and the Church, the influence of the religious institution still permeated peninsular society. As a result of these historical circumstances, intellectuals in the nascent republics associated Spain with tradition, while France and England represented the epitome of modernity. And above all, as Octavio Paz observed, Spanish American intellectuals wanted to be modern: "los modernistas no querían ser franceses: querían ser modernos" (*Cuadrivio* 12-13).

There is also a broader historical context to the *afrancesamiento* of Porfirian society. Richard Bailey's 1936 study on the presence of French culture in nineteenth-century Mexico

shows that Gallic cultural influences had been present in Mexico since the late colonial period. This came as a result of the change in the Spanish Throne, from the Habsburgs to the Bourbon kings. In 1781 Carlos III founded the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City, an institution structured in the manner of a French art academy, thus introducing the aesthetic of neoclassicism in the visual arts. As mentioned previously, treatises by preeminent French philosophers circulated in Mexico, and played a role in the insurgency against Spain. French merchants also entered Mexico during the eighteenth century, and many remained there in the post-independence era, contributing significantly to commerce and social life. The French Intervention of 1862-67 initiated yet another wave of Gallic culture into the country, in this case as part of Napoleon III's (1808-1873) imperialist project in the hemisphere. Nevertheless, the French scholars, scientists, artists and architects that the emperors Maximilian and Carlota brought with them contributed greatly to the intellectual development of Mexican culture. The new emperors oversaw the construction of French villas and wide boulevards, including the Paseo de la Reforma, which was laid out in imitation of the Champs-Élysées in Paris. After the defeat of the French and the Restoration of the Republic, many French men and women again remained in the country and continued to be active in commercial enterprises. French fashions transformed the dress of urban citizens, particularly among upper class men, who exhibited a taste for Parisian manners and style (Bailey 16-24). The founding of the National Preparatory School in 1868 served as another avenue for the entry of Gallicism into Mexican culture. French soon became the most popular modern foreign language taught in Mexican schools, a trend which "contributed more forcefully than perhaps anything else to the reception of intellectual French culture" (55-56).

Given the breadth of this historical context, this particular manifestation of the post-colonialism in nineteenth-century Mexico departs from the dynamic of mimicry or emulation of a dominant culture. Instead, the French aesthetic in Porfirian society is more in the spirit of Bill Ashcroft's concept of the dialogic nature of transculturation. According to this thesis, culture is a

dynamic force, one that is organic and fluid. A transformative process takes place when cultures come into contact with each other. Notwithstanding the social hierarchy that may exist between the two cultures involved, neither one is passive in this process. But rather both exercise a subjectivity in regard to the absorption of elements from one to the other (54-55). This set of circumstances also coincides with García Canclini's observation of the hybrid nature of Spanish American culture in general, resulting from the layering and juxtaposition of indigenous, African, and colonial Hispanic traditions throughout the region (71). The overwhelming presence of the French language and culture in Mexico then adds another nuance to that intersection of social currents. This is not to minimize the elitism of Porfirian society, whose modernity clearly solidified the traditional social hierarchy and neglected the component of democratization. However, the culture was elitist, not because it was *afrancesada*, but because the *criollo*s themselves were elitist. As stated previously, the concept of mimicry takes on relevance in regard to the mestizo and indigenous masses in this internal colonial system. Men of indigenous heritage, such as the Zapotec Benito Juarez and the mestizo Porfirio Díaz, were able to appropriate the strategies of the prevailing discourse, rising to prominence within the established social structure. However, they did not disrupt the colonial authority, or render a critical analysis of the effects of colonialism. Rather, they accepted and adopted the values of the ruling class and worked within the existing Eurocentric framework that had been in place for three hundred years. As Díaz consolidated his power in the final decades of the century, his régime reinforced and extended the traditional social hierarchy.

The societal characteristics I have delineated here form the cultural context in which Nájera, Gamboa, and Nervo lived and worked. As such, the texts by these authors will often reflect the contradictions that were inherent to the Porfirian process of modernization. The authors supported the régime's agenda for technological and industrial modernization, yet rationalized its neglect of democratization. Politically, both Nájera and Gamboa welcomed the

social and economic stability that the strong-willed Díaz brought to the nation, even if that stability was implemented by force. In other words, they supported modernity, but a modernity that emerged from their own particular set of historical and cultural circumstances. In this sense, their texts are representative of the prevailing *criollo* discourse, that is, the continuation and maintenance of the colonial social order. Culturally, all three promoted the Eurocentric values of the ruling class, including the modern artistic/literary styles of the European aesthetic. They are in dialogue with the principles of the Reform, in the sense that they express the prevailing ambivalence among liberals toward secularization. Their writings emerge from the tension in Porfirian society between the sacred and the profane, that is, between religious and liberal discourses.

MODERNITY OF THE PORFIRIAN LITERATI

When Nájera writes on political topics, he affirms the Eurocentric colonial discourse of the era and expresses his support for Porfirio Díaz. In "La Constitution de 1857" (1879), he critiques the concept of the sovereignty of the people as a utopian principle that does not have a practical application in Mexico. He even goes so far as to declare that the people would forgo liberties in order to have a stable social order. "Nosotros no queremos una libertad ilimitada, porque nuestro pueblo no está educado para recibirla" (*Obras* 13: 14). This statement distinguishes between "nosotros" and "nuestro pueblo." The first refers to the ruling class, what Angel Rama calls *el sector letrado* (1984), the educated middle and upper classes. The latter refers to the masses, who are left out of the decision-making process because, in Nájera's view, they do not have the intellectual capacity to take part in the task of nation-building. In "La cuestión política" (1879), Nájera writes that the difficulties Mexico has experienced in establishing a democratic form of government have resulted from the intent to transplant a foreign system into a culture that has no historical framework conducive to such a system. The laws

designating civil liberties were theory that did not coincide with the actual cultural practices (*Obras* 13: 17-18). He again reiterates his assertion that the people need to be educated before these principles can be implanted. In this way he expresses the contradictions of Porfirian modernity, championing liberal institutions, while rejecting the principle of the people's sovereignty. In this article, Nájera also participates in a dialogue with the principles of the liberal Reform when he criticizes the anti-clerical agenda of the movement, which he regards as a new form of idolatry. In this point he expresses the tensions between the "conservative" and the "radical" factions within the liberal party, which generally broke down along the lines of believers and non-believers in regard to the issue of separation of Church and State.

In several articles, Nájera expresses his support for the strong-willed leadership of Porfirio Díaz. In "El porfirismo" (1884) he defends Díaz's consolidation of power on the basis of evolutionary principles, stating that "el partido del general Díaz no es más que una de las fases que ha tomado en nuestra evolución política el gran partido liberal" (*Obras* 13: 198). In another article, simply entitled "1888", Nájera sums up the cultural and political achievements of Díaz's second presidential term: the development of the secular education system, the reorganization of the armed forces, and the régime's harmonious relationship with the Church. Nájera praises Díaz's past military career and equates his heroic actions in times of war with his accomplishments as the nation's leader in peacetime: "Bajo ningún otro gobierno se había visto una fusión tan estrecha de todos los elementos nacionales. La vida social tenía, por fuerza, que sentir su influencia, y así hemos visto cómo se animó en el último año, dando aliento al comercio y a la industria" (*Obras* 13: 231). Finally, the 1894 article, "Balance politico" shows that Nájera's support for Díaz did not wane over the course of the leader's perpetual presidency. After a turbulent year in which the nation experienced a financial crisis and tensions surrounding some of the gubernatorial elections, Nájera still praises Díaz's leadership skills in handling these situations: "…el año politico de 1893, a pesar de los conflictos económicos que trajo y que ya

están sustancialmente conjurados, fue bueno para México. Honra a la Nación. El general Díaz puede inscribirlo en el gran libro de sus victorias" (*Obras* 13: 272).

Regarding the role of the Church in modernity, Nájera's texts again reveal the ambivalence among moderate liberals toward secularization. Rather than regarding the Church as an institution opposed to the goals of modernization, his writings continue to critique the anti-clerical Reform Laws. These, in his view, were the product of radical *juarista* liberals who were intent on destroying all that is sacred. In the same way that he found the principle of the sovereignty of the people to be inapplicable in Mexico, Nájera likewise regarded the concept of freedom of religion to be incongruous within the nation's historical and cultural context. In "El prostestantismo en Mexico" (1893), he advocates for preserving Catholicism as Mexico's official religion as a means of preventing a "yankee" invasion that could take place through the spread of Protestant sects. In this sense he sees Catholicism as a significant element of Mexico's national identity, in much the same way that the *criollo* founders of modern Mexico sought to have Catholicism declared the nation's official religion earlier in the century (*Mañana de otro modo* 167). It is not the religious doctrine of the Church that he promotes, but rather the effect that this discourse has on the control of the indigenous population. By instilling in them the idea that other sects are heretical, Catholicism becomes a barrier against the potential wave of North American culture that might infiltrate the nation via the spread of Protestantism (168). Another interesting note in this article has to do with the hierarchized society in Mexico. Nájera acknowledges that "la raza criolla, dominante en el país desde la época de la Independencia, nada ha hecho a favor de la clase indígena" (168). However, he doesn't criticize the discrepancy between the living conditions of the masses and the affluence of *criollo* society. He is merely pointing out the important role that the Church plays in maintaining the allegiance of the *campesinos* to Mexico's national agenda. "Lo único que les hace no simpatizar con el yankee es la diferencia de religión. El catolicismo alimenta en los indios un sentimiento de animadversión hacia la conquista

norteamericana, que redunda en beneficio de la conservación de nuestra nacionalidad" (168). All of this again confirms Nájera's support of the continuation of the colonial social order in Mexico during the porfiriato, including the traditional role of the Church in maintaining that order.

The critique that Nájera does make of the Church has to do with its role in education. In "La educación católica" (1893) he defends the curriculum of secular schools, not because he is opposed to parochial education, but because he finds the curriculum of the Church to be deficient in the sciences. But again, he does not view the Church as contradicting modernity. He still believes that the teaching of Church doctrine is necessary for the salvation of the soul. But he also regards positivist education, based on the dissemination of scientific knowledge, as indispensable for Mexico to be competitive in the modern era. So religion does have its place in modernity, to provide for the salvation of souls, and to maintain the traditional social order. But it should not impede social, economic, and scientific progress (*Mañana de otro modo* 171-72).

Politically, Gamboa, like Nájera, supported Porfirio Díaz's régime. Although he did not express political opinions that were as clearly defined as those of Nájera, there are several passages in his personal diaries that unequivocally articulate the admiration he felt for the nation's leader. The first passage, from 1897, recounts an incident in which an attempt was made on the president's life, on September 16, the very day the nation commemorates its political independence. Gamboa does not attempt to examine the political motivations of the would-be assassin. Instead, he utilizes hyperbolic language to depict Díaz in this time of crisis as a great and heroic man, "de valor personal y de conciencia de su puesto" (*Mi Diario* 2: 46).

> ¡Cuánto no habría yo dado por asomarme á los interiores psicológicos del General Díaz en los momentos que siguieron al atentado! […] Su espíritu de ayer, del que nunca ha de poder despojarse por más que hoy dormite en las profundidades de su individuo, su espíritu de ayer, valeroso y militarizado, hecho á toda clase de peligros, que con la muerte se ha enfrentado más de una vez, ¿qué sentiría con la brutal agresión? (47).

Here Gamboa makes a reference to Díaz's career as a military leader and his participation in the War of the Reform and the French Invasion. The passage highlights the characteristics of a

valiant military man who willingly puts his own life at risk in defense of the nation and the liberal cause, notwithstanding the fact that Díaz's governance at this stage of his political career was becoming less liberal, and increasingly centralized (Garner 91).

The next passage in which Gamboa praises Díaz is from 1898, again during the week of national ceremonies commemorating Mexico's Independence. The author had been invited by the president himself to speak during the celebrations, and he recorded a transcript of the speech he gave in the diary entry. After sketching out Mexico's history from the time of the Conquest, to the period of insurrection, up to the present day, Gamboa declares that the nation has finally achieved political stability, as well as the respect of "los pueblos civilizados" (78). At this point Gamboa addresses the president directly, extolling his achievements on behalf of the nation.

> Señor Presidente de la República: usted es el principal responsable de este progreso positivo; así como en sus épocas de guerrero, en medio de los campos de batalla, serena y valerosamente no temió la muerte, con idéntica serenidad y con idéntico valor emprendió usted la obra magna de la pacificación nacional (78-79).

Again, Gamboa emphasizes Díaz's past military career and how he brings those traits to his presidential role. Like many of his *criollo* contemporaries, it is the political and economic stability that Porfirio Díaz brought to the nation that resonates most with Gamboa. Granted, if the author were to engage in an objective analysis of Díaz's job performance, including his abuses of the political system, this ceremony would not be the place for that kind of commentary. But the fact that there aren't any passages elsewhere in the diaries where he might offer criticism of this nature, suggests that he welcomed the order and progress that the régime instilled in the nation.

This same speech also reveals Gamboa's Eurocentric perspective on cultural modernity, and his acceptance of the internal colonial social order in Porfirian Mexico. He affirms the hierarchy of cultures when he discourages the trend among some intellectuals to idealize the indigenous civilizations of Mexico as a component of national identity, arguing that these are as distant from modern society as ancient Egypt. He goes on to speak disparagingly about the

indigenous people themselves, calling them degenerate, and describing them as "un empobrecido rebaño de indios, el lamentable fin de una raza apenas vestida de cuerpo, desnuda de inteligencia y exhausta de sangre" (73). Here Gamboa is verbalizing the same dynamic about which Homi Bhabha has theorized, in regard to the relationship between colonizer and colonized. "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha 101). Gamboa, as a member of the *criollo* class, is not playing the role of a formerly subjugated citizen who is mimicking the colonial discourse; he is instead a representative of that very same discourse, encouraging the hierarchical relationship between the *criollo* elites and the indigenous peoples in the post-independence era. However, he makes a distinction between the masses of indigenous people, in what he regards to be their uncultured state, and educated men *de pura raza* such as the Zapotec Benito Juárez and the Nahua Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834-1893), a respected author of romantic novels. These men merit Gamboa's admiration precisely because they are modern and "civilized," according to the Western paradigm. That is to say they have assimilated into the hegemonic culture.

> …les doy complacido mi admiración y mi aplauso, pero fuera del tipo físico, no me resultan indios; si acaso ellos alardean de serlo, es por inocente coquetería de hombres superiores; son los primeros en comprender que su raza no produce individualidades de su talla […] ignoran el habla de sus padres, visten como nosotros, se ilustran, piensan, escriben y obran mejor que nosotros (*Mi Diario* 2: 73-74).

Even though Gamboa intends this passage to be an expression of praise for their achievements, he still ends up speaking disparagingly about their race. They are intellectual urban gentlemen, who have risen above the status of "degeneracy" with which Gamboa labels the rest of their people. He even sttempts to deprive them of an autochthonous cultural identity when he erroneously states that they do not speak the languages of their fathers. As a child in the town of Gueletao, Oaxaca, Juárez spoke only his Zapotec dialect and began learning Spanish at the age of eleven when he went to Oaxaca City to be apprenticed as a printer (Wasserman 94). Growing up in

Tixtla, Guerrero, Altamirano likewise spoke Nahuatl as his first language and learned Spanish in school (Conway, *Zarco* 9).

Gamboa's denigrating statements about the indigenous peoples of Mexico also reflect the complex demographics of Mexico's post-colonial society. As they are depicted in his speech, Juárez and Altamirano more closely personify Bhabha's concept of mimicry of the dominant culture in the sense that they acquired the language, culture, and appearance of the (internal) colonial authority and rose to prominence within that system, Juárez to the nation's highest office, and Altamirano as an intellectual who made significant contributions to the development of Mexico's literary canon. But they are not subversive in the sense that Gamboa is not threatened by their presence. He disapproves of the "uncivilized" condition of the indigenous people, and expresses relief that these two men managed to rise above those circumstances. The colonial discourse itself remains in place, and Gamboa's rhetoric still reveals Eurocentric values. Gamboa's affirmation of the hierarchical relationship between the European and the Indigenous currents of Mexican culture is also exemplary of Mignolo's assessment of the *criollo* worldview, which privileges the population of European descent and marginalizes the indigenous elements.

Like Nájera, Gamboa expresses ambivalence toward the secularizing agenda of the liberal Reform in another diary passage. This entry from 1895 documents a ceremony held in the Metropolitan Cathedral in honor of the enshrinement of the remains of the insurgentes, the heroes of Mexico's struggle for Independence, including Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos, and Ignacio Allende (*Mi Diario* 1: 252). Although it was a civic procession that brought the remains of the national heroes into the Cathedral, the clergy still played an active role in the ceremony. This collaborative effort between ecclesiastical officials and the Díaz administration, underscores the continued involvement of the Church in State affairs. Gamboa reverently describes the ecclesiastical mise-en-scène of the ceremony without a hint of anti-clerical sentiment: "El clero, tenía listo suntuoso recibimiento eclesiástico, cabildo pleno, palios, capas pluviales, hasta los

papeles de música en los atriles del órgano gigantesco y en los de la orquesta" (252-53). The passage goes on to comment on the government's efforts to discourage political demonstrations at the event by the liberal press. However, Gamboa directs his critique toward the members of the press themselves by labeling them as "periódicos rojos y liberales sueltos" and describing them as malcontents: "tan descontentadizos los unos como los otros" (253). At the end of the diary entry, Gamboa does acknowledge that this ceremony contradicts the principle of separation of Church and State when he asks himself "¿por qué no se inhumarían los restos en la Rotonda de los Hombres Ilustres de nuestro cementerio municipal de Dolores?" (253). But his tone is still ambivalent on this question. That is, he doesn't take a direct stand against the Church, whose prestige he still reveres, unlike the journalists of the "periódicos rojos".

In contrast to Nájera and Gamboa, Nervo rarely expressed explicitly political views in his writing. One of the few articles in which he comments on a domestic political issue, "El candidato" (1896), renders a subtle criticism of the Porfirian electoral process. The article announces an upcoming political rally in support of a challenger to Díaz's bid for yet another presidential term, Nicolás Zúñiga y Miranda (1865-1925), a perennial candidate who ran against the dictator in every election between 1892 and 1910: "Los periódicos han hablado de una manifestación solemne a Zúñiga y Miranda, la cual se efectuará dentro de la órbita de la ley, en el orden más completo" (*Obras completas* 1: 609). As the article continues, Nervo's commentary doesn't argue for or against any particular political stance that Zúñiga y Miranda represented. He does not assess the candidate, or his objectives, but instead directs his critique toward those journalists who ridicule this pretender to the presidency, for his futile effort to challenge Díaz's political machinations. In doing so, Nervo argues, they are in fact ridiculing the entire nation for participating in this farce.

> Como se verá por lo anterior, la broma va siendo ya pesada, y no para el candidato, que dice modestamente a quien quiere oírle que acaso lo venza el Presidente actual, porque cuenta con más elementos, sino para el país. Quienes creen herir con un dislate semejante

> a tal o cual personalidad se equivocan: al país hiere, al país burla. Habrá fuera de aquí quien, no sabiendo que los mexicanos somos chuelistas de abolengo, tome la cosa a lo serio y nos equipare a las ranas pidiendo rey (609-10).

The article essentially questions the effectiveness of elections in Mexico, which, of course, were manipulated by the Porfirian régime. There is no explicit criticism of Díaz in Nervo's commentary, but neither is there the kind of rhetoric praising him for being a strong leader who brought stability to the Nation, a view that is clearly stated in Nájera's articles and Gamboa's diaries. The lack of direct criticism in this article is not surprising, given the tight censorship that the régime exercised over the press. Journalists who dared to publish material critical of the government risked imprisonment, exile, and/or bodily harm (Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 394). Nervo's article only goes so far as to denounce the flawed electoral process, which in the political climate of the time reads as a veiled criticism of the régime's abuse of power. Nevertheless, Nervo still writes from the Eurocentric perspective of the *criollo* class. Even though he doesn't openly praise Díaz, neither does he challenge the political *status quo* in any significant way, in contrast to Joaquín Clausell (1866-1935), for example, editor of the oppositionist periodical *El Demócrata*.

Like the other two writers in this study, Nervo commented on the changing role of the Church, in view of the anti-clerical Reform Laws and Díaz's lenient stance toward the enforcement of those laws. However, Nervo's critique of this topic is more personal than political. As the most spiritually inclined of the three authors, he is not so much concerned with the place of institutional religion in modernity. His criticism of this cultural domain is twofold. On the one hand he critiques the repressive dictates of the Church, which inhibit a subjective experience of the spiritual realm. Even though he is not overtly political, this criticism aligns Nervo with the objectives of the Masons, the radical faction of liberals, in the sense that he challenges the Church's monopoly of spiritual practices. The other side of his critique is directed toward the banal materialism of bourgeois society. In this regard, Nervo's spirituality is linked to

the symbolist desire to restore a sense of mystery and enchantment to an increasingly industrialized society. These are all characteristics that I will examine more closely further on in this study.

Thus Nájera, Gamboa, and Nervo are all products of the porfiriato in the sense that their texts represent the perspective of the *criollo* sector of society, with its maintenance of the traditional social order. They accept the uneven modernization of the Díaz régime, either openly supporting the heavy-handed leadership of the dictator, as in the case of Nájera and Gamboa, or minimally criticizing his manipulations, as Nervo had done, without seriously defying the established social order. They are all responding in some way to the anti-clerical agenda of the Reform. Although they utilize the creative process to articulate a secular experience of the divine, –the intangible spiritual realm–, Catholicism continues to inform their content in varying degrees, reflecting the Porfirian ambivalence toward secularization.

This study is organized in three parts, the first of which is devoted to an analysis of selected articles, chronicles, and short stories by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. As one of the earliest proponents of *modernismo*, Nájera's prose works layer and juxtapose various literary styles, from the Parnassian attention to aesthetic form, to the symbolist expression of subjective moods, all with an undertone of romantic idealism. Here I will analyze how Nájera synthesizes these disparate currents and adapts them to a content that derives from his own cultural context. This part is divided into two chapters, one that will explore Nájera's depiction of the objective realm in his texts, in relation to religion, spirituality, and secularization. This includes his attention to the carefully-crafted external form of his prose, as well as his observations of social conditions in the urban center that arise from the processes of modernization, and his perceptions of the changing role of the Church in modernity. In the second chapter I will examine Nájera's subjective expressions of the divine, including his depictions of spiritualist attempts to

communicate with the metaphysical realm, mystic religious experiences, and the transcendence of musicality.

Part two of this study examines three novels by Federico Gamboa: *Metamorfosis* (1899), *Santa* (1903), and *Reconquista* (1906). Like Nájera, Gamboa writes from a *criollo* perspective and maintains a dialogue with French literary sources. Although scholarly studies of his work often associate his style with naturalism, Gamboa's narratives in fact exhibit a fusion of currents, including aspects of Parnassianism, symbolism and decadence, a characteristic that aligns him with the *modernista* spirit. In addition, far from merely emulating his literary role models, the author often departs from the empirical perspective that is central to Emile Zola's naturalist doctrine. The content of Gamboa's narratives often mirrors the cultural ambivalence of Porfirian society toward secularization and the anti-clerical Reform Laws. Some of the characters wrestle with the problematic presence of the Church in modernity, the conflict between the autonomy of the individual subject and the restrictive precepts of the religious doctrine. This tension often manifests itself in regard to the constraints that the Church's moral code places on sexual expression. In terms of the characters' assertion of their autonomy, only *Metamorfosis* challenges the religious discourse, and then only tenuously, ultimately leaving the question unresolved. The other two novels show characters moving ever closer toward the Church rather than away from it. This tendency culminates in the semi-autobiographical *Reconquista*, a fictional version of Gamboa's own reaffirmation of institutional religious values.

I turn my attention to Amado Nervo, the most spiritually experimental of the three authors, in the third part of the study. As he was the only one of the three who spent his formative years in the provinces, Nervo provides a perspective on the role of the Church in rural regions during the *porfiriato*. As modernization was primarily focused on the urban centers, the liberal Reform did not significantly impact the rural regions of the nation. As a result, the feudal-like social structure of the colonial era, which privileged the clergy and the *hacendados*, the land-

owning class, remained intact. Nervo's first two novellas, "Pascual Aguilera" (1892/1896) and "El bachiller" (1895), reflect this provincial ambience. My analysis of these narratives will show how he portrays the Church in this pre-modern context, including the tension between institutional precepts and subjective experiences of the spiritual realm. The final chapter of this study will focus on a selection of prose works that Nervo produced during his first stay in Mexico City (1894-1900), including his third novella "El donador de almas" (1899). In these later narratives and articles Nervo, despite his mystic inclinations, ironically reveals himself to be more modern than Nájera or Gamboa in the sense that he questions Church doctrine, and investigates alternative metaphysical perspectives. This is not to say that he formally renounces Catholicism, but that he brings the spirit of critical inquiry to the subject of religion and spiritual experiences. In this way, Nervo follows Nájera's lead in utilizing the *modernista* aesthetic as a means for rendering the divine accessible to secular society. His texts, like those of Nájera and Gamboa also present religiosity as a persisting cultural form in modern Mexico.

PART I.

MANUEL GUTIERREZ NAJERA: SECULARIZATION OF THE DIVINE

As one of the earliest Spanish American *modernistas*, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895) was a central figure in the intellectual circles of Porfirian Mexico City. He was born in the capital and spent his whole life living and working there. His formative years coincided with the turbulent era of civil war, the French Intervention, and the subsequent period of liberal reform headed by Juárez and Lerdo de Tejada. Positivism had recently been introduced at the newly formed Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, and Jacobin ideas were being debated between radical and moderate factions of liberal intellectuals (Clark de Lara xlviii). This was also the period in which the romantic novelist and liberal statesman Ignacio Manuel Altamirano was promoting the development of a national canon of Mexican literature. Nájera's home life included influences from both sides of the national political struggle, as his mother, doña Dolores Nájera, was a devout Catholic and his father, don Manuel Gutiérrez Gómez, a moderate liberal who supported secularization. Nájera received a religious education at home, where he studied literary works from classic Greek and Latin literature, the Spanish *Siglo de oro*, as well as the French and

Spanish romantic literature of the day (Clark de Lara xlvii). In 1875, amid all these currents of political and social thought, and on the eve of Porfirio Díaz's first presidential term, Nájera began his career as a poet, prose writer, and journalist. Dedicating himself to this profession, he wrote prolifically under a variety of pseudonyms, including Recamier, M. Can-Can, Junius, Gil Blas, and his most often used nom de plume, el Duque Job. He published chronicles, short stories, and poetry in many of the well-known journals in the city: *El Correo Germánico*, *El Federalista*, *La Libertad*, *El Cronista Mexicano*, *El Partido Liberal*, and *El Universal*.

Nájera's literary style is emblematic of the *afrancesamiento* of Porfirian society. Despite the fact that he never had the opportunity to travel to France, he developed a particular affinity for French literature, and he intentionally cultivated a French aesthetic in his work. He was an avid reader of the full spectrum of Gallic literary movements, from the romantics Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), and Alfred de Musset (1810-1857), to the Parnassians Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894), and José María de Heredia (1842-1905), to the proto-symbolist Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and the symbolists proper Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). Nájera often defended the use of French literary currents in Mexican literature in response to criticism of this trend, using rhetoric that underscores Walter Mignolo's thesis regarding the significance of the term "Latin" America to the *criollo* elite in regard to postcolonial identity (2005). In articles such as "Las grandezas de la raza latina" (1877) and "¡Francia!" (1880), Nájera highlights the shared Latin heritage of Mexico and France, rooted in the Mediterranean cultures of southern Europe. In the first article, he idealizes this conception when he states that "nuestra raza, [es] más poética, más espiritual y más alzada" (*Obras* 13: 6). In the second, the author attributes to the Latin race a universal quality, which he contrasts with what he percieves to be the coldness of the Anglo-Saxon race: "La raza latina, cuya forma primera se halla en Francia, tiene algo de más universal,

de más humanitario que la raza anglosajona, por ejemplo, encerrada en su frialdad y en su egoísmo como un señor feudal en su castillo" (49).

In 1894 Nájera co-founded, along with Carlos Díaz Dufóo (1861-1941), the literary magazine *Revista Azul*, a journal dedicated to promoting a modern and cosmopolitan literary/ artistic aesthetic. Again, the trait of *afrancesamiento* was attributed to the publication, even though more than half of the contributions to the journal were written by Spanish American authors. Boyd Carter's analysis of the journal's contents over the years of its publication (1894-1896) reveals that thirty percent of the material came from Mexican writers, with another thirty percent provided by representatives from republics throughout the subcontinent. In comparison, about twenty percent of the contributions were translations of French literature. Another ten percent came from peninsular Spaniards, and the remainder consisted of translations from English, US, Italian, German, and Russian literatures (Carter 349). Nájera again came to the defense of the cosmopolitan essence of the magazine in an article entitled "El cruzamiento en literatura" (1894). In this essay, he highlights the association between French culture and modernity when he states that "en Francia, hoy por hoy, el arte vive más intensa vida que en ningún otro pueblo" and "la literatura contemporánea francesa es ahora la más sugestiva, la más abundante, la más de hoy" (*Obras* 1: 101). However, he does not advocate a rejection of the Hispanic literary tradition. He presents instead an argument in favor of cultivating and sustaining a dialogue with other cultures as a means to enrich one's own literary production. He reminds the reader that the great poets from Spain's *Siglo de oro* studied not only classic Latin literature, but also the work of the Italian humanists of the Renaissance. But as Spain became more and more closed off to foreign influences in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, the lack of interaction with other literatures led to what Nájera perceived to be a stagnation in Spanish literary production: "la aversión a lo extranjero y a todo el que no sea cristiano rancio, siempre ha sido maléfica para España" (102). This state could be remedied, he says, by opening up to the

influences of other sources: "Mientras más prosa y poesía alemana, francesa, inglesa, italiana, rusa, norte y sudamericana, etc., importe la literatura española, más producirá y de más ricos y más cuantiosos productos será su exportación" (102). However, Nájera does not promote the blind imitation of other literatures, but rather an openness to the ideas contained in them: "No quiero que imiten los poetas españoles; pero sí quiero que conozcan modelos extranjeros; que adapten al castizo estilos ajenos; que revivan viejas bellezas, siempre jóvenes; en resumen, que su poesía se vigorice por el cruzamiento" (103-04). These are the very characteristics that are present in Nájera's own writing. He embraces the modernity of French literature, and maintains a cosmopolitan dialogue with a range of literatures, while adapting these sources to his own cultural context.

Turning to the study of Nájera's prose works, Chapter One will focus on how Nájera portrays the objective realm in his texts, in relation to the transformation of religious beliefs in modernity. His attention to external form, the careful crafting of his prose, and his references to luxurious materials and precious objects in his short stories are all characteristics Nájera draws from the French Parnassians, as well as the British aesthetes. In this we will see shades of Mignolo's assessment of the *criollo* class living "under the illusion that they were Europeans too" (66). While it is true that Nájera looked to France and England for aesthetic models, this chapter will show that he was not blindly emulating European intellectuals, but was instead actively evaluating and responding to the literary sources that he utilized, from his perspective as a Mexican intellectual. From these models, Nájera embraces the creative process as a cult of idealized beauty, a pseudo-religious worship of beauty. In this way, Nájera takes on a priestly role, expressing the conception of art as a religious passion, characteristics that critics have noted in *modernista* literature in general. However, this trait in Nájera's writing does not mean that he was an exemplar of the stereotypical escapist, ivory-tower intellectual of the porfiriato. Rather, many of his texts show how he often utilized his carefully crafted prose to portray his

observations of the external world. His gaze toward society departs from the Parnassian abstract conception of idealized form. In this regard, the chapter will present the author's perceptions on the changing role of the Church in modernity, and his attention to social and humanitarian concerns, including the spiritual anxieties of the era, which resulted in part from the Porfirian emphasis on positivism and scientific inquiry.

The texts that I examine in Chapter Two reflect Nájera's portrayal of subjective experiences of the divine, in the spirit of the symbolist current of *modernismo*. This chapter will reveal how Nájera perceived the spiritualism of the era, the esoteric practices of men and women who were attempting to communicate with the spirit world and provide empirical evidence of the continued existence of the soul after death. I will also examine here some of Nájera's short stories that depict an alternative view of Catholicism. These are narratives that portray subjective spiritual experiences, distinct from the rationality of institutional doctrines, which emerge from the Baroque mysticism of the Hispanic tradition. Finally, I will examine another group of chronicles and short stories in which Nájera presents musicality as a subjective experience of the immaterial realm, the ethereal and transcendant pleasure that is evoked by music.

Chapter 1: *El arte por el arte versus el arte comprometido*

In terms of the aesthetic form of Nájera's literary craft, the works presented in this chapter highlight his participation in a cultural dialogue regarding the role of art in modernity that was taking place throughout western culture. As artistic production becomes increasingly autonomous from the agendas of the *Ancien Régime* and the Church, a conception of art for art's sake emerges in intellectual circles, promoting the ideal that aesthetic form has its own intrinsic value, and that art exists for no other purpose than to provide pleasure to the viewer. In literature this translates into a carefully crafted use of language, which imbues the words with a plasticity that can evoke for the reader pictorial and/or sculptural forms. As artistic creation originates in the immaterial realm, the creative process becomes a vehicle for giving the intangible spirit a concrete form. This preoccupation with form and luxurious materials in *modernista* literature is a trait that critics often characterize as *preciocismo*, and Nájera's prose is exemplary of this style. In this chapter I will examine his contribution to the debate on the nature of aesthetic production, as well as some samples of his poetic prose style. However, I will also show that, far from being an "ivory-tower" intellectual, he often utilized his florid literary style to examine social conditions around him in the urban center. I will also present some of his narratives that reveal the changing status of religious beliefs, often in tension with the positivism of Porfirian society.

The modern doctrine of art for art's sake was formalized in the writings of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) whose treatise *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (1790) explicates the underlying principles of the beautiful and the sublime, as well as the application of these judgments to the production of objective forms (Ginsburg). Kant distinguishes objects that are *beautiful* from those that are merely *good*, on the basis of their finality: "Objective finality is either external, i.e. the utility, or internal, i.e. the perfection, of the object. […] In an objective internal finality, i.e. perfection, we have what is more akin to the predicate of beauty" (Kant 69).

The opposition between the utilitarian and the beautiful in art was further codified by Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), one of the French writers that Nájera admired. In the preface to his novel *Madamoiselle de Maupin* (1835), Gautier vehemently rejects the bourgeois notion that art should serve a practical social purpose:

> Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid, car c'est l'expression de quelque besoin, et ceux de l'homme sont ignobles et dégoûtants, comme sa pauvre et infirme nature. […] J'aime mieux les choses et les gens en raison inverse des services qu'ils me rendent. Je préfère à certain vase qui me sert un vase chinois, semé de dragons et de mandarins, qui ne me sert pas du tout… (45).
>
> [There is nothing so beautiful as that which serves no purpose; everything that is useful is ugly, for it is the expression of some material need, and those of man (*sic*) are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor and infirm nature.(…) My love for things and people is inversely proportional to the services they might render to me. Instead of a vase that is useful, I would rather have a Chinese vase, decorated with dragons and mandarin figures, that does not serve any purpose at all.]

While Gautier finds beauty in objects that do not have a mundane function, he regards utilitarian objects to be ugly precisely because their very usefulness is linked to the base instincts of humanity, to matter and the physical realm, in contrast to the transcendent beauty of art. The Parnassians embraced Gautier's aesthetic doctrine in an effort to strengthen literary construction. *L'art pour l'art* became their motto as they sought to eliminate the excessive sentimentaility and social-political agendas of romantic literature. Structurally, they strove for balanced, harmonious forms, and in terms of content, they were drawn to exotic and classical subjects which they rendered with an air of emotional detachment.

Like the French Parnassians, the English aesthetes also promoted the concept of art for art's sake. One of the significant figures in the development and promotion of this doctrine was Walter Pater (1839-1894). This Oxford professor of classics served as a mentor to Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), one of the most renowned of the aesthetes. Pater's collection of essays, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), contains his aesthetic philosophy, which, like Kant and Gautier before him, advocates artistic beauty as an ideal in and of itself. He emphasizes the

"special, unique, impression of pleasure" that a work of art produces in the viewer, and describes the objective of the art critic as a search for "the source of that impression" (Pater xx-xxi). He urges the reader to live life to the fullest, embracing the passion, beauty, and art of each moment:

> Only be sure it is passion –that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, *the love of art for its own sake*, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake (190). [Emphasis added.]

The focus on aesthetic form in art and literature was, then, an international trend in western culture. The Parnassian affinity for perfect form, as well as the aesthetes devotion to Art and Beauty would eventually infuse the writing of the Spanish American *modernistas*, Nájera among them. However, in contrast to their European sources, many of these writers would continue to retain the sentimental tone of romanticism, as well as an eye for social concerns in the urban center, while simultaneously incorporating visual imagery and crafted form. Early in his journalistic career, Nájera entered into this cross cultural dialogue with the publication of a series of articles entitled "El arte y el materialismo" (1876), in which he denounces the trend toward positivism in literature and defends the spiritual and noble characteristics of artistic creation. Together these essays form a treatise that many critics consider to be the first *modernista* manifesto (Martínez Peñaloza 20).

ARTISTIC CREATION AND THE DIVINE

The series "El arte y el materialismo," published in *El Correo Germánico* from August 5 to September 5, 1876, provides a detailed account of Nájera's adoption, and adaptation, of the various influences that went into the formulation of his literary philosophy. As the title of the series suggests, these articles highlight the opposing artistic philosophies that permeated intellectual circles in Porfirian Mexico City: a refined artistic sensibility on the one hand, and positivist realism on the other. The first article begins with his defense of maintaining a

sentimental tone in poetry, in all of its manifestations, from religious chants to patriotic expressions and songs of love. He is defending the autonomy of the poet, stating that art should not be subject to restrictions of any kind: "…porque esa sujeción, tiránica y absurda, ahoga su genio y sofocando tal vez sus más sublimes inspiraciones, le arrebata ese principio eterno que es la vida del arte..." (*Obras* 1: 52). He then contrasts this poetic idealism with what he calls the materialization of art, which attempts to impose a rational method on the sublime creative process.

> Se pretende despojar a la poesía del idealismo y del sentimiento; se pretende arrebatar al arte todo aquello que de espiritual tiene, para sustituirlo con el realismo pagano, con el terrible materialismo; y los que tal quieren, no ven en su loco desvarío que lo que ellos llaman reforma del arte, no es más que su ruina y su muerte; que si sus teorías se realizasen, el arte perdería todo aquello que lo constituye, que es lo verdadero, lo bueno y lo bello, para convertirse en fétido estanque de corrompidas aguas (53-54).

Nájera's argument here reveals the persistence of romantic idealism in his aesthetic theory, which of course is anathema to the Parnassians. It is the realism of the positivist era that Nájera rallies against. And yet, in the next article he moves toward the conception of art for art's sake when he makes a reference to philosophers who have contemplated the inherent value of an artistic sensibility. "Los filósofos que con más particularidad se han ocupado de la estética, dicen que así como la industria tiene por principio lo útil, el arte tiene por principio lo bello" (54-55). Here he paraphrases the distinction made by Kant between that which is *beautiful*, an object containing an inherent perfection of form, and that which is *good*, an object valued for its external, utilitarian function. Throughout the series Nájera continues to affirm both of these tendencies: romantic sentimentalism and the cultivation of perfect aesthetic form. This coincides with Octavio Paz's identification of *modernismo* as Spanish America's genuine romanticism. Whereas the first wave of romanticism in the subcontintent was, in Paz's view, a weak imitation of European models, "[un] reflejo de un reflejo" (*Hijos del limo* 122), *modernismo* as a reaction against scientific positivism carried out a similar historic function as the European literary movement of the early

nineteenth century. According to Paz, "el *modernismo* fue nuestro verdadero romanticismo y, como en el caso del simbolismo francés, su versión no fue una repetición, sino una metáfora: *otro* romanticismo" (126). It is precisely this reaction to positivism, "ese asqueroso y repugnante positivismo," that Nájera expresses in "El arte y el materialismo" (53). While, in the manner of the Parnassians, he strives to construct balanced harmonious forms and he decries the bourgeois tendency to evaluate cultural artifacts according to their social function, Nájera does not maintain the air of emotional detachment cultivated by the Parnassians. He devotes the core of the essay to articulating his conception of what constitutes beauty. In this regard, his rhetoric recalls the transcendental idealism of the post-Kantian German philosophers, such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), and G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), who espoused in their aesthetic doctrines a relationship between artistic genius, divine inspiration, and art as an eternal principle. In the following passage, Nájera associates the beautiful with an eternal and transcendent ideal, identifying an intangible, ethereal origin of beauty, which is then physically constructed by means of the creative process.

> Para nosotros, *lo bello* es la representación de lo infinito en lo finito: la manifestación de lo extensivo en lo intensivo; el reflejo de lo absoluto; la revelación de Dios. Para nosotros el sentimiento de *lo bello* es innato en el hombre; es un destello de la naturaleza angélica, un ideal sublime que Dios presenta al espíritu como el término de sus luchas, como la realización de sus aspiraciones, como el bien supremo. *Lo bello* tiene que ser necesariamente ontológico: es lo absoluto, es Dios. […] *lo bello* es al artista como la perfección espiritual es al santo; el anhelado término, la suprema recompensa, la idea sublime. […] La belleza […] no es una idea, sino la imagen de una idea (55). [Empasis added.]

I have highlighted here Nájera's repetition of the phrase "lo bello" in this passage. He describes beauty in dualistic terms, attributing to the concept characteristics of both immanence and transcendence. It is an intangible essence that the artist translates into concrete form. The author's depiction of beauty and art in this passage expresses ideas similar to those found in Schelling's aesthetics. The German romantic philosopher describes art as a means by which one can arrive at an understanding of the immaterial realm. The art object, according to Schelling, is the concrete

manifestation of an essence that cannot otherwise appear as an object of knowledge (Bowie). This conception of art was further developed by Hegel, in his lectures on aesthetics that he gave in Heidelberg (1818) and Berlin (variously from 1820-1829). For Hegel art expresses spirit's self-consciousness by rendering visible or audible that which does not have a tangible form. This sensuous expression of spirit, in his view, is what constitutes beauty (Houlgate). It is this very undertone of transcendental idealism that links Nájera's rhetoric to an earlier period of romanticism, notwithstanding his affinity for Parnassian form. Even if, as Paz identified, the previous generation of Spanish American literati were merely imitating European sources, I want to emphasize again, the subjectivity that Nájera brings to his use of these sources, that he evaluates them from a critical stance, and decides which are relevant to his cultural context. As the text proceeds, he continues to characterize beauty in highly idealistic terms, which again emphasizes the ethereal nature of this trait.

Another aspect of Nájera's text that sets him apart from the Parnassians is the use of religious terminology when speaking of the transcendental facets of beauty. He identifies the spiritual realm as the source of beauty, which highlights the divine nature of art. But there is a religious undertone to his association of beauty and artistic creation with the Christian conception of God. He mentions "Dios" as frequently as he mentions "lo bello" in the passage above, and even states the beauty is "la revelación de Dios." He goes on to declare that God is present in cultural artifacts, such as poetry, music, painting, and architecture: "Dios, que se revela en las sublimes creaciones del poeta, en las dulces melodías de la música, en los lienzos que con magnífico pincel traza el artista, y en las gigantescas moles que levanta el genio creador del arquitecto" (55). As mentioned previously, Nájera also retains a sentimental tone in his text, which again distinguishes his artistic philosophy from that of his European models. He identifies love as an integral element of the transcendental experience of beauty, attributing to love the same spiritual origin as beauty. In his view, love is the manifestation in the physical world of an

emotion, an impulse which by its very nature is intangible: "El amor, […] es tan sólo la revelación en el orden físico de los sentimientos del espíritu, el lazo material de dos almas que se confunden y asimilan…" (56). Thus, even as he is promoting in this text the concept that art should exist for its own sake, he expresses the lingering religiosity that is present within his culture. This is an example of what Graciela Montaldo identifies as the transformation of the religious impulse in the modernity of Spanish America. In this case, religiosity is transformed into a spiritual conception of artistic creation. In addition to this, Nájera again emphasizes romantic sentimentality, and an idealized conception of human love that, like beauty, is noble and transcendent. He continues this train of thought in the next essay, in which he attributes this same divine connotation to the creative process.

The third article in the series expands on the ethereal aspect of *modernismo*, which coincides with French Symbolism. Having established that human love is a revelation of spirit in the physical realm, the third article begins by stating that art is "una revelación del amor" (56). In this way he turns his attention to the divine nature of artistic creation, by examining expressions of love in various works of art. He starts by juxtaposing sacred and profane aspects of love as represented respectively by the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, Teresa de Ávila, and the lyric poet from ancient Greece, Sappho: "En el amor divino, al último término de esa escala llegó la angélica Teresa de Jesús; en el amor humano, la desdichada amante de Faón; la poetisa de Lesbos, la infortunada Safo" (57). Here again is the presence of Catholicism as a cultural artifact. The close association between Church and Monarchy in Spain and her colonies is woven into Spanish Golden Age literature by means of the mystic tradition. However, Nájera's text does not delve into religious doctrine. He does not polarize divine love and erotic love, as Christian theology does, but rather identifies the same spiritual source for both of these poetic expressions.

As the passage continues, Nájera turns his attention to the love of art, citing some of the significant works in western culture as examples of this manifestation of the divine: "…en el

amor al arte, Homero, el ciego cantor de la troyana guerra; y Dante, el viajero sombrío de los espacios; Miguel Ángel, el Dante de la pintura; y Mozart, el Miguel Ángel de la música" (57). Included here are references to epic poetry, from antiquity as well as the middle ages, and also to painting and music. Here he shows another aspect of the *fin de siglo* aesthetic on both sides of the Atlantic, the interrelationship that exists between the various art forms –literature, the visual arts, music– all of which, again, originate in the spiritual realm. This concept, which is central to the *modernista* aesthetic, was articulated by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) in his sonnet "Correspondances" from the volume *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857): "Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent / Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité, / Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté, / Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent" (16). [Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance / In a deep and tenebrous unity, / Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day, / Perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.] By representing in his text some of the great minds across the spectrum of the arts, Nájera alludes to the synesthesia between various forms of artistic creation and the senses of human aesthetic perception.

As Nájera continues his exposé on the conflicting objectives between art and materialism, he uses the image of a soaring bird to symbolize the autonomy of the artist and the transcendent beauty of art. This image he contrasts with that of a caged bird, which represents the artist who is constrained by the culturally superficial ambience of bourgeois Porfirian society.

> Esa es la libertad del arte; ese es el idealismo que remonta al cielo. Y ved ahora a esa misma ave que presa por la red astuta del cazador, no tiende ya el vuelo en aquellos bosques tan queridos en que la libertad tiene su imperio, sino que encerrada en la dorada cárcel de su jaula, cuyas rejas en vano azota con impotente rabia, sólo exhala tristísimo lamento, postrer sollozo del que doliente gime entre las cadenas de la opresión y la tiranía.
>
> Ese es el arte esclavizado; ese el arte obligado a mirar siempre la tierra; esa es la materialización del arte, y la deificación de la materia. […] El idealismo rebaja la materia para engrandecer el espíritu; el materialismo rebaja el espíritu para engrandecer la materia (57-58).

The passage begins with an image of the heavens as the source of idealism, and the artist ascending to those heights, in order to accomplish the creative task. Immediately the image shifts to that of the caged bird, the metaphor for the artist enslaved by bourgeois materialism. The imagery in this passage recalls another poem from Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*, "L'Albatros." In these verses, Baudelaire compares the poet in modern society, who is constrained by the rational dictates of the bourgeois value system, to an albatross that is trapped on a ship by sailors. When soaring through the air, the albatross are noble, elegant birds: "ces rois de l'azur" (179). However, when one of them is captured by the sailors, he becomes awkward and clumsy, comical and ugly: "il est gauche et veule! […] il est comique et laid!" (180). In the same manner, the poet loses his aristocratic elegance as he struggles to survive in the materialist culture of the bourgeoisie: "Le Poëte est semblable au prince des nuées […] Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées" (180). [The poet resembles the prince of the heavens (…) Exiled from the celestial, grounded amid the jeering crowd.] In Baudelaire's poem the image of the soaring bird has an aristocratic connotation. In Nájera's text, although there is a sense of nobility to his imagery, the author emphasizes the idealism of the creative process, and its relationship to the sacred. Nájera embraces Baudelaire's desire to transcend the banality of bourgeois society, but not his transgressive nature. He retains the undertone of romantic idealism, demonstrating again that he was not passively mimicking his French literary models. He was instead actively engaged in a dialogue with these sources, constantly evaluating and responding to the ideas presented in them.

In the last two articles of the series Nájera examines characteristics of the modern aesthetic in painting, theater, and music, again in contrast to realism and materialism, highlighting again the interrelationship between the arts that was promoted as much by the Parnassians as by the Symbolists. What is most significant, for the purpose of this study, is the relationship that Nájera identifies between beauty, art, and love, all of which are domains of human expression that originate in the divine realm. This is the spiritual essence of the modernista aesthetic; not an

exposition of the doctrinal precepts of an institutional religion, but an expression of a universal and transcendent spirit. This spiritual realm is, as Octavio Paz has indicated, "la fuente de la inspiración poética y el arquetipo de todo transcurrir" (*Cuadrivio* 19). Nájera establishes a link between the divine and artistic creation, acknowledging the transcendent force at the heart of the creative process, which allows one to ascend from the earthly to the heavenly realm. "El arte purifica al hombre, porque lo acerca a la belleza, que es Dios" (56). This series of articles thus makes clear that Nájera's perspective on the divine has an objective and a subjective component. The Parnassian aesthetic is the infinite represented in a concrete, tangible form. The nuance and etherealness of Symbolism is the metaphysical aspect of *modernismo*. Both of these trends merge with Romantic idealism, and even elements of realism in Nájera's prose works.

An example of Nájera's exploration of art for art's sake is a short piece entitled "Pia di [*sic*] Tolomei" (1878). In this text, the narrator has attended a play by the Italian Romantic dramatist Carlo Marenco (1800-1846), also called *Pia dei Tolomei* (1836). The drama is based on a thirteenth-century Italian legend about a noble woman from Siena who had engaged in an adultrerous affair. According to the tale, la Pia was imprisoned in a fortress by her husband as punishment for her transgression, and left to die without absolution. The actress in the title role looks intriguingly familiar to Nájera's anonymous spectator, who then begins searching his mind to remember where and when he has seen her before. What follows is essentially an extended prose poem in the spirit of Baudelaire's *petits poèmes en prose* in *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869). Nájera's text is filled with references to visual art forms, colors, precious stones and other fine materials, and literary works. There isn't really a narrative to the text, only the author constructing images with words, and linking these literary images to other art forms, including other literary texts, thus highlighting the interrelationship between literature and the plastic arts.

These brief texts by Nájera often begin and end with a paragraph that reads as a poetic unit in and of itself. Even though the passage is not written in verse, Nájera imbues it with its own

rhythmic sensibility and constructs it in such a way that it could function as a self-contained poetic composition. The introductory paragraph to "Pia di Tolomei," for example, is an ode to the beauty of the actress, as well as to the character she portrays.

> ¡Pia!... ¡Pia di Tolomei!... ¡Es raro! Yo he visto a esta mujer en otra parte. Es alta, esbelta, se creería una imagen escapada de la vidriera de colores de una iglesia antigua; su pupila es negra como la noche; aquel arco purísimo de su boca parece hecho más bien para la oración que para el beso; sus cabellos se deslizan silenciosamente en negras y espesas bandas por sus hombros, recortando aquella frente de marfil que guarda un pensamiento impenetrable. ¡Qué blancura, la blancura hiperbórea de sus brazos! ¡Qué cuello aquel, apenas entrevisto y que trae insensiblemente a la memoria a las mujeres-cisnes de las leyendas alemanas! ¡Cómo se confunden y armonizan en aquel rostro esos tintes lácteos, opalinos, nacarados! ¡Cuán bien se dibuja en su blanquísima mejilla ese ligero pétalo color de rosa, semejante al reflejo del sol del Mediodía en las nieves eternas de los polos! Esa mujer recuerda a *la Gioconda* de Leonardo da Vinci; parece que sus carnes se idealizan, se vuelven diáfanas; no es la Venus escultórica y hermosa, es la Diana casta y bella que se enseñorea de su amor y sus pasiones; esa mujer es un soneto de Petrarca humanizado. ¡Oh, no cabe duda alguna! Yo he visto a Pia di Tolomei en otra parte (103-04).

This rather long passage shows the poetic nature of Nájera's prose, the *preciocismo* that is characteristic of the *modernista* style in general. The paragraph opens and closes with the same line, giving it a structural unity. The use of compact phrases separated by semicolons and the series of exclamation points in the middle give the text a rhythmic quality. It is also dense with references to art objects, both pictorial and sculptural, again showing the interrelationship between *modernista* literature and the visual arts.

The language that the spectator uses to describe the beauty of the actress links the text to two British cultural trends that were contributing influences in the development of Spanish American *modernismo*: the aesthete movement promoted by Walter Pater and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848-c.1860), a group of painters and poets inspired by the writings of the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900). While Pater and his disciples valued the balanced symmetry and linear perspective of the high renaissance, the Pre-Raphaelites preferred the more stylized forms of the early renaissance, and even the late middle ages. As Nájera's narrator meditates on the beauty of

the actress, he makes references to both of these tendencies. He first compares her visage to an image from a stained-glass window in a church, and notes her pale complexion and elegant, swan-like silhouette. These characteristics recall the type of female figures that appear in Pre-Raphaelite paintings. In fact, the description coincides with a pictorial version of the same legend created by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), one of the founders of the brotherhood (Figure 1.1). As Rossetti's canvas had also been inspired by Marenco's the cultual dialogue taking place in regard to this legend not only reveals the interaction between Mexican and English aesthetics, but also between various artistic media: textual, visual, and dramatic.

FIGURE 1.1
La Pia de' [sic] *Tolomei* (c. 1868-80)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Oil on canvas, 41¼ x 47½ in.
Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas

As Nájera's anonymous spectator continues his internal monologue, he utilizes references to colors and tints, such as one would find on the surface of a painting, and then compares her to a specific work of art, Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) *La Gioconda*, also known as the *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1.2). This reference links the text not only to the high renaissance artistic ideal of the English aesthetes, but specifically to Pater's celebrated critique of this very painting, contained in his 1869 essay on da Vinci (Pater 97-99). In a similar vein as Pater's aesthetic reverie on da

Vinci's painting, the narrator of Nájera's text contemplates the beauty of the unnamed actress in terms that highlight a mysterious quality that emanates from her beauty. While he perceives in her countenance "un pensamiento impenetrable" (103), Pater observes in the *Mona Lisa* an air of "subdued and graceful mystery" (97). Adding to this reference to renaissance painting, Nájera's anonymous narrator characterizes the actress as the embodiment of renaissance poetry, specifically a sonnet by another Italian humanist Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374).

There is also a correlation in the passage cited above between religion and sensuality, which amplifies the statements Nájera had made previously in "El arte y el materialismo" regarding the divine nature of both religious and erotic poetry. The narrator alludes to the relationship between these two domains when he describes the elegant curve of the actress' mouth but then says that she was made for prayer rather than for kissing. He reinforces this notion of chastity at the end of the passage with a reference to two pagan female deities from ancient Roman mythology. He distances her from Venus, the goddess of erotic love, and associates her instead with Diana, one of the virgin goddesses.

FIGURE 1.2
La Gioconda (c. 1503-06)
Leonardo da Vinci
Oil on panel, 30 x 21 in.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

The rest of the chronicle is comprised of the internal musings of the narrator as he struggles to recall where he has seen this woman before. Rather than a narration of specific events, the text reads as a sampling of Nájera's encyclopedic knowledge of western art and literature, both contemporary and historical. Wondering if he might have known this woman in another lifetime, the anonymous voice of the text quotes verses by the romantic Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855), in which the French poet recounts being transported back in time by a melody, to a feudal castle, and a beautiful woman at the window. The narrator then makes a reference to Théophile Gautier's volume of essays *Voyage en Italie* (1875), thinking that perhaps he could have recognized this woman's face from Gautier's description of some masterpiece in one of Italy's great museums. In this passage the text pays homage to the French proponent of *l'art pour l'art*, with an enthusiastic exclamation: "¡Cómo me deleitaban aquel arte, aquella filigrana, aquella palabra colorida y pletórica de Théo!" (21). This phrase, which highlights the sculptural form and the plasticity of Gautier's writing, could also be descriptive of the *preciosismo* of Nájera's own texts, and it specifically identifies Gautier as one of his influences. The narrator then quotes the verses from Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Divina Commedia* (1308-21), in which Italy's *Sommo Poeta* recounts the legend of Pia dei Tolomei.

The text ends by emphasizing the religious connotations that the narrator had mentioned earlier in his description of the actress. He suddenly remembers where he has seen her face before: in a painting he had seen in a provincial convent.

> ¿La he visto en algún libro, en alguna galería, en alguna iglesia? ¡Ah! ¡un rayo de luz! ¡eureka! ¡eureka! Bien lo recuerdo: el pueblecillo aquel… la parroquia con sus muros de ennegrecida piedra… aquel convento casi en ruinas en una de cuyas celdas vivía el cura… la tarde lluviosa… nuestra plática aquella… aquellos corredores sombríos en cuyo fondo apenas lograba distinguir la escasa luz de agonizante linternilla… un gran lienzo representando la "Asunción" de la Virgen, y a su lado ¡horror! un cuadro profano… ¿qué representa? ¿quién es esa mujer que tan dulcemente nos mira? El pobre cura afirma que es una imagen de María… pero no, volvamos por el revés el cuadro… no tiene firma… aquí encuentro un letrero… descifrémoslo… ¡eureka! ¡eureka! ¡todo está aclarado! He aquí el letrero: *Ista fuit illa Pia nobilis Domina de Tholomeis de Senis* (24-25).

Nájera's phrasing in this paragraph is fragmented and impressionistic, punctuated by question marks and exclamation points, lending poetic rhythms to the prose. In this passage the reader is transported from a contemporary setting, that of a gentleman in the secular urban center, to a rural edifice that connotes the religiosity of the middle ages, a convent in ruins and in shadows. In terms of content, the author again juxtaposes the sacred and the profane in this passage, represented by the two paintings that appear side by side, one of the Virgin Mary and the other, a portrait of Pia dei Tolomei, an adulteress, according to the medieval legend. This text ultimately merges art, religion, and beauty, three cultural domains that all originate in the divine realm.

Another example of this prose style in Nájera's œuvre is the short story "Mi inglés" (1877). This text has more of a narrative to recount, although, like "Pia di Tolomei," there are passages in it devoted to rendering detailed descriptions of beautiful works of art. As the title indicates, the protagonist of this story is an Englishman, one who embodies the values of a devotée of the aesthete movement. Two connotations of the character's name associate him with the English upper class. First, it is the name of a noble family, the Earls of Pembroke (Martínez 93); second, it is the name of one of the constituent colleges of Oxford University, the center of the aesthete movement. Milord Pembroke is a wealthy, but bored and phlegmatic Englishman, suffering from the ennui of modernity. The text contrasts the aristocratic elegance of Pembroke with the restrictive, constraining manners of victorian English society, depicting him as a restless man, ill at ease with the "rígida Albión y sus costumbres invariables" (9). This characteristic links the protagonist to the aesthetics of John Ruskin, who likewise repudiated the values of industrialized England. Ruskin regarded true art as a spiritual experience and promoted an artistic ideal of medieval craftsmanship as an expression of individual creativity, in contrast to the soullessness of mechanized mass production.

In Nájera's narrative, Milord Pembroke, craving adventure, flees from the banality of Victorian society, and travels throughout Europe and Asia, collecting beautiful objects along the

way. The artifacts that the protagonist collects, with their provocative nuances of color and imagery, evoke the artistic sensibility of the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as of the aesthetes. Pembroke's house is filled with beautiful and exotic plants, animals, and objects. The text describes the vestibule as "amplio y bien dispuesto, con pavimento de exquisitos mármoles, y en cuyo centro derramaba perlas cristalinas un grifo colocado en una fuentecilla de alabastro" (12). The text even objectifies Pembroke's wife, and includes her in the enumeration of his collection. She is a beautiful Andalucian woman, whom the narrator compares to a fairy from orientalist legends, reflecting the tendency among northern European intellectuals to exoticize Spain's Moorish heritage, and include it within the broad category of what they called "oriental."

In detailing Pembroke's art collection, the narrator highlights the Englishman's affinity for the Italian renaissance, particularly the sixteenth century venetian school, the topic of another essay by Pater, "The School of Giorgione" (1877). Nájera's text mentions many of the great masters from that region, including "Ticiano, el rey del colorido, aquel que tuvo por musa a una bacante, […] Giorgione, con la firmeza de sus líneas, la naturalidad y soltura de sus ropajes y el atrevimiento de sus toques, [y] Tintoretto, aquel que amaba el perfil de Miguel Angel y el colorido de Ticiano" (13). An example from this artistic school is *Pastoral Concert* (Figure 1.3), a painting formerly thought to be by Giorgione (c. 1477-1510), but now attributed to Titian (c. 1488-1576). The harmonious composition of this work, the linear perspective and softly modeled forms are all characteristics that Pater and the aesthetes admired as manifestations of an idealized beauty. By including these works among milord Pembroke's collection, Nájera creates a protagonist who personifies Pater's artistic ideal, based on a quasi-religious worship of beauty.

Although this text seems to be far removed from a Mexican cultural context, it reflects the cosmopolitan ambience of *fin de siglo* Mexico City. Although the *afrancesamiento* of Porfirian society is well documented, there was also a British commercial and cultural presence in the capital during that era (Macías-González 227). Whether at the Jockey Club, at the horse races

at Peralvillo, or at the High Life clothing store, Nájera could have very easily encountered an English gentleman like the protagonist in this short story, within the context of his own urban center. And the character is rendered from the perspective of Nájera's own subjectivity. The narrative voice in the text is that of the Mexican *criollo* intellectual. He is the central figure, who is casting his gaze at the English gentlemen, perhaps admiring him, perhaps mocking him; but in any case he is the active agent who constructs an exotic, even eccentric Other in this literary portrait.

A significant aspect of the subjectivity of the author arises in regard to the gender ambiguity of a typical aesthete. Although Nájera associates his protagonist with the British artistic values of the era, he departs from the effeminate image, according to western standards of gender identity, that the aesthetes often projected, and instead attributes to Milord Pembroke characteristics of a robust masculinity: "Alto y robusto como un Milón de Crotona fundido en bronce en Inglaterra, impasible y severeo como la estatua del remordimiento, pudiera a las mil

FIGURE 1.3
Pastoral Concert
(c. 1509)
Attributed to Titian
(c. 1488-1576)
Oil on canvas,
43½ x 54½ in.
Musée du Louvre,
Paris

maravillas colocarse en un museo de antigüedades egipcias…" (9). Milord Pembroke also displays strength and vitality as he confronts dangerous situations throughout his travels: "cualquiera diría que el excéntrico Pembroke es un hombre formado de granito" (10). The narrative thus expresses the author's admiration for the contributions of the English intellectual to the dialogue regarding the role of art in modernity, the question of art for art's sake, while rejecting the feminine undertones of Pater's devotion to the cultivation of beauty in life and art. This attitude was common among the upper classes in Mexico City, who regarded the *calavera* or *largartijo*, the Mexican incarnation of the dandy, with ambivalence. On the one hand, the conspicuous consumption of this elegant figure signified the cultural capital of economic progress. But elites disapproved of what they regarded to be the feminization of male gender identity associated with the dandy's luxurious lifestyle (Macías-González 227-28). This notion of masculinity was not uncommon among some *fin de siglo* Spanish American intellectuals. Prominent figures, such as José Martí and Rubén Darío, would later express disparaging remarks in regard to the gender ambiguity of Oscar Wilde, even as they admired his devotion to art and beauty (Molloy 188-190). In the same vein, Nájera, even though he was quite the dandy himself (Martínez 26-27), minimizes the obliqueness of this character's portrayal of gender, and instead creates in his protagonist an image of masculinity that concurs with the concept of strong masculinity, which served as a cornerstone for the construction of Mexican national identity.

Notwithstanding the cosmopolitan air of the two narratives we have examined, more of Nájera's short stories and chronicles portray people and places that he encountered in the city. Here then is the realist current of his literary production. This might seem to contradict the author's earlier protestations against realism and positivism. However, it is all part of his subjectivity as an intellectual. In terms of a purist approach to art for art's sake, he rarely constructed narratives that were completely divorced from any social content. But he would

always continue to employ the carefully crafted, poetic prose to whatever theme he was exploring. In addition to this, he would also maintain an undertone of romantic idealism.

REALISM AND HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

Octavio Paz identifies *modernismo*, not as a school of political abstention, but rather artistic purity. The movement's aestheticism does not arise out of a moral indifference. Neither is it a manifestation of hedonism (*Cuadrivio* 13-14). Adela Pineda Franco, in her study of narratives by Ángel de Campo and Nájera published in *Revista Azul*, persuasively shows that the demarcation between *modernismo* and realism in Porfirian Mexico was not so clearly drawn. "Both Gutiérrez Nájera and de Campo participated in the *modernista* sensibility of the turn of the century, if this sensibility is understood as a layering of aesthetics that revealed the conflicts between 'art for art's sake,' as promoted by the *modernistas*, and the positivist nationalism, attributed to the realists" (121). Both literary/artistic movements offered a different method for perceiving the external, objective realm. Realism in art and literature, as well as the positivist philosophy of Porfirian society were founded on the use of the scientific method, that is, detached, impersonal observation, as a means of understanding the physical world. The *modernista* emphasis on aesthetic form offers another objective perspective on the external world. Both of these literary currents could be used to comment on modern social transformations. Other critics have also noted the eclectic mélange of ideological discourses and literary styles present in Nájera's prose (Martínez; Bustos). In addition to the romantic undertones and the lyrical quality of his narratives, these texts contain a realist component as well, in the sense that the people and places in his short stories and chronicles come directly from Porfirian society and the urban center. The physical space that forms the ambience for his narratives is Mexico City. And the characters that appear in these stories are often based on people that he knew and/or observed in his immediate surroundings, across the spectrum of the social hierarchy.

One of Nájera's more well-known stories, "La novela del tranvía" (1887), depicts scenes of daily life in the city, the concentration of people in the constructed architectural space, amid the latest technologies. The narrator of this story adopts the role of the *flâneur*, a gentleman who strolls through the city observing people and activities and taking possession of all that falls within his gaze. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) identified a particular "sociology of the big city," that forms the context from which this modern figure emerges (38). The *flâneur* is a product of the burgeoning population and changing demographics of industrialized urban centers, in which "interpersonal relationships are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear" (38). In the Spanish American experience, Angel Rama identifies a sense of unease among the traditional ruling class as they witnessed the transmutation or dissolution of their surroundings (Rama 95). The activity of strolling in the city, *el paseo*, had traditionally been limited to the plaza central, where there was a sense of community among inhabitants. The physical expansion of Spanish American cities brought an influx of anonymous masses into the urban center. For Julio Ramos, these physical and demographic transformations, as well as the rise in capitalist consumerism, formed the context out of which the French *flânerie* emerged as a distinctly modern, but impersonal form of urban activity in the *fin de siglo* era (Ramos 167). Baudelaire describes this type of gentleman and his relationship to the urban space in his essay "Le Peintre de la vie moderne":

> La foule est son domaine, comme l'air est celui de l'oiseau, comme l'eau celui du poisson. Sa passion et sa profession, c'est d'épouser la foule. […] Être hors de chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques-uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés, impartiaux, que la langue ne peut que maladroitement définir (*Œuvres complètes* 2: 691-92).
>
> [The crowd is his dominion, as the air is for the bird, as the water is for the fish. His passion and his profession, is to take possession of the crowd (…) To spend hours away from home, and yet feel at home everywhere; to see the world, to be at the center of the world and remain hidden from the world, these are some of the small pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial spirits, that language cannot adequately define.]

In "La novela del tranvía" (1887) Nájera's *flâneur* is, in accord with the French poet's description, an anonymous observer at the center of the urban activity that he witnesses, remaining hidden from the people who fall under his gaze. However, he does not exhibit the Baudelairean air of detached superiority. Instead, he immerses himself in the lives of the people that he encounters. In addition, the stories that the Mexican observer narrates take on a moralistic sentiment, which links them to a didactic tendency in Mexican literature, a trait which is the very antithesis of the Parnassian doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*.

The narrator of "La novela del tranvía" wanders through the city by means of the modern electric tram, and presents to the reader a series of living tableaux, based on the passengers he observes as they board and exit the streetcar. As he contemplates their appearance, their manner of dress, their gestures and facial expressions, he transforms them into characters in the dramas that he imagines play out in their day to day lives. One of the narratives that he constructs centers on a female protagonist, a matron of about thirty years. She is a frequent passenger who always gets off at the plaza Loreto and enters a church. However, this matron doesn't strike the observer as a particularly religious woman, "no tiene cara de mujer devota. No lleva libro ni rosario" (158). He then wonders why she enters that church at a particular time every day, and concludes that she must be meeting a lover. This reveals another characteristic of the *flâneur*: the anonymous observer as an amateur detective, "who does not take his eyes off a miscreant" (Benjamin 41). Having raised suspicion about this woman the narrator proceeds to develop a storyline about her complete with an entire cast of characters. Scandalized by what he perceives as her immoral behavior, he expresses sympathy for her husband who must be at home, unaware of her infidelity, and outrage on behalf of her children, who will have to bear the burden of her disgraceful conduct. He wonders if he should try to find her husband and expose her shameful crime. However, these incidents are only happening in the mind of the narrator himself. When the

tram arrives at the plaza Loreto, his protagonist quietly exits the streetcar and walks into the church.

The narrator makes several assumptions about this woman based on her appearance. He questions the sincerity of her religious practice, as well as her morality, and wonders why she is out by herself every day, suggesting that behavior and activities in Porfirian society were highly structured. This is also indicative of the unease among city inhabitants that both Benjamin (40) and Rama (95) identified, in European and Spanish American milieus respectively, brought on by the cultural transformations of urban life. For Nájera's narrator, there is an appropriate place for this woman to be at a given time. What he perceives to be a deviation from an acceptable routine arouses his suspicion. Here then is the didactic tone of the story. The narrator's conclusion that the woman in question must be involved in an illicit affair, expresses moral precepts in regard to the behavior of women, particularly their role in marriage and the restrictions on female sexuality.

In addition to this moralism, Nájera's chronicles and short stories often go beyond objective observations of people in the urban center. He frequently utilized his literary craft to document the social and economic inequities he observed in the society around him. He commented on urban social problems and expressed sympathy for the plight of the underclass, particularly the suffering of women and children in the urban center. However, he doesn't critique the economic or political policies of the Díaz régime that might contribute to the creation and/or maintainance of these circumstances. To the contrary, his political writings make clear that he was an enthusiastic supporter of Díaz. Still Nájera expresses sympathy for the plight of the underclass, a tone that mirrors the paternalistic attitude of the *criollo* class toward the masses.

As Nájera was only seventeen years old when he wrote "El arte y el materialismo," it is not surprising that, over the years of living and working in the capital, his perspective would evolve and mature. Furthermore, the discrepancies between rich and poor were so evident, not only in terms of lifestyle, but also in numbers –only a small percentage of the population enjoyed

the benefits of modernization– it would be difficult not to take notice of the miserable conditions of the underclass. However, even as Nájera addressed social concerns in his narratives, he would continue to employ his aesthetic use of language. In other words, he maintains the elegance of his literary craft, and employs it as a tool to construct narratives about the lives of people with whom he comes into contact. This tendency, completely contrary to Gautier's promotion of non-utilitarian art, again links Nájera's prose to the tradition of didactic literature which had existed in Mexico since the late colonial period.

Nájera often attended public events around the city and wrote chronicles based on his impressions of these events. Just as he did in "La novela del tranvía," the narrator in these tales takes on the role of the *flâneur*, observing the physical characteristics of the people around him in the city, delving into their psyche, and imagining what their social circumstance might be. Here then is the realist tendency in Nájera's prose. He is not constructing exotic narratives that take place in some unknown land. His stories instead portray quotidian scenes of life in Porfirian society. But these do not focus specifically on the sordid aspects of the modern city, as in naturalist narratives. When he does show the unpleasant characteristics of urban life, he retains the sentimental tone of romanticism and regards the suffering of the unfortunate ones with a sympathetic eye. He also maintains his carefully crafted, poetic prose in these narratives, once again showing the plurality of aesthetic trends that he incorporated into his literary style.

It is typically the lives of women and children that Nájera examines. If the public arena of the modern city is a masculine domain, women and children are the most vulnerable in this realm. "En la calle" (1883) is a story that Nájera composed by joining two chronicles he had written recounting his observations on the way to the racetrack at Peralvillo (Mapes 131). William Beezley has identified the horse races as a Europeanized form of recreation for the aristocratic and bourgeois classes of Porfirian society. These events provided a setting for the ostentatious display of fashion and consumer goods by the upper class (Beezley 27-31). As the carriages of

these finely dressed men and women had to pass through impoverished areas of the city to arrive at the track, the mere act of going to the races immediately establishes a juxtaposition of wealth and poverty in the urban center. It is precisely this contrast between rich and poor that Nájera presents in his narrative.

In the opening passage, as the narrator passes through a poor neighborhood, he is attentive to the details of the misery that he witnesses around him. This focus on the sordidness of the modern city places the narrative within the naturalist literary domain. However, Nájera's text is still composed of the poetic prose that is characteristic of his style.

> Calle abajo, calle abajo, por uno de esos barrios que los carruajes atraviesan rumbo a Peralvillo, hay una casa pobre, sin cortinas de sol en los balcones ni visillos de encaje en las vidrieras, deslavazada y carcomida por las aguas llovedizas, que despintaron sus paredes blancas, torcieron con su peso las canales, y hasta llenaron de hongos y de moho la cornisa granujienta de las ventanas. Yo, que transito poco o nada por aquellos barrios, fijaba la mirada con curiosidad en cada uno de los accidentes y detalles. El carruaje en que iba caminaba poco a poco, y conforme avanzábamos, me iba entristeciendo gravemente. Siempre que salgo rumbo a Peralvillo me parece que voy a que me entierren (131-32).

The repetition of the phrase "calle abajo" at the very beginning of the narrative establishes a rhythmic sensibility to the descriptive passage that follows. However, the carefully structured phrases that follow do not describe the idealized images of perfect aesthetic form as in the Parnassian style. Instead the focus is on the ugliness, and the state of decay of this impoverished house, which again is more typical of naturalism. But the passage also includes a tone of romantic idealism, rather than the detached impersonal observation that is integral to the naturalist method, as codified by Emile Zola. The narrator is not simply documenting the sordid details of this setting; he experiences instead a subjective reaction to the misery. It is not just the urban blight that evokes sadness in him; he also feels sympathy for the people who live in this condition. As he describes the decrepit house, his attention is also drawn to its occupant, a frail young woman sitting in a wheelchair near the balcony.

> Yo tendí la mirada al interior, y cerca del balcón, […] estaba una mujer, casi una niña, flaca, pálida, de cutis trasparente como las hojas delgadas de la porcelana china, de ojos negros, profundamente negros, circuidos por las tristes violetas del insomnio. Bastaba verla para comprenderlo: estaba tísica. Sus manos parecían de cera; respiraba con pena, trabajosamente, recargando su cabeza, que ya no tenía fuerza para erguir, en la almohada que le servía de respaldo, y viendo con sus ojos, agrandados por la fiebre, esa vistosa muchedumbre que caminaba en son de fiesta a las carreras, agitando la sombrilla de raso o el abanico de marfil, la caña de las indias o el cerezo (132).

Combining multiple literary trends, the narrator gives a naturalist account of the symptoms of her illness, yet compares the paleness of her skin to porcelain, an elegant material that connotes sculptural form and aesthetic beauty. Also present is the romantic tone of sympathy that he feels for this ailing woman. He contrasts her sickly condition with the life and boisterousness of the city, and juxtaposes the illness and melancholy of the young woman with the festive spirit of the people in the carriages outside her balcony. He further amplifies this contrast between illness and vivaciousness by fixing his attention on an elegant woman in one of the carriages.

> El landó en que Cecilia se encaminaba a las carreras era un landó en forma de góndola, con barniz azul obscuro y forro blanco. Los grandes casquillos de las ruedas brillaban como si fuesen de oro, y los rayos, nuevos y lustrosos, giraban deslumbrando las miradas con espejeos de barniz nuevo. Daba grima pensar que aquellas ruedas iban rozando los guijarros angulosos, las duras piedras y la arena lodosa de las avenidas. Cecilia se reclinaba en los mullidos almohadones, con el regodeo y deleite de una mujer que antes de sentir el contacto de la seda, sintió los arañas de la jerga. Iba contenta; se conocía que acababa de comer trufas. Si un chuparrosa hubiera cometido la torpeza de confundir sus labios con las ramas de mirto, habría sorbido en esa ánfora escarlata la última gota de champagne (133-34).

Here Nájera returns to the preciosismo, the detailed description of beautiful, luxurious objects. The varnished surface of the carriage, along with the use of colors, precious metals, and luxurious materials to describe its construction, draw the reader's attention to the artifice of the objective forms. Even the beauty of Cecilia, the woman riding in the carriage, accentuates the superiority of artifice over nature. In spite of these details, the passage still evinces an air of realism in the sense that this woman is not situated in an enchanted, exotic land. She is instead in the heart of the very real Mexico City. Her sumptous carriage is traveling on "las duras piedras y la arena lodosa de las avenidas," through a poverty stricken quarter of the city, on her way to Peralvillo.

Even though the narrator expresses reverence for Cecilia's beauty, the text also brings into question her social role, by suggesting that this life of luxury was new to her: "antes de sentir el contacto de la seda, sintió los araños de la jerga." Then in the closing passage, as on-lookers speculate as to the identity of this woman, one ventures to guess that she is "–una duquesa o una prostituta" (134). This statement expresses an unfavorable judgment of Cecilia, just as the narrator in "La novela del tranvía," had done in regard to the female passenger of the tram. In both instances, a woman in Porfirian society who is exercising agency over her life is regarded with suspicion. At the end the text reveals that the two characters, the sickly woman in the balcony and the beautiful Cecilia in the carriage, are sisters. These two women then personify binary oppositions of illness and health, frailty and vivaciousness, melancholy and joy, and even virtue and sin, implied by the suggestion that Cecilia could be a prostitute. In this way the narrator expresses sympathy for the woman in the balcony, without examining the causes of the impoverished conditions he witnesses around him in this particular neighborhood. If, in contrast to her sister in the carriage, the frail woman represents virtue, then this virtuousness ennobles her suffering.

Another short story in which Nájera expresses sympathy for a member of the urban underclass is "Historia de un peso falso" (1890). For this narrative, Nájera takes as a point of departure a short passage from one of Baudelaire's prose poems in *Le Spleen de Paris* (1867), "La Fausse monnaie". In the French text, the narrator is strolling with a friend who tosses a counterfeit coin to a beggar. At first the narrator is startled by his friend's careless gersture. But he soon begins to ruminate about what possible consequences, "funestes ou autres," this false coin might engender in the life of the mendicant.

> Ne pouvait-elle pas se multiplier en pièces vraies ? ne pouvait-elle pas aussi le conduire en prison ? Un cabaretier, un boulanger, par exemple, allait peut-être le faire arrêter comme faux-monnayeur ou comme propagateur de fausse monnaie. Tout aussi bien la pièce fausse serait peut-être, pour un pauvre petit spéculateur, le germe d'une richesse de

> quelques jours. Et ainsi ma fantaisie allait son train, prêtant des ailes à l'esprit de mon ami et tirant toutes les déductions possibles de toutes les hypothèses possibles (137).
>
> [Couldn't it multiply into real coins? Couldn't it also lead the beggar to prison? A nightclub owner or a baker, for example, could have him arrested as a counterfeiter or as a distributor of false currency. On the other hand, the false coin could also be, in the hands of a poor little gambler, the seed to a fortune that could last for several days. In this manner my fantasy flowed, giving flight to my friend's spirit and drawing all possible conclusions from all possible hypotheses.]

Nájera amplifies the premise that Baudelaire has established here, and develops a story against the backdrop of urban poverty in Mexico City. The narrative begins with the introduction of the "peso falso" as an animate object, and a protagonist in its own right. The counterfeit nature and dubious origins of the coin transform it into a metaphor for the underclass. "Por supuesto era de padres desconocidos. ¡Estos pobrecitos pesos siempre son espósitos!" (215). The narrator sympathizes with this coin in its struggle to survive in a society that deems it to be worthless. He also attributes class distinctions among coins, referring to authentic currency as aristocratic, and to the counterfeit coin as "el pobretón, el de la clase media, el que no era centavo ni tampoco persona decente" (216).

The false coin falls into the hands of a gambler and, as Baudelaire had surmised, brings him fortune when he places it on a roulette wheel. Feeling charitable, the gambler tosses the coin to a child selling newspapers on the street. At this point the narrative shifts and the boy becomes the central focus rather than the peso. But the narrator maintains the parallel between the illegitimate coin and the illegitimate child by paraphrasing the same line he had used when he introduced the "peso falso": "Por supuesto, no conocía a su padre… era uno de tantos pesos falsos humanos, de esos que circulan subrepticiamente por el mundo y que ninguno sabe en dónde fueron acuñados" (220). As the false coin does not have a place in the strictly regulated capitalist economy, the fatherless child likewise lacks a place in the rationally structured bourgeois society. Another interesting note in terms of class distinctions in the narrative is that this child is called "el inglés" because of his fair skin and blond hair. A decade earlier, Nájera had

published his short story, "Mi inglés," that presented an idealized image of the aristocratic and elegant Milord Pembroke. Here the author presents a blond child, perhaps fathered in an illicit union between an English gentleman and a Mexican woman of humble status. In this sense the child becomes a metaphor, not only for poverty, but for the consequences of the neo-colonial aspect of Porfirian society, which allows foreign investors to exploit Mexico's economy. At any rate, the child lives at the opposite end of the socio-economic hierarchy from Milord Pembroke, and like the "peso falso," is struggling to survive.

Whereas the false coin had brought fortune to the gambler, to the impoverished child it only brings more suffering. When he attempts to buy food, the store keeper discovers the coin to be counterfeit, and accuses the child of being a thief. The poor child ends up in a correctional institution, another one of the possible outcomes about which Baudelaire had speculated. However, the tone of Nájera's story is distinct from that of the source material. Baudelaire's brief narrative does not express sympathy for the mendicant. The narrator is unconcerned for the plight of the impoverished man, and instead gleefully ponders the various possible outcomes that could await the beggar who has received the *fausse monnaie*. Nájera's tale, on the other hand is decidedly sentimental. As we have already seen, the 'peso falso' is a metaphor for the illegitimate child in the urban center. The narrator expresses sympathy as much for the counterfeit coin as for "el inglés." This version also addresses class distinctions in the modern city. It characterizes the aristocratic class as corrupt, and suggests that they do not suffer the same consequences as the underclass.

Another aspect of Nájera's story which sets it apart from the source material is the religious tone that arises at the end of text. The narrative concludes with a lament to the divine for having interceded in favor of the gambler, but not for the child.

> ¡Señor! Tú que trocaste el agua en vino; tú que hiciste santo al ladrón Dimas: ¿por qué no te dignaste convertir en bueno el peso falso de ese niño? ¿Por qué en manos del jugador fue peso bueno, y en manos del desvalido fue un delito? Tú no eres como la esperanza,

> como el amor, como la vida, peso falso. Tú eres bueno. Te llamas caridad. Tú que cegaste a Saulo en el camino de Damasco, ¿por qué no cegaste al español de aquella tienda? (224).

The observations that Nájera makes in this type of narrative are reflections of sociological positivism, which seeks to alleviate social ills in modern society, but from a secular rather than a religious perspective. In accordance with that trend, this passage could be suggesting that religious ideals are illusions, and that the universe really operates in an arbitrary manner. However, the narrator is not speaking as an atheist. He is addressing God directly, making references to biblical stories, and asking why this all powerful being did not intervene to help this child. In this way, Nájera introduces religiosity into his social commentary.

Notwithstanding Nájera's enthusiasm for modernity and progress, the dénouement of "Historia de un peso falso" reveals that the religious rhetoric of his upbringing is still present in his consciousness. I have already shown that Nájera, as a member of the *criollo* class, supported the continuation of the colonial social order, even as he championed Díaz's program for the modernization of Mexico. And he regarded the Church as an institution that could be instrumental in helping to maintain that social order. However, in contrast to the pragmatic tone of his statements regarding the social function of the Church, Nájera's narratives about Catholic themes reveal a more sentimental perspective on religiosity. In some of his chronicles and stories he portrays the changing role of the Church in Porfirian society, often limiting the sphere of influence of this institution to the domestic domain of women, or to childhood reminiscences. In other stories he examines the unease that many people experience in modernity. However, as we have seen in his narratives of social commentary, Nájera rarely analyzes the causes of these stresses, but instead suggests a correlation between the angst of modern life and the waning of religious faith. The intimation here is that religion could also serve this function, to ameliorate the often unavoidable anxieties that arise out of the struggles to survive in the material realm. In this

regard, there is often a tension in Nájera's texts between the competing discourses of religion and science that permeated Porfirian Mexico.

CHANGING ROLE OF RELIGION IN MODERNITY

Nájera's writings on religious themes often reveal a tendency to regard the spiritual and the material as two separate realms of human experience. Alongside his enthusiasm for modernity and material progress, some of his chronicles express a reverence for the sacred rites of Catholicism. But even within the topic of religion itself, he makes a distinction between the objective and the subjective experiences of religion. On the one hand there is the institution of the Church, which contributes to the maintenance of the traditional social order; on the other are his personal memories of religious practices, which form part of his cultural context. He manages to express both the personal and the political in his chronicle on "La fiesta de la Virgen" (1894), the feast day which honors Mexico's most venerated religious icon, the Virgen de Guadalupe. Along with his reminiscences of the mystical ambience of the provincial chapel of his youth, "el místico olor de incienso –ese divino olor de la castidad" (299), Nájera makes a reference to the Reform Laws that placed restrictions on public religious celebrations. In his memory of the celebration, he describes how the local people would prepare for the traditional procession in honor of the Virgen, while the alcalde, the local representative of the "Estado sin Dios," would feign ignorance regarding these activities. If the civic leader were to acknowledge the event, he would have to forbid it from taking place. Here Nájera is signaling the fact that these laws were often not enforced, allowing the Church to continue functioning in spite of the liberal agenda of the secular State. In this way the chronicle describes how the religious practices remained embedded in the cultural life of the people.

Another chronicle, "¡Abuelita, ya no hay Corpus!" (1887), also takes up this theme of changing religious practices in the wake of the Reform Laws. In this case the author mourns the

loss of pageantry and spectacle in traditional Catholic rites as a result of the mandated restrictions. The chronicle opens with a paragraph in Nájera's poetic prose style in which the narrator announces to his grandmother the disquieting news that the secularization of society is taking place. As a result of this transformation, the procession in honor of the feast day of Corpus Christi will no longer take place.

> ¡Abuelita, abuelita!, la de cabellos blancos y anteojos de oro en caja de marfil: abuelita, abuelita, bien hace Dios en no querer que salga Ud. de ese rincón pacífico y obscuro en que maúlla el gato y lee Ud. vidas de Santos; bien hace Dios en tenerla sujeta con un hilo de algodón a la mesilla donde una lámpara de aceite alumbra el gancho y los tejidos comenzados; ¡abuelita, abuelita, ya no hay frailes, ya no hay procesiones, ya no hay Corpus! Ya me parece ver cómo, al oír estas palabras, cae de sus manos la enorme bola de hilo blanco y hasta el Año Cristiano desencuadernado. […] Ud. no mira nada: abre los ojos espantados y murmura en voz baja: ¡ya no hay Corpus! (*Cuentos completos* 304).

The narrator goes on to depict this change from the religious to the secular in theatrical terms, like the changing backdrop of a stage set for a new act. This transformation was taking place while his *abuelita* went about her religious practices: "Mientras Ud. leía *Vidas de Santos* el mundo cambió, como se cambian los telones en el escenario" (304). As the text continues, the narrator reminisces about how this event was celebrated in the past. There is a romantic fervor to his nostalgia, as he recounts the solemnity of the sights and sounds associated with the procession, as well as the participants involved and the choreography of activities.

As the narrator associates religiosity with childhood memories and with his *abuelita*, an elderly woman who serves as the guardian of these traditions, he locates the influence of religion within the private, domestic sphere, the domain of women and children. The public arena, in contrast to this, is no longer the place for community displays of religiosity. It is now the domain of progress, of industrial and technological developments, as well as secular intellectual activity. Nájera, as an urban intellectual supported these processes of modernization. And yet the nostalgia for religious practices that he often expresses in his narratives is again emblematic of the ambivalence among liberals in regard to the cultural transformations taking place. Another aspect

of the lingering Catholicism that is present in many of his prose works is an undertone of social anxiety that emerges from the challenge that a scientific worldview brings to religious teachings.

Some of Nájera's narratives reflect these social tensions that arise out of the competing discourses of science and religion. An example of this is "La balada de Año Nuevo" (1882), which deals with the suffering that human beings experience when faced with impending loss of life. The narrative expresses both the physical agony of a gravely ill child, and the emotional suffering of his parents, who feel powerless in the midst of this tragedy. In this narrative, the author shows how religiosity continues to permeate the lives of these characters, indicating that this traditional belief system continued to be influential, alongside scientific knowledge in modernity. Science, as personified by the medical doctor who attends to the child, predominates in the opening passage of the story, while the undertone of religiosity is present in the religious icon over the child's bed: "la bendita imagen de la Virgen [que] vela a la cabecera de la cama" (108). The text emphasizes the objectivity and rationality of the doctor, presenting him as cold and distant, an attitude that contrasts markedly with the intense emotions of the young couple. The cerebral, intellectual activity of the doctor is made audible in the sound of his pen scratching on paper, as he writes a prescription. The suffering in the room, however, is expressed through the absence of sound: "Sólo se oye en la alcoba, como el pesado revoloteo de un moscardón, el ruido de la pluma corriendo sobre el papel, blanco y poroso" (108). The activity of the doctor is tangible, and represents one of the tenets of Western culture, that empirical knowledge has the capacity to provide the answers that people need to the questions about the meaning of existence in the material world. However, even though the emotions in the room are intangible and silent, they are no less real. As her baby lies dying, Clara becomes frustrated by the doctor's distant and clinical approach to the child's illness:

> La calma insoportable del doctor la irrita. ¿Por qué no lo salva? ¿Por qué no le devuelve la salud? ¿Por qué no le consagra todas sus vigilias, todos sus afanes, todos sus estudios? ¿Qué, no puede? Pues entonces de nada sirve la medicina: es un engaño, es un embuste,

> es una infamia. ¿Qué han hecho tantos hombres, tantos sabios, si no saben ahorrar este dolor al corazón, si no pueden salvar la vida a un niño, a un ser que no ha hecho mal a nadie, que no ofende a ninguno, que es la sonrisa, y es la luz, y es el perfume de la casa? (109).

This passage underscores the limits of science, and from Clara's perspective, the shortcoming of human knowledge. As the doctor's methods ultimately fail to heal the child, the couple turn to their religious beliefs, imploring God to save their child: "Clara y Pablo lloran, ruegan a Dios, suplican, mandan a la muerte, se quejan del doctor, enclavijan las manos, se desesperan, acarician y besan. ¡Todo en vano!" (111). However, neither science nor religion, neither the efforts of the doctor nor the supplications of Clara and Pablo, are effective in preventing the death of the child: "El enfermito ya no habla, ya no mira, ya no se queja: tose, tose. Tuerce los bracitos como si fuera a levantarse, abre los ojos, mira a su padre como diciéndole: –¡Defiéndeme! –vuelve a cerrarlos… ¡Ay! Bebé ya no habla, ya no mira, ya no se queja, ya no tose; ¡ya está muerto!" (111-12).

This narrative portrays the anxieties of life in Porfirian society during the process of modernization in which the *científicos* promote a new paradigm for perceiving the physical world to supplant what they regard to be a dated world view, one that is based on superstitions. Once again, the text suggests that religion does have a place in modernity, in this case, to provide solace in times of crisis. But at the same time, when one considers that Clara and Pablo's desperate pleas to the divine don't bring the desired result, this religious belief system appears as superstition. This leads back to the positivist perception of the universe as a mechanical entity which operates at random. Science cannot save the child, but neither can religious faith.

Notwithstanding the tragedy of the death of a child, the narrator juxtaposes the mournfulness of Clara and Pablo with sounds of joy coming from the street outside, as the death occurs at the same moment that a new year begins. Once again, in positivist fashion, the narrative portrays the inevitability of the stages of existence. Time goes on; life goes on, as embodied in

the boisterousness of the children in the street. Life and death are presented as stages in the eternal cycle of natural forces. Alongside the couple's grief, the laughter of the children in the street, and their enthusiastic cry of "–¡Mi Año Nuevo! ¡Mi Año Nuevo!" (112) portray the hopefulness of a new beginning. But it is a hopefulness unconnected to any religious connotation.

"La mañana de San Juan" (1883) also recounts the tragic death of a child. Although religiosity is not overtly depicted in this narrative, there are suggestions of religious nuances within the narrative context, beginning with the title itself, which refers to the Catholic feast day of St. John the Baptist. The story begins with an ode to the feast day, "la mañana de San Juan." There are subtle references to baptism in the opening passage, although the text does not mention specific Catholic rites.

> Pocas mañanas hay tan alegres, tan frescas, tan azules como esta mañana de San Juan. El cielo está muy limpio, "como si los ángeles lo hubieran lavado por la mañana"; llovió anoche y todavía cuelgan de las ramas brazaletes de rocío que se evaporan luego que el sol brilla, como los sueños luego que amanece; los insectos se ahogan en las gotas de agua que resbalan por las hojas, y se aspira con regocijo ese olor delicioso de tierra húmeda […] También la naturaleza sale de la alberca con el cabello suelto y la garganta descubierta; los pájaros, que se emborrachan con el agua, cantan mucho, y los niños del pueblo hunden su cara en la gran palangana de metal (141).

Here the text describes how all the elements of nature have been cleansed by the rain, revealing echoes of the nature-centered religions of pre-Christian Europe embedded within the reference to the Christian rite of baptism. As the passage continues, the narrator anthropomorphizes the morning, constructing a female-gendered entity to whom he speaks directly, and then splitting this image of the feminine principle into the virgin/whore dichotomy that is present in Christian iconography. The text associates the virginal aspects of the feminine with the countryside, and the prostituted woman with the urban center.

> ¡Oh mañanita de San Juan, la de camisa limpia y jabones perfumados, yo quisiera mirarte lejos de estos calderos en que hierve grasa humana; quisiera contemplarte al aire libre, allí donde apareces virgen todavía con los brazos muy blancos y los rizos húmedos! Allí eres virgen: cuando llegas a la ciudad, tus labios rojos han besado mucho; […] muchos brazos han rodeado tu cintura; traes en el cuello la marca roja de una mordida, y vienes tambaleando, con traje de raso blanco todavía, pero ya prostituido, profanado, […] ¡No,

> mañanita de San Juan, así yo no te quiero! Me gustas en el campo: allí donde se miran tus azules ojitos y tus trenzas de oro" (141-42).

The text thus idealizes nature, the locus amoenus of the countryside and depicts the city as a place of corruption. As the date of commemoration of St. John the Baptist, June 24, coincides with the summer solstice rites of pre-Christian European cultures, the idyllic image of nature in Nájera's text establishes a link between the Catholic feast day and its pagan antecedents. In the narrative that follows, the author also incorporates a legend from the indigenous cultures of Mexico, highlighting the hybridity of modern Mexican culture, even among the Euro-centric *criollo* elite.

After the introductory paragraph the narrator then recounts a tragic story from the countryside, which had happened years before on this particular feast day. Two children, Gabriel and Carlos, go to a reservoir to play with paper boats. Their mother and all the workers on the hacienda are taking a siesta, so the fields are deserted when the boys go out. While they are playing at the water's edge, Carlos falls into the pond and is swept away by the current. Gabriel desperately tries to rescue his brother, but is ultimately unable to pull him out of the water. This presents another veiled reference to baptism, in this case complete immersion in water. However, the tragic end to the story does not correspond to the positive connotations that are associated with the Christian rite of baptism, which signifies purification, the washing away of sins. Yet the one specifically Christian reference in the text, when Carlos calls out to his guardian angel to intercede on his behalf, does not bring forth divine intervention: "¡Santo ángel de mi guarda! ¿Por qué no me oyes?" (144). Like Clara and Pablo in "La balada de Año Nuevo," the supplication of Carlos does not help him to escape from peril. In recounting the fate of Carlos, the text diverges from a typically Christian signification, as the death of a child by drowning bears a similarity to a pre-Hispanic legend that had been circulating in Mexico City since colonial times.

The chronicles of Catholic friars during the colonial era, such as Bernardino de Sahagún's (1499-1590) *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España* (c. 1570-1582) and Diego Durán's (c. 1537-1588) *Libro de los dioses y ritos* (1576), recount stories of children being

sacrificed in Lake Texcoco to Tlaloc, the Nahuatl god of rain. According to both accounts, a child would be placed in a canoe and taken to a place on the lake called Pantitlán, described as a natural drain in the middle of the lake. There the child would be cast into the waters, and swallowed by the whirlpool, never to be seen again (Sahagún 99; Durán 164-65). In Nájera's story, after Gabriel's unsuccessful struggle to pull his brother from the reservoir, the text describes how Carlos was swallowed by the water: "Ya se abren las aguas, como se abre la muchedumbre en una procesión cuando la Hostia pasa. Ya se cierran y sólo queda por un segundo, sobre la onda azul, un bucle lacio de cabellos rubios" (145). It is likely that Nájera was familiar with the legend regarding the existence of this sinkhole, as well as the accounts of the missionaries regarding the fate of children in the context of indigenous religious rites. It is therefore possible that he had these anecdotes in mind when he wrote the tale. In addition to the reference to Pantitlán, however, the passage also includes another Christian allusion, the religious procession and the ceremonial display of the Eucharist Host. This passage demonstrates again that, even as Nájera looked to European sources for literary models, the mestizaje of indigenous legends and colonial Hispanic traditions from his own cultural context also informed the content of his narratives.

Both of these stories portray the tragedy of death, the death of a child, and the inability of a loved one to prevent that loss. Although science is not specifically present, as a counter discourse to a religious world-view, in the narrative of "La mañana de San Juan," the text does reveal theories of naturalism and Darwinism in the representation of the malevolent side of nature. The closing paragraph of the narrative again anthropomorphizes the day, but this time reveals the locus terribilis of nature, and depicts the destruction that these impersonal forces can inflict, as they run their course: "¡Oh mañanita de San Juan! ¡Tu blanco traje de novia tiene también manchas de sangre!" (145). This story, like "La balada de Año Nuevo," exposes the frailty of religious faith in modern western culture. These stories express the experience of suffering from the subjectivity of the characters themselves, and expose the vulnerability of their

religious beliefs as a means for alleviating that suffering. They show that the processes of modernization and secularization did not provide society with a valid replacement for the philosophical foundation that institutional religion had provided, to serve as the basis for understanding the nature of human existence in the physical realm.

Another narrative portrays the anxiety caused by the loss of religious beliefs from the perspective of a secular intellectual. If the modern man in Porfiran society, immersed in western rationalism and positivist principles, relegates religion to the domestic sphere of women and children, where does he turn when confronted with the vulnerability that all human beings experience, at one time or another, in the physical realm? He essentially finds himself operating without a safety net, in a metaphysical sense. Nájera addresses this dilemma in "Carta de un suicida" (1880, 1888), a short story in which he specifically links the mal del siglo of modern society with the loss of religious faith. The narrative opens with a narrator/journalist recounting how an acquaintance of his had recently committed suicide. He goes on to explain that he is publishing the suicide note left by this tragic figure, not out of disrespect for the memory of his friend, but in response to another newspaper article that had reported on another recent suicide in a frivolous manner. The letter itself begins with the external reason for the victim's fateful decision, which was essentially his state of poverty: "Voy a matarme porque no tengo una sola moneda en mi bolsillo, ni una sola ilusión en mi cabeza. El hombre no es más que un saco de carne que debe llenarse con dineros. Cuando el saco está vacío, no sirve para nada" (42). This statement is not only commenting on the relentless pursuit of wealth and material possessions in Porfirian society, it also implies that a man measures his worth as a human being by his material wealth. The author of the letter is going to kill himself, not simply because he is poor, but because without money he serves no purpose. The protagonist of this story senses no other transcendental reason for his existence than to be productive and acquire wealth. It is because he has fallen short

of that objective that he contemplates taking his life. But the letter does go on to address the lack of religious faith in modern society more directly.

The author of the letter recounts the religious beliefs that had been instilled in him during his formative years, describing the traditions and rituals of Catholicism from a nostalgic perspective, particularly his preparation for receiving his first communion, thus linking religious experiences to childhood. He then recalls how as a young man he turned away from religion to study science, an experience that was typical for those coming of age in the era of positivist education. Soon scientific knowledge began to unravel his childhood beliefs, which in turn left him with a spiritual void that nothing in the material world could fill. He is unable to reconcile science with the tenets of Church doctrine that he learned as a child, for the former has exposed the latter as a superstition and a lie. But at the same time he is aware that this very superstition gives comfort to men like himself. He remembers that when he believed, he was happy: "Soportaba la vida, porque la vida es el camino de la muerte, Después de estas penalidades –me decía– hay un cielo en que se descansa. […] Cada sufrimiento, cada congoja, cada angustia es un escalón de esa escala misteriosa vista por Jacob y que nos lleva al cielo" (43). Even though he now knows this is a lie, when he believed these sentiments, they brought comfort, and meaning to this existence, and made the suffering of the human condition bearable. It is not only the material poverty that leads him to suicide, but also the loss of this belief system. As the letter continues, its author then recalls a passage from a novel by the German romantic writer, Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825), paraphrasing an excerpt from Richter's *Blumen- Frucht- und Dornenstücke* [*Flower, Fruit and Thorn Pieces*] (1796-97), in which Christ addresses a group of souls, informing them that there is no God and that, in this existence, "todos somos huérfanos." Nájera's anonymous protagonist then echoes these very same words:

> ¡Cuántas veces, caballero, he repetido en mis horas de angustia estas palabras! ¡Todos somos huérfanos! Mi alma está entumida, y necesita, para seguir moviéndose, ¡el calor de una creencia! Pero he despilfarrado mi caudal de fe, y en el fondo de mi corazón no

> queda un solo ochavo de esperanza. Soy un bolsillo vacío y una conciencia sin fe. Cuando el saco no sirve para nada, se rompe (44).

It is both the material and the spiritual poverty that lead him to suicide. The dilemma of modernity, as it is expressed in this narrative, is the loss of a belief system, and a cosmology that had brought comfort to people. Particularly for the intellectual who feels compelled to reject the religion of his youth, and instead embrace the scientific method, the loss of this philosophical framework results in the spiritual crisis that leads the protagonist to take his own life.

"Carta de un suicida" was published twice during Nájera's lifetime: in *El Nacional*, 19 octubre, 1880, and again, with some minor revisions, in *El Partido Liberal*, 2 septiembre, 1888. The first version, then, predates Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God, which first appeared in *The Gay Science* (1882). However, as Nájera's reference to Richter's eighteenth-century novel demonstrates, the concept of the demise of the Christian deity was not new to the *fin de siècle* era, although Nietzsche proclaimed this event more forcefully than previous philosophers. In any case, the anonymous protagonist of Nájera's story is representative of his time. He expresses the *mal del siglo*, the ennui of modernity, the dissatisfaction with the materialism of bourgeois society, as well as the anxiety of the era that resulted from the realization that scientific inquiry was exposing more and more the vulnerability of the philosophical framework which had for centuries served as the foundation for western culture.

Although Nájera utilized the range of his literary style to restore a sense of the divine to Porfirian society in an abstract aesthetic manner, his characters and narratives were often drawn from the places he frequented and the people he encountered in the city. He often utilized his impressionistic, poetic prose style as an extension of sociological positivism, a trend which sought to bring the care of the needy, previously one of the domains of Church activity, under the umbrella of secular organizations. This social concern corresponds to Auguste Comte's conception of a secular or positivist religion, which eliminates the need for a transcendent God, and focuses instead on the humanitarian functions of religion (Bourdeau).

Nájera's treatment of this theme is another aspect of the lingering romanticism in his style, which distances him from the Parnassian artistic agenda, as well as Baudelaire's aversion to sentimentality. However, Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894), one of the elder statesmen of the Parnassian poets, had early in his career participated in humanitarian causes, including the popular uprising of the 1848 Revolution in France. Disillusioned over the failure of that movement, it was at that time that Leconte de Lisle retreated to his Ivory Tower and developed a scorn for utilitarian, didactic verse (Schaffer 73-77). Baudelaire had also participated in the Revolution of 1848, albeit half-heartedly. He was likewise disenchanted by the results of the movement, and from that point on devoted himself to the construction of pure literature, and to shocking the bourgeoisie (Schaffer 157; Quennell 44). Given these circumstances, I propose that the Nájera's French counterparts were not somehow more sophisticated in their dismissal of the plight of the underclass, but that they were disillusioned by the outcome of their efforts. Intellectuals then respond to the set of circumstances that give rise to their cultural production. Nájera did not feel compelled to create pure literature. Even though his observations do not critique Díaz's social or economic policies, or hold the régime accountable for the uneven effects of modernization, the suffering that he witnessed in the city warranted his attention.

Following on this humanitarian concern, Nájera also examined the spiritual anxieties of the era, and how the changing role of the Church, and the rise of scientific knowledge created a sensation of human vulnerability in the material world. This last topic brings forth the subjectivity of individual experiences of modernity, including reactions to the transformation of religious beliefs in the face of positivism and the exploration of alternative approaches to understanding humankind's place in the cosmos. In the next chapter I turn my attention to this aspect of Nájera's prose works, his depiction of subjective spiritual moods and various perspectives on the metaphysical realm, topics more closely associated with the symbolist current in *modernismo*.

Chapter 2: Transcending the Materialism of Porfirian Society

As stated previously, Spanish American *modernismo* developed from a mélange of literary/aesthetic influences, primarily though not exclusively French. The prevailing characteristics are two trends that in French culture were diametrically opposed to each other: Parnassianism and symbolism. While the previous chapter focused on the Parnassian aspects of Nájera's prose, in this one I will examine the symbolist influences. This is not to say that his texts can be categorized in terms of one of these doctrines or the other. Rather, both literary currents are often intertwined in his prose. The characteristics that I will examine in this chapter stem from the subjective and nuanced nature of symbolism.

Baudelaire's literary production bridges both the Parnassians and the symbolists. As shown in the previous chapter, his sonnet "Correspondances" (1857) contains the concept of synesthesia, the interrelationship between the various art forms and the spectrum of human senses for perceiving and responding to those forms. This same poem also lays the foundation for the development of symbolism, in its depiction of a world composed of hermetic symbols that the poet/artist must then decipher to uncover the hidden meanings of existence: "La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers / Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles; / L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symbols / Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers" (*Fleurs du mal* 16) [Nature is a temple in which living pillars / Sometimes give voice to confused words; / Man passes there through forests of symbols / Which look at him with understanding eyes.] Baudelaire also expresses in his writings dissatisfaction with a dreary existence in the physical realm. His yearning to transcend the banality of the material world is evident in the prose poem "La Chambre double" from the volume *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869). The first part of the narrative describes an ethereal, dream-like space: "Une chamber qui ressemble à une reverie, une chamber véritablement *spirituelle*, où l'atmosphère stagnante est légèrement teintée de rose et de bleu"

(79). The narrator continues in this vein, describing the voluptuousness of his surroundings, when a loud knock jolts him out of his reverie. Whoever this visitor might be, –a bailiff, a lover, an editor–, their presence has the effect of breaking the enchantment of his transcendent experience, bringing him back to the rationality of the material realm: "toute cette magie a disparu au coup brutal frappé par le Spectre" (80). [all that magic disappeared at the sound of the brutal knock at the door delivered by the Specter.]

As symbolism continued to develop the poets Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) contributed characteristics of musicality, ambiguity, and nuance in poetic construction. Verlaine outlines this aesthetic theory in his "Art poetique" (1884): "De la musique avant toute chose, / Et pour cela préfère l'Impair, / Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air, / Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose" (Œuvres complètes 295-96) [Music above all else / And for this, choose the odd-numbered verse / So vague as to vanish in the air / Without anything in it that would weigh it down.] Mallarmé is likewise attentive to the musical rhythms of poetry, particularly the sounds produced by certain combinations of words. He also makes use of ambiguous phrasing rather than direct statements (Schaffer 204-07).

In terms of philosophy, the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) were influential among the symbolists. His treatise, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819, 1844), identifies impersonal forces at work in the universe, immaterial forces that he calls Will, mindless, non-rational urges at the heart of the instinctual drives of all living beings. This thesis ultimately undermines traditional western cosmology, as it depicts a world that operates irrespective of the Christian conception of good and evil. In order to circumvent the impersonal forces of Will, and transcend the suffering inherent in this existence, Schopenhauer proposes the contemplation of ideal forms, a primordial aesthetic which he calls the Platonic Idea. According to this concept, one must adopt an intellectual and disinterested attitude toward the world, in order to achieve a contemplative state. True art, he believes, can lead one to that contemplative

state which provides refuge from world of Will (Wicks). This treatise was translated into French in 1874 by Theodule Ribot and came to have a profound influence on literary and artistic trends during the *fin de siècle* (Doss-Davezac 249).

In 1886 Jean Moréas codified all of these sources in an essay he published in *Le Figaro*, which came to be known as the symbolist manifesto. Moréas recognizes Baudelaire as the precursor to this literary aesthetic, and identifies Verlaine and Mallarmé as the first symbolist poets, who brought a sense of mystery to their verses. He rejects didacticism, declamation, false sentimentality, and objective descriptions. Instead, Moréas promotes an aesthetic based on the depiction in art and poetry of abstract primordial ideas, rendered in delicate, nuanced forms. Symbolism in prose literature, according to Moréas, consists of narratives that unfold in malformed or distorted spaces, such as dreams or hallucinations, peopled by strange or shadowy phantasms or mythological beings. As in poetry, these tales are constructed in a suggestive, impressionistic manner, a style conducive to revealing the inner, subjective reality of the characters, rather than rendering a detailed description of the external, objective world.

This symbolistic aesthetic emerged as much in response to Emile Zola's (1840-1902) scientific approach to literature as to the air of emotional detachment promoted by the Parnassians. Nájera takes elements from all these schools of thought and adapts them to his own purpose. The works that I examine in this chapter will reveal how Nájera portrays the subjective moods that stem from the yearning to achieve an ethereal transcendence, in tension with the rationality of a secular society. In these texts the author channels the religious impulse into an exploration of some of the esoteric practices that were circulating in western culture as another manifestation of the *fin de siglo* sensitivity. But even in these topics, there continues to be a Catholic undertone to Nájera's content. In some of the texts he expresses an air of mysticism that is inherent to the Hispanic Christian tradition. In others, he meditates on the symbolist affinity for music as the most transcendent of all the arts.

The quest for the literary/artistic representation of the metaphysical realm, on both sides of the Atlantic, took various forms. The reaction to the increasingly mechanized culture of the West led to a renewed interest in religion, whether a return to Christian traditions, an exploration of Asian religions, or even alternative esoteric movements, such as spiritualism, theosophy, Rosicrucian orders, and even Satanism. What all of these explorations held in common was an emphasis on the immaterial domain, a realm of mystery and subtlety, where images are suggested rather than empirically and concretely defined. In regard to Nájera's narratives, we have seen that when he addresses religious themes in his writings, the religion of his upbringing often manifests in varying degrees. As we turn our attention to the influence of French symbolism in his prose, we will see how a Catholic undertone continues to be present, although not in the form of institutional doctrine. In terms of alternative expressions of religiosity, Nájera tends to refrain from straying too far to the dark side of the metaphysical. In some of his narratives, he does portray aspects of spiritualism, which had been in vogue throughout the Western world at that time. But his representations of the transcendental manifest more often as expressions of the mysticism inherent in the Hispanic tradition of Catholicism. In addition to these themes, we will also see how Nájera utilized other characteristics of the Symbolist aesthetic, such as the suggestiveness and nuance that Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Moréas advocated, as well as the relationship between musicality and literature.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE SPIRITS

The anxieties in western culture regarding the fate of the soul after death, in the face of the waning influence of religious doctrine, contributed to the emergence and popularity of spiritualist movements. Proponents of modern spiritualism believed in the continued existence of the soul in the afterlife, as well as the possibility of communication with the spirit world. These beliefs functioned as an alternative perspective on the metaphysical realm, and served the

spiritual needs of the increasingly secularized Western culture. Although spiritualist activities were taking place throughout the Occident, in France a particular movement called Spiritism was founded by Allan Kardec (1804-1869), who sought to bring the method of scientific inquiry to prove the existence of the soul, and the spirit world. In other words, rather than using science to undermine religious beliefs, Kardec proposed to use these same methods to bring empirical proof to the precepts that religions urged their followers to accept on faith (Monroe 110).

In Mexico, conceptions of the spirit world are present in the religious traditions of both the Hispanic and the indigenous cultures. In addition to these currents, Kardec's Spiritist philosophies entered the country during the French occupation of 1863-67, adding another facet to Mexican spiritualism. Spiritist groups, composed mainly of educated middle- and upper-class men and women, soon flourished in Guadalajara, Guanajuato, and Mexico City, and then subsequently branched out into smaller cities like Mazatlán and Guaymas in the north (Vanderwood 178), and Mérida in the Yucatán peninsula (Rugeley 195). Terry Rugeley describes Mexican spiritualism as "a form of Protestantism in a society not ready or willing to be Protestant," in the sense that Mexican spiritualists sought to circumvent the ecclesiastical hierarchy and communicate directly with the divine. However, many practitioners remained Catholic, at least nominally, and regarded their activities as an extension of the Catholic tradition of intercession. That is, they "did not speak directly with God but rather with a series of incorporeal beings that stood closer to the spiritual source than themselves" (198). Rejecting the materialism of modernity, Mexican spiritualists criticized positivism far more often than they did Catholicism, although at times they expressed an indirect critique of the latter (198-99).

In an article entitled "La metafísica y la política" (1880), Nájera comments on the contrast between materialist and spiritualist philosophical systems. The ideas he presents here essentially comprise an extension of the topic he had articulated previously in "El arte y el materialismo." In this text, he focuses more on the contradistinction between spirit and matter.

Materialist doctrines, the author says, attempt to deny the mystery of the human soul, and to reduce the human mind to an entity that can be studied empirically: "El alma humana no era, conforme a aquel sistema, más que la colección completa de nuestras sensaciones; y el cerebro, una especie de museo portátil de nuestras ideas, de las fotografías de todos los objetos que habíamos visto o tocado" (*Obras* 13: 37). He believes that the study of the metaphysical realm is important because to deny the validity of what lies beyond this world is to deny the immortality of the soul. "Cuidemos de no confundir el alma con la materia, cuidemos de no proscribir el noble estudio de la metafísica; porque, si tal hacemos, proscribimos al mismo tiempo la creencia en la inmortalidad, y con la creencia de la inmortalidad, la sanción del heroísmo" (37). In this way, Nájera articulates the very argument that drives spiritualist movements, to ameliorate the anxiety that scientific inquiry has provoked regarding the fate of the soul in the afterlife. Unlike the anonymous protagonist in "Carta de un suicida," here the author affirms with confidence that, even though the divine lies beyond our physical senses, it is no less real. He identifies an intangible spiritual essence to our being that is transmitted from generation to generation. In this sense, Nájera depicts the metaphysical realm as one that is fluid, a concept that coincides with theories of French Mesmerism, a precursor to Kardec's Spiritism (Monroe 67).

> Toda cosa humana participa del tiempo y de la eternidad: del tiempo cuando es una acción simple, una sensación que las circunstancias traen y desvanecen; de la eternidad, cuando es una verdad o una virtud; la verdad, es decir, la palabra invariable de siglo en siglo, de comarca en comarca; la virtud, es decir, la acción hermosa por sí misma y que irradia constantemente su belleza (37).

In this passage, Nájera juxtaposes spirit, which is eternal, with finite matter. Man has to choose between time and eternity, between the pleasures of the body and the transcendental pursuits of the spirit/mind. He associates the eternal with abstract concepts, truths, and virtues: "Tú, por el contrario, quieres vivir de la eternidad, es decir, por la simpatía, por el pensamiento, amar, conocer, educar en tu propio espíritu la ciencia, la justicia, la abnegación, la caridad. Pues tú has formado a modo de una escala de cosas divinas para subir por ella al Cielo" (38). The reference

here to typical Christian virtues, such as abnegation and charity, as well as the image of one going up to heaven, again reveals an undertone of Nájera's own religious tradition. "La eternidad te espera en su majestuoso misterio, y cuando la tarde de tus días haya llegado, podrás decir: he concluido la cosecha y voy a reposar" (38). He doesn't use specific Christian rhetoric in this article, but neither does he push the envelope to explore alternative perspectives on the divine.

One of the narratives in which Nájera plays with the concept of communication with the spirit world is "El desertor del cementerio" (1880). The poetic prose of the introductory paragraph reads as an ode to the ethereal mood of the month of November, a time when the spirits of the deceased return to the earthly realm.

> Como al llegar la primavera vienen las golondrinas, al llegar el invierno vienen los aparecidos. Noviembre es el gran mes de las resurrecciones. La naturaleza parece como que muere, y el espíritu como que resucita; las hojas se desprenden de los árboles y las almas de los muertos se desprenden de los panteones; en los teatros y en las calles se representa Don Juan Tenorio; la muerte da una recepción en cada cementerio, como una dama aristocrática que abre su salón en día determinado; nos vestimos de negro y escuchamos el doble acompasado que cae del campanario; vemos con la imaginación, ese anteojo que alcanza a diez mil leguas y a diez mil años, a todos esos seres que han ido al país de donde nadie vuelve; es la época en que todo resucita, menos los corazones que se han muerto y las bellezas que han pasado (45).

November as the month of resurrections is a reference to *Día de los muertos*. The Mexican celebration in honor of the dead corresponds to All Souls' Day on the Catholic calendar. In Hispanic tradition, the observance of this day includes candle-lit processions and the ringing of bells. In Mexico, the festivities of this day manifest in a unique way, due to the merging of Catholic rituals with indigenous cosmology. The Mesoamerican cultures also expressed a belief in the eternal existence of the soul, and practiced rites to pay tribute to the dead. The celebrations of this feast day in modern Mexico, –the custom of visiting tombs and carrying out quasi-festive activities in honor of the dead during the first two days of November–, result from the syncretism of these two cultural traditions.

In the nineteenth century, the performance of José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844) also became customary at this time of year, as Nájera himself noted in the opening paragraph to his story. The legend of don Juan, which has origins in fourteenth-century chronicles of Sevilla, recounts a tale in which the spirit of a deceased comendador, don Gonzalo de Ulloa, returns to the earthly realm to deliver justice from beyond to the anti-hero/protagonist, don Juan. The first literary version of this legend is the Spanish Golden Age play attributed to Tirso de Molina, *El burlador de Sevilla y el convidado de piedra* (c. 1627). In this work the spirit of don Gonzalo appears in the form of a statue that had been erected at his tomb. Zorrilla's drama, a Romantic retelling of the tale, expands on the concept of communication from the metaphysical realm, by incorporating a scene in which the protagonist experiences an eerie encounter in the cemetery with the sepulchral statues of several deceased characters. The spirit of doña Inés, the daughter of the comendador and don Juan's fiancée, also communicates with him in the cemetery, appearing, however, as a shadow, rather than as a solid sculpted form (186-89). This is a more ethereal representation of spirit, more in line with the Spiritist conception of the fluidity of unseen forces. The reference to Zorilla's play and to the festivities in honor of Día de los muertos in this introductory paragraph set the mood for the tale that will follow.

The next passage, in which the central character arrives at the narrator's door, parallels the Sevillian legend in several ways. First the very title of Nájera's narrative evokes the image of don Gonzalo himself, who likewise deserts the cemetery and appears at don Juan's chamber. Then, in both stories, the arrival of the mysterious visitor is announced by a series of ominous sounds, loud knocks in Zorilla's play, and footsteps in Nájera's short story. Finally, just as the spirit of don Gonzalo takes the form of his sepulchral statue, the narrator of Nájera's tale describes his mysterious visitor as having the characteristics of a statue.

> Pensaba yo el día último de octubre en estas cosas, cuando oí detenerse a la puerta de mi casa algún carruaje. Sonaron pasos en la escalera, abrí la puerta de mi gabinete y halléme desde luego frente a frente de un desconocido. Era un hombre de alta estatura, esbelto y

> vigoroso, como el Apolo de Belvedere, y altivo y elegante como Milord de Brummel. Un traje negro correctísimo, que todavía mostraba la nostalgia de Inglaterra, cubría un cuerpo de gladiador romano. En la mano izquierda tenía el desconocido su sombrero, de copa alta; y en la derecha una tarjeta blasonada. El sombrero estaba forrado de irreprochable seda blanca, y la tarjeta decía así: / Juan Octavio, / Duque de Parisis (45-46).

The text thus depicts this soul who has returned from the dead as solid form rather than the fluidity one would typically associate with spirit. However, this particular statue, the Apollo Belvedere from classical antiquity, belies the heaviness of stone mass and instead exudes lightness, grace and elegance, the very embodiment of aesthetic perfection promoted by the Parnassians (Figure 2.1). In addition to the idealized sculptural form, the narrator compares this character to Beau Brummell (1778-1840), the original English dandy and precursor to the aesthete movement. Thus Nájera takes the Spanish legend and imbues it with modern literary characteristics. In the same way that the *modernistas* sought to renovate the Castillian language in poetry, we see Nájera applying this same principle to his prose.

FIGURE 2.1
Apollo Belvedere
Roman copy (c. 120-40)
of Greek bronze original (c. 350-25 BCE)
White Marble, 7.3 ft. tall.
Vatican Museums, Vatican City

Upon introducing the name of this visitor, Nájera delves even further into his affinity for the French literature of his era, by adopting the title character of Arsène Houssaye's (1815-1896) novel *Monsieur Don Juan* (1868), as the protagonist for this narrative. From the Spanish legend, Houssaye borrows only the name don Juan, which he attributes to the French aristocrat, Jean-Octave de Parisis. Like his namesake, Jean-Octave is a seducer of women. But unlike the Spanish swordsman from the late middle ages, he is an elegant dandy in Second-Empire Paris (ca. 1852-1870). He is linked to gothic tales by means of a curse that had been placed on his family lineage during the fifteenth century, which prophesied that love and death would be inextricably linked in each generation of the noble house of Parisis (16-20). Even more ominous, the lineage was fated to die out in four hundred years, precisely during the lifetime of Jean-Octave himself. This is the figure in Nájera's story "que se desprende del panteón" and arrives at the narrator's door.

The combination of the sculptural form and the pale marble-like complexion of the character create a juxtaposition of elegance and death. The narrator describes the Duke of Parisis as "pálido, mortalmente pálido" (46), and "un muerto vivo" (47). He is the embodiment of a spirit who has taken advantage of Día de los Muertos to return to the earthly realm and seek out the eternal feminine in all parts of the world. Thus the narrative blends characteristics of the Parnassian aesthetic –solidity of form, elegance, and luxurious materials, with the Symbolist content of communication with the spirit world. The narrative that follows, however, is not a macabre encounter with the dead. In fact, the Duke of Parisis himself is not menacing in the least, but instead addresses the narrator with aristocratic manners: "–Caballero, yo soy un desertor del cementerio. ¡Tenga Ud. La amabilidad de no mirarme con esos ojos espantados! Soy un muerto. La vida que hoy disfruto es como la mayoría de los relojes: sólo tiene cuerda para un día. Suplico a Ud., por consiguiente, que no perdamos ni un minuto" (46). The narrator then agrees to accompany his mysterious visitor to a gathering in Chapultepec Castle, where he introduces him to many of the leading socialites in the capital. In this way Nájera plays with the concept of

communication with the spirits. He transforms this experience from a terrifying encounter with the unknown to a parody of Porfirian high society.

The portraits of the women in attendance at the ball, as described by the narrator, again rely on the Parnassian emphasis on perfect form and sculptural beauty. Like the elegance of the Duke, the narrator compares the beauty of many of these women to that of statues. La Sra. Quintana de Goríbar "tiene la gracia de la estatuaria antigua" (48). La Sra. Espinosa de Castañeda y Nájera is "una obra maestra de la estatuaria humana" (48). The body of la Sra. De Camarena "tiene la corrección de la estatuaria griega" (49). The narrator also compares this woman to a statue of the Greek goddess Diana on a marble pedestal. This emphasis on the sculptural form of these women, as objects made of a substance that is cold and hard, negates the warmth of a human body. If the sculpted form of the Duke is a manifestation of his soul returned to the physical realm, by extension this entire ball could be a dance of the dead. The author alludes to this in the introductory paragraph when he compares "la muerte" to "una dama aristocrática que abre su salon" (45).

The emphasis on the external beauty of the women in attendance at this ball is countered by the melancholy of the Duke of Parisis. In the final passages the focus of the narrative shifts from the superficiality of aristocratic society to the subjectivity of the Duke, the expression of his inner thoughts, as he contemplates the beauty of these women and the brevity of his visit to the physical realm. "El duque de Parisis se ha ido entristeciendo poco a poco. La hora de las ánimas se acerca. La cuerda de su vida se va acabando paulatinamente" (50). The narrative ends with a monologue by the Duke, in which he meditates on his life and the many women whose love he exploited.

> –Soy el deseo insaciable, la fuerza loca que lo arrastra todo. En las mujeres he buscado la mujer y en la mujer he buscado el amor, sin encontrarlo. […] Ahora lo siento; hoy veo que existe; […] En el despilfarro de la vida, todo puede echarse por la ventana, menos el corazón. Pero ¡ay! Es muy tarde para darlo. Mirad la faja negra de los árboles, la mancha blanca del castillo, la luz rojiza que sale por sus vidrios. Es la última vez que yo la veo.

> Suenan las ánimas en el viejo campanario: al escucharse la última campanada estaré muerto. ¡Alas, por Yorick! (51).

Here he sums up the essence of the don Juan legend, the great seducer of women. He expresses regret, not so much for the pain he might have caused these women, but for his unrestrained and unfulfilled desire, for the fact that he could not find love in these liaisons. As his brief stay among the living comes to an end, he expresses the ephemeralness of existence and utters a phrase that signifies *memento mori* from Shakespeare's Hamlet. Again, Nájera does not explore the dark side of the metaphysical in this short story. But the expression of the inner thoughts, the subjective mood of the protagonist, as well as his philosophical ruminations coincide with the Symbolist rejection of a mechanistic perspective on reality. The Duke's monologue highlights the vulnerability of human existence and the desire to sense the mystery of what lies beyond.

Another example of Nájera's literary representation of spiritualism is "La pasión de Pasionaria" (1882/93), a short story that fuses spiritualist ideas regarding the continued existence of the soul with the Christian conception of the afterlife. In this narrative, Nájera depicts the metaphysical realm according to Christian imagery of heaven, where virtuous souls are rewarded, and of purgatory, where errant souls do penance. Pasionaria is a child whose mother, Andrea, dies young. When her father remarries, the child is subjected to the abuses of a cruel step-mother, Antonia. The spirit of Andrea appears to Pasionaria, to comfort her in the face of the suffering she endures at the hands of her step-mother. The explanation that the text gives for the cause of these apparitions coincides with Christian cosmology. Essentially, the afterlife is represented as if it were an extension of an earthly, hierarchized, and rationally structured social order. Andrea asks for an audience with God, to ask his permission for her spirit to remain in the earthly realm so that she could watch over her daughter.

> –Señor: yo estoy muy contenta y muy regocijada en tu gloria, porque te estoy mirando; pero si no te enojas, voy a hablarte con franqueza. Tengo en la tierra un pedacito de mi alma que sufre mucho, y mejor quiero padecer con ella que gozar sola. Déjame ir a donde está, porque me llama la pobrecita y se está muriendo.

– Vete – dijo el Señor– pero si te vas no puedes ya volver (149).

What this passage shows is that the spirit of Andrea utilizes a medieval protocol, by asking for an audience with God, as if he were a literal human being, in this case a feudal lord. She then speaks to him as a vassal would speak to her lord. As Christian iconography developed during the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that much of this imagery mirrors the hierarchized society of a medieval social order. This narrative represents the afterlife according to that same structure. Andrea asks God to allow her soul to remain in the physical world so that she can protect her daughter. God allows this but tells her that she won't be able to enter heaven at a later time. Being the archetypal virtuous mother, Andrea agrees to this condition. Although Pasionaria is comforted by the presence of her mother's spirit, she ultimately dies from her step-mother's maltreatment. When she takes her place in heaven, Andrea must remain in purgatory, and she does so willingly. She has no regret about this, because she sacrificed her place in heaven in order to give comfort to her child.

Andrea is virtuous and self-abnegating to the point that she goes willingly to purgatory because she is also obedient to the rules established by her Lord. In this way, Nájera portrays the metaphysical as a domain that functions according to the same rational protocol as an earthly social structure. Nájera's depiction of the spirit world in this story does not explore esoteric practices or macabre manifestations of the immaterial realm. Instead, the narrative remains within the iconography of a Christian world view, rooted in a medieval cosmology. This also illustrates the characteristic of Mexican spiritualism that Rugeley identified, that is, the Catholic tradition of intercession, in which spirits communicate with God on behalf of the living, but without subverting Church doctrine. This is not to say that Nájera's writings were in any way constrained by religious precepts. However, when he explored the spiritual realm, he tended to utilize concepts and imagery that were familiar to him from his own religious tradition. In this regard,

some of his narratives reveal the symbolist tendency to embrace mystic religious experiences as another avenue for transcending the material realm.

MYSTIC RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

The subjective dimensions of mystic traditions offered the possibility of a more transcendent religious experience, one that moves beyond rational precepts of institutional religion. For this reason, the cultivation of mystic experiences emerged as one of the methods by which intellectuals sought to fill the metaphysical emptiness of modernity left by positivism and materialism. Even Schopenhauer's philosophy advocated the study of mystic traditions, as found in both Eastern and Western religions, as a means to free oneself from the forces of Will. The German philosopher found similarities between the mystic quest for union with God and his own conception of the need to circumvent the instinctual desires that arise from the Will to live. The objective of both practices is to quiet the individual will, to free oneself from the consequences of original sin in the case of the mystic pratitioner, or from the mind-less, irrational Will, in Schopenhauer's terms (Marcin 129). We have already seen that when Nájera turns his attention toward metaphysical aspects of existence, the Catholicism of his upbringing often emerges in varying degrees. Thus, it is not surprising that when he portrays the ethereal ambience of a mystic mood, he draws on the tradition of Hispanic mysticism that is inherent to the religion of his own cultural context.

The mystic tendency in the Hispanic Catholic tradition flourished during the Catholic counter-reformation of the sixteenth century. While eccelesiastical authorities were intent on curbing the spread of doctrinal heresies, Spanish mystics of the baroque era sought to renew the Church spiritually. Their objective was to cultivate a more profound and transformative experience of the divine, to develop a receptive mode of consciousness, through mystical communion with God. One of Schpoenhauer's role models in the western tradition of mysticism

was the seventeeth-century Spanish Catholic priest Miguel de Molinos (1640-1696). Molinos developed a contemplative practice called Quietism, the objective of which was to achieve a purity of soul and a state of inner peace (Marcin 118). The subjective nature of mysticism often brought practitioners into conflict with the Church hierarchy. The Quietist teachings of Molinos, for example, were ultimately condemned by the Church (Pérez Goyena). However, the writings of other Spanish mystics, such as Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582) and Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591) managed to pass the scrutiny of the Inquisition, and now form part of the canon of Spanish Golden Age literature. Spanish mysticism, then, is not only an integral aspect of Nájera's religious tradition, but part of his literary formation as well.

"La primera comunión" (1883) is one of Nájera's narratives that moves further beyond the rhetoric of Church doctrine to reveal the etherealness of mystic experience. This is not the true mystic experience, the transcendent state of the union between the soul and God, but rather a subjective experience of religious rituals apart from the dictates of the institutional Church. In this short story, the solemnity of the traditional observances of Holy Week prompts the narrator to reminisce about his own childhood religious experiences. The *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* states that in regard to the ceremony of First Communion "no effort should be spared to fix the occasion indelibly on the mind of the young communicant" and that "the Mass at which it is received should be celebrated with special solemnity" (Morrisoe). This chronicle shows that for Nájera, the urban intellectual, and champion of progress and modernity, his experience of this sacrament was indeed fixed indelibly on his mind. The narrator prefaces his tale by juxtaposing science and religion, setting the mystery and sacredness of religious rituals apart from the unfeeling scientific method of modernity.

> Para hablar de los días solemnes, santificados por la tradición, no quiero recurrir a mis pobres libros ni a mis cortísimos saberes. La ciencia es fría como el mármol de un monumento sepulcral. Prefiero recorrer con la memoria el camino que dejo atrás y hablar con el corazón. Todos tenemos en nuestro cofre de recuerdos una reliquia religiosa, y en

> nuestro corazón una fibra que se estremece en la quietud solemne de los templos (113-14).

He is speaking as an intellectual who wants to set aside his books and scientific knowledge, and instead speak from the heart. Although he values the scientific method as integral to modernity, science by itself leaves the soul yearning for something beyond the rational realm. In addition to the opposition between religion and science, this passage also juxtaposes the Parnassian and the symbolist aesthetics. The narrator equates science with the sepulchral statue made of marble, like the protagonist from "El desertor del cementerio." Here the text is not highlighting the beauty of sculptural form, but rather the coldness, and rigidity of the object. By contrasting these characteristics with the warmth of his religious fervor, he is expressing the Symbolist desire for transcendence, an experience that he merges with religious rituals, and by extension, with mystic experience.

He then recounts some of his memories of religious traditions with an air of wistful nostalgia. When he states that "todos tenemos… una reliquia religiosa," he is assuming that his readers have all had such profound religious experiences and is inviting them to reminisce along with him. This signals the extent to which Catholic traditions had been deeply embedded in the culture as a whole. He remembers a particular ceremony commemorating the Passion of Christ. He recalls the darkness of the chapel, the somber and menacing religious paintings, and the austere priest recounting the tragedy of the biblical passages. He then shifts his attention to a more joyful religious experience, the Catholic rite of First Communion.

> De ese humilde predicador y de la azul mañana en que hice la primera comunión, jamás podrá olvidarse mi memoria. Cerrando los ojos para no mirar los seres y cosas que nos rodean, y explorando con la imaginación el campo del pasado, parece que la vida, como un inmenso panorama, va pasando ante nosotros en su infinita variedad de cuadros (116).

In this way the text again portrays the subjectivity of this anonymous narrator, not only in terms of religious experience, but a broader perspective on his life in general. He is 'seeing' internally, with his mind's eye the landscape of his childhood; a place and time that is not of the present

moment, not of the external world, but of the internal projections of his imagination. The narrator also alludes to the mystic union when he refers to the concept of God entering the soul of the communicant: "Dios debe entrar al alma cuando la savia renueva las ramas, cuando el perfume sale de la flor y los pájaros salen de sus nidos. El ruiseñor, cantando por la noche, enseña a orar. La luz, entrando por los ojos, lava el alma" (117). The text thus conveys the ethereal mood that envelopes mystic experience. It expresses both the grotesque and the sublime of the metaphysical realm, the darkness and the light. The narrator expresses the terror that a child feels when confronted with the violent images of Christ's final hours, and the ecstatic serenity of union with God, as symbolized by the reception of the communion host. However, these elements remain within the framework of Church doctrine. And by limiting these experiences to childhood reminiscences, the urban intellectual does not reach the transcendent state, but remains within the materialist confines of secular Porfirian society.

In "El vestido blanco" (1894) Nájera presents a protagonist who more closely embodies the metaphysical yearning of the modern mystic. In this story, the narrator recounts an anecdote about his friend Adrián, whom he describes as "un místico; pero no es, en rigor, un creyente" (243). This distinction between the mystic and the believer suggests that one who has a yearning to transcend the material world may not necessarily be concerned with following the dictates of Church doctrine.

> Como esa hay muchas almas, en las que han quedado las creencias trasfiguradas en espectros, que perturban el sueño con quejidos, sólo perceptibles para ellas, o en espíritus luminosos pero mudos; almas tristes, como isla en medio del océano, que miran con envidia a la ola sumisa y a la ola resueltamente rebelde; almas cuyos ideales semejan estalactitas de una gruta obscura, bajo cuyas bóvedas muge el viento nocturno; almas que se ven vivir, cual si tuvieran siempre delante algún espejo, y a ocasiones, medrosas, apocadas, o por alto sentido estético y moral, cierran los ojos para no mirarse; almas en cuyo hueco más hondo atisba siempre vigilante y duro juez; almas que no sintiéndose dueñas de sí mismas, sino esclavas de potencias superiores e ignotas, claman en la sombra: "¿En dónde está, cuál es mi amo?" (243).

To the souls that the narrator describes in this passage, the experience of the transcendental is subjective, unconcerned with the dictates of religious dogma, or a code of conduct. It is a state that the mystic feels or senses, rather than something that is understood rationally, through the intellect. Rather than an intellectual exercise, religious beliefs are transformed into incorporeal beings that can be sublime, luminous spirits, or grotesque specters that accost the mystic soul in the intangible realm of dreams. The author depicts the melancholy soul as isolated and adrift in a vast ocean, sometimes calm, other times torrential, that represents the subconscious.

The author does incorporate references to Christian iconography, particularly in Adrián's monologue about the significance of a white dress (243-45). He makes a distinction between the solemnity of official rites of the Church, "la pompa del culto católico," and the innocent spirituality of a group of young girls who are receiving their first communion: "tierna, vívida, pura, esta angélica procesión de almas intactas que lleva flores a la Virgen" (244). Much of the text is devoted to this character's ruminations, his subjective impressions of religiosity. His words exude an ethereal conception of religious worship, which is distinct from the structured Church ceremonies.

The story ends comparing Adrián to two symbolist writers who were also drawn to the transcendental dimensions of religion. "Mi amigo, el místico, a lo Verlaine y a lo Rod, había dado el último sorbo del ópalo verde que da el sueño y la muerte" (246). Verlaine, one of the central figures of symbolism, experienced a religious conversion while incarcerated at Mons, Belgium (1873-1875). He composed the mystic verses of his volume *Sagesse* (1880) during that time. The other writer that Nájera mentions in this line is the swiss novelist Edouard Rod (1857-1910), who early in his career had been a disciple of Zola's naturalism, but later experienced a shift in his perspective toward a contemplation of the soul. This closing line also links mysticism to intoxication, through the reference to absinthe, "el ópalo verde," –another veiled reference to Verlaine who spent his final years in Paris cafés indulging in the green liqueur. This narcotic

substance in turn leads one to the dream state, and ultimately to death. The correlation between mysticism and alternative states of transcendence recalls Baudelaire's prose poem "Enivrez-vous," in which he urges the reader to escape from the confines of the material realm, by any means: "Pour n'être pas les esclaves martyrisés du Temps, enivrez-vous; enivrez-vous sans cesse! De vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise" (*Spleen de Paris* 152). For the French poet, the objective is to free oneself from the rational state, and he identifies both poetry and virtue, in addition to wine, as methods that can serve that purpose. It is in this sense that Nájera's text distinguishes Adrián as a mystic, but not a strict believer. Both religious virtue and the intoxicating liqueur take him to that ethereal domain.

Another aspect of the symbolist aesthetic is an affinity for music as a transcendent experience. Because of the intangible nature of music, Schopenhauer had regarded this art form to be a direct expression of Will. It is not an image of Ideas, as are the visual arts, but "an image of the very will of which Ideas are also the objectivization." (Schopenhauer 307-08). In literature, this translates into a desire to emulate the immateriality of music, to suggest meaning through the cultivation of nuance, rather than direct statements.

TRANSCENDENCE OF MUSIC

The importance of the transcendental nature of music was further supported by the aesthetic philosophy of German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883), who sought to use music as a medium that could evoke and convey the full spectrum of human emotion. He wanted to paint images with sound, and depict intense feeling with melody. He articulated this aesthetic theory in an essay entitled "Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft" [The Art Work of the Future] (1849), in which he promoted the reunification of all the arts in dramatic production (Millington 17). Baudelaire found in Wagner's treatise a correlation to his own conception of correspondences between the senses. In his essay "Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris" (1861) he notes the

synesthesia of sound that can suggest color, or color that can evoke a melody, which correlates with the conception of the world "comme une complexe et indivisible totalité" that he depicts in "Correspondances" (*Fleurs du mal* 7). In this same essay, Baudelaire describes his impression of Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* (1850) as a transcendental experience, one in which he feels freed from the weighted sense of being in the physical realm. He describes a sensation of voluptuousness, and of being in "l'état délicieux d'un homme en proie à une grande rêverie dans une solitude absolue" [the delicious state of a man in the grip of a great reverie within an absolute solitude] (Wagner et Tannhäuser 784). In other words, this auditory experience had the same effect as wine, poetry, or virtue for Baudelaire. It took him out of the rational, and into a state of ecstasy, giving him the sensation that his soul was far away from the physical world.

Although early in his career Nájera dismissed Wagner's music as "exagerada y extravagante" (*Obras* 3: 296), after having the opportunity to attend a performance of *Lohengrin* in Mexico City in 1890, he was moved by the experience, and came to embrace the Wagnerian artistic revolution. He recounted his experience of the opera in an article published in *El Partido Liberal*, entitled "Oyendo a Wagner" (1890). Like Baudelaire, Nájera found Wagner's production to be intensely spiritual. However, as we have seen in other writings, he uses religious imagery to articulate his impressions. He felt as if he were sitting in a cathedral rather than a theater: "las armonías de esta opera flotan y suben a las grandes bóvedas rodeadas por nubes de incienso. No sé a qué Dios se venera en esta catedral, pero evidentemente, aquí hay un Dios" (*Obras* 7: 66). Where Baudelaire feels the sensation of voluptuousness, Nájera feels the presence of *a* God during the performance. Although this is not specifically the Christian God, Nájera renders his experience of the divine presence in terminology –vaulted cathedrals and clouds of incensé– that is familiar to him from his own religious tradition. In both cases each of these men describes a transcendent experience. After attending *Tannhäuser* (1845) the following year, Nájera wrote a second article on the maestro, "Hablaremos de Wagner" (1891), in which he again uses religious

references in his depiction of both the composer and the opera. "¡Y qué creyente ese coloso Wagner! Tal parece un pontífice que cumple decretos inmutables; que representa algo eterno y divino; que no puede cejar un solo palmo, y tiene de oponer su enérgico non possumus a todas las instancias humanas que no quepan en el dogma" (*Obras* 7: 99-100). Just as Nájera had identified earlier the association between art and the divine, here he accentuates the spiritual essence of music, and presents the composer as the pontiff of a new religion. Throughout the article he uses a similarly diaphanous language as Baudelaire had used in his essay on the maestro. He describes, for example, the intangible beauty and the passion that Wagner's music expresses. He also notes the nexus between music and the expression of emotions that is integral in Wagner's productions. He observes that the music in both *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* is synthesized with the narrative in such a profound manner that song becomes the language of the characters, and music is the ambience in which they move: "…personajes que no viven sino en la onda armónica, así como los peces sólo viven en el agua" (102).

In some of his own narratives, Nájera explored the transcendental nature of music. Two of his chronicles in particular delve into the life and music of the Mexican violinist and composer, Juventino Rosas (1868-1894), as a point of departure to contemplate this theme. Rosas was an Otomí Indian from Guanajuato who had moved to Mexico City as a child. He belonged to a family of musicians who performed together in the city, at first as street musicians, and later as members of dance orchestras. As an adolescent, Rosas studied briefly at the National Conservatory, although he was never able to complete the program, and by the age of eighteen he had composed his first waltzes (Brenner 11-18). Rosas died while on tour in Cuba, probably as the result of a viral infection (62-64). News of the tragic demise of the young musician is what prompted Nájera to turn his attention toward the significance of his music. The first of the two chronicles was published in the column "Crónicas dominicales" in *El Universal* (1894). This untitled piece gives a biographical sketch of Rosas, emphasizing characteristics that depict him as

the archetypal bohemian musician, one who feels restless amid the rationally structured bourgeois society. The author's description of Rosas as a young man immersed in "los limbos de su vida interior" (*Obras inéditas* 135) suggests a correlation between music and the metaphysical realm. His characterization of the music itself further reiterates the ethereal quality of this art form.

> La música de Juventino Rosas tiene delicadezas y elegancias exquisitas. No es tosca, ni insolente ni provocativa, sino suavemente triste. Parece escrita para acompañar las horas de ensueño… Es raro que la vida trashumante no la contagiara, que el vino no la manchase, que la miseria no la hundiese en la abyección: flota blanca sobre las olas, con los labios entreabiertos como si fuera todavía a cantar (136).

The traits of delicacy and elegance that Nájera mentions in this passage highlight the intangible nature of the pleasure that music evokes. Nájera also links music to the etherealness of melancholy and the dream-state, which he then contrasts with the vulgarity of the material realm. This passage also recalls similar imagery that Nájera had depicted previously in his poem "Para entonces" (1887), which expresses a desire to die at sea: "Quiero morir cuando decline el día, / en alta mar y con la cara al cielo; / donde parezca sueño la agonía / y el alma, un ave que remonta el vuelo" (*Obras* 122). These verses portray a visualization of death as an experience of floating upon the ocean, not unlike the author's prose description of Rosas' music as an essence that also floats over the waves, in reference to the composer's most renowned waltz, *Sobre las olas* (1888). In addition, both the poem and the chronicle present a correlation between death and dreams, which, like music, exist beyond the physical realm.

Again emphasizing the immaterial aspect of music, Nájera's chronicle on the life of the musician equates his artistic inspiration with perfume and then ultimately links both of these senses to death: "La vida bohemia corrompe la inspiración de otros artistas; pero la de Rosas conservó su perfume hasta la muerte" (136). In regard to the early demise of Rosas, Nájera contrasts his creative intensity and his "frescura de imaginación" with the fact that he no longer exists in the physical plane. Although in life the musician's creative faculties embodied these qualities, his demise reveals the fleeting essence of music. Continuing with this association

between music and death, Nájera depicts the end of a dance as a metaphor for the loss of life: "Palidecen las bujías; el sueño llega; la aurora se espereza; el baile acaba… ¡Sólo quedan en bóvedas y alfombras / Las notas mudas y las flores muertas! (136). Here Nájera uses the impressionistic phrasing that is characteristic of his prose style, as well as the vague nuance of the symbolist aesthetic. The boisterousness of dancing all night is only suggested in contrast to this description of a quiet dissipation of the activity.

The other chronicle that Nájera wrote, inspired by his meditations on the life and music of Juventino Rosas, "El músico de la murga," appeared in *Revista Azul* (1894). In this text, the author utilizes Rosas' musical œuvre as an introduction to contemplate broader questions related to the ethereal nature of this art from, and its relationship to subjective experiences. The first two paragraphs are odes, written in Nájera's poetic prose, devoted respectively to Orpheus and to Rosas. The first of these is not only the archetypal poet/musician of Ancient Greece, he is also associated with the metaphysical realm by means of his descent into the underworld to bring his wife back from the dead. The chronicle opens by quoting the epitaph on the tomb of Orpheus, "Aquí yace el susurro del viento," and then goes on to describe the nebulous characteristics of sound, associating music with spirits, vibrations, and sensations, all of which are beyond the tangible realm.: "…lo semejante a ciertos espíritus fugaces que solo producen una vibración, un centelleo, un estremecimiento, un calosfrío y mueren como si se evaporaran" (254). In the next paragraph the author draws the readers' attention to Rosas and the breadth of his musical compositions:

> ¿Conocéis de Juventino Rosas algo más que unos cuantos valses elegantes y melancólicos, y bellos como la dama, ya herida de muerte, en cuyas manos, casi diáfanas, puso la poesía un ramo de camelias inmortales? Un schottisch… una polka… una danza… otro vals… ¡rumor del viento! Algunos tienen nombres tristes como presentimientos: Sobre las olas… ahí flota descolorido y coronado de ranúnculos el cadáver de Ofelia. Morir soñando… ¡anhelo de los que han vivido padeciendo! Y observad que envuelve casi toda esa música bailable cierta neblina tenue de tristeza (254).

Again the author highlights the fleeting qualities of music, but also introduces the element of wistful emotion, as he considers Rosas' œuvre. There is also the imagery of death as a dream-state, floating on the sea, which he had previously associated with the young composer's most famous work. Nájera also incorporates into this passage a reference to Ophelia, the heartbroken maiden who dies by drowning in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1602). Evoking the image of the Pre-Raphaelite painting by John Everett Millais (1829-1896) of this scene, Ophelia becomes the embodiment of the very image of death as a sensation of floating on a body of water (Figure 2.2). In this way the author conveys the tenuousness of music, and he links this art form to the profound sentiments that the musician experiences, as well as to the intangible after-life.

FIGURE 2.2
Ophelia (1851-52)
John Everett Millais
Oil on canvas, 30 x 44 in.
Tate Gallery, London

Nájera then recounts anecdotes about other musicians that he knew in the city, maintaining the emphasis on the link between music and emotion. In his description of the musical style of a particular violinist, melodic sound merges with an agressive, almost violent energy: "…tocaba con frenesí, con furia, y el arco del violín, torciéndose y retorciéndose sobre las cuerdas, fingía un estoque rasgando en epiléptico y continuo mete y saca las entrañas de víctima invisible" (256). The author presents another musician in terms of his physical

appearance, which again reflects an inner melancholic mood: "…el de los ojos azules desteñidos; el que vistiendo siempre ropa ajena, flaco y largo, proyectaba en las alfombras la sombra de un paraguas cerrado y puesto a escurrir junto a la puerta" (257). The image is one of a man who is gaunt and exhausted, struggling to survive in the urban center. The description of ill-fitting clothes connotes a life of poverty. Notwithstanding this disheveled appearance, and in contrast to the agressiveness of the previous description, this man's music expresses a sensitive elegance: "Una exquisita dulzura se exhala de sus notas; siéntese el contacto suave de la escala de seda; se ve la luna, como bañándose desnuda en las murmurantes y azules ondas del pequeño lago; se oye el rumor de los besos todavía tímidos, como que acaban de encontrarse y conocerse" (257). The passage articulates the correspondences between the senses, as the music not only produces an audio experience, but also evokes a visual image, that of the moon, as well as sweetness and the sensuality of kisses. The text then reiterates the association between music and the metaphysical realm in the form of a monologue recited by this melancholy musician to his audience.

> Oísteis las malagueñas; ésas sí me producen, allá donde las toco, aplausos y un puñado de monedas. El editor quiere música que se baile, música para que la estropeen y la pisen. Y yo necesito dinero para mí y para mis vicios. Me repugnan esos vicios, no porque lo son, sino por envilecidos, por canallas. Quisiera dignificarlos, ennoblecerlos, vestirlos de oro, en la copa, en el cuerpo de la mujer, en el albur. Quitármelos no; porque ¿qué me quedaría?... (258).

In this passage, Nájera returns to the dichotomy between art and materialism by highlighting the fact that this most intangible art form can be bought and sold, like everything else in a bourgeois society. The musician then acknowledges the indulgences of his bohemian lifestyle. But he doesn't apologize for his vices; rather, he wants to ennoble these activities. In the spirit of Baudelaire, his vices allow him to transcend the very materialism that reduces his art to a commodity. They alleviate the anxiety of modernity, the ennui, the *mal del siglo*.

As the musician continues his address, he further articulates his inner angst, while also revealing aspects of his religious background. As in some of the previous narratives that we have

examined, this protagonist's reminiscence expresses the mystic undertones of the Church's rituals, which coincide with his yearning for transcendence.

> Cuando me doy asco, pienso en matarme. Pero hay en mí cierto indefinido temor a la otra vida que se quedó en mi alma, como grano de incienso no quemado en la cazoleta del incensario. ¿Quién lo puso allí?... De niño fui monago. Vestí la sotanilla roja. Aprendí a cantar cantando letanías, Ayudé misas. Y todavía envuelven mi espíritu nubes de incienso; todavía percibo, en horas de nostalgia, el olor a cedro de la sacristía; me acuerdo del Cristo que me veía como un padre muy triste desde la reja del coro… ¡a mí, que nunca tuve padre!… ¡Y no puedo matarme! ¡El requiem es muy pavoroso! Suenan sus notas como el aire, por las noches, en una catedral a obscuras y desierta (258-59).

The musician makes a reference to suicide, although his reasoning is distinct from that of the author of the "Carta de un suicida." Whereas the protagonist of that earlier text took his life because his religious beliefs had been exposed as lies, in the case of this musician, his religiosity prevents him from acting on this thought. He considers taking his life to relieve the suffering that he experiences in the physical plane, but he fears the unknown of what lies beyond. There is also in this passage an association between music and religiosity, as the protagonist learned to sing in the sacred space of the temple, performing the Church's sacred rites. In addition, the relationship between the Church and this man's music reiterates how the influence of this institution permeated culture in Porfirian Mexico in so many ways. Thus, Nájera's text intertwines multiple facets of the metaphysical realm, from the wistfulness of music, to a religiosity imbued with a mystic mood, all of which are aspects of this character's desire for transcendence. The chronicle ends by informing the reader of the death of this musician, and comparing him to Rosas. The narrator then contrasts the pleasure that the public experiences from the music, and the metaphysical longing of the musician that is at the heart of his creative expression, the irony of joyful melodies created from sadness.

Another narrative in which Nájera explores the transcendent and subjective experience of music is a novella entitled "Juan el organista," which was published serially in *Revista Azul* from October 14 to November 25, 1894. In this story, the title character is asked to play the organ at

the wedding of a woman with whom he had been secretly in love. Like a Wagnerian opera, the narrative describes the textures of the music and the relationship between the sounds, the event being celebrated, and the intense emotions of the musician. The notes emanate from the organ as if they were troops on horseback, "tocando las trompetas y moviendo cadenciosamente las banderas" (275), expressing the triumphal moment for the bride and groom, while simultaneously conveying the grief of the musician: "De cuando en cuando, una melodía tímida y quejumbrosa se deslizaba como un hilo negro en aquella tela de notas áureas. Parecía la voz de un esclavo, uncido al carro del vencedor. En esa melodía fugitiva y doliente se revelaba la aflicción de Juan, semejante a un enorme depósito de agua del que sólo se escapa un tenue chorro" (275). Juan's grief is signified by a melody, which in turn is represented by a black thread woven into the fabric of the piece, a mournful sound barely audible amid the exuberant musical composition. This passage is suggestive of the structural unity of Wagner's operas, his use of leitmotifs to signify a particular character, and his ability to synthesize the music with the narrative. Nájera's prose conveys the alternating crescendo and calm of the music, according to the emotions that he describes. In the same way that Wagner sought to paint with sound to express the vigor of these emotions, Nájera paints with words to depict not only the emotions, but also the music. An example of this is his use of the imagery of water to represent various intensities of emotions. The narrator describes how the music evokes the image of a fisherman in a boat that is tossed about by the stormy sea. At times the music gives the impression that the boat is submerged by the waves, but then it reappears, struggling to survive: "venciendo la tormenta, aparecía de nuevo airoso, joven y gallardo, como un guerrero que penetra, espada en mano, por entre los escuadrones enemigos, y sale chorreando sangre, pero vivo" (275). The text also associates music with the metaphysical realm when the narrator compares the sounds emanating from the organ to spirits escaping from the instrument. The notes burst out in a violent manner, again portraying music as an aggressive energy, or in Schopenhauer's terms, the very manifestation of the forces of Will:

"Al salir disparadas con violencia, por los cañones de metal, las notas se retorcían y se quejaban" (275). After this burst of violent energy, Juan's rage fades into sadness, "una melancolía infinita sucedió a la tormenta," and the music becomes calm, in accordance with this change in emotion, "la melodía se fue suavizando: era un mar, pero un mar tranquilo, un mar de lágrimas" (276). There is one final crescendo at the end of the text, "cuando la misa concluía, las notas conjuradas y rabiosas estallaron de nuevo en una inmensa explosión de cólera" (276), which culminates in the mysterious death of the grief-stricken musician.

The visual imagery that Nájera portrays in this text is the kind of deformed or hallucinatory ambience that Moréas identified in his characterization of symbolist prose. The narrative does not depict a literal representation of objective reality, but rather, a drama that plays out within the musician's psyche. In the dénouement of the story there is the characteristic of suggestiveness that the Symbolists promoted, in the sense that the text doesn't state directly how Juan dies. What it does express is that the final explosion of sound coincides with a final eruption of rage, and a scream: "en el tumulto de aquel escape de armonías mutiladas y notas heridas, se oyó un grito" (276). The air continues vibrating at the moment of death: "y luego, el coro quedó silencioso, mudo el órgano" (276). This again brings to mind Schopenhauer's conception of music as a direct manifestation of Will. Also, this gradual dissipation of sound as a metaphor for death, recalls the final passage of Nájera's chronicle on Juventino Rosas, in which he poetically depicts the demise of the musician. In addition to these symbolist characteristics, Nájera adds the element of Wagnerian music. In the same way that Wagner composed music to express the emotion of the character, Nájera uses words, not only to construct the narrative, but to convey both the music and the emotion, revealing again the synesthesia, the correspondence between art forms, in this case between sounds, images, and moods, and the plurality of human senses that one employs to experience those art forms.

Utilizing various aspects of the symbolist aesthetic, Nájera's narratives manage to portray these transcendent states of being, even while an undertone of Catholicism continues to be present in varying degrees. He was familiar with the spiritualist movements that were in vogue throughout the western culture during the nineteenth century, and made references to these concepts. However, his perspective on the metaphysical realm tended to not stray too far from a Christian cosmology. Because of the Catholicism that permeated his culture, he was naturally drawn to the mystic tendency of the symbolist aesthetic. This does not mean that Nájera can be classified as a "Catholic author." In other words, he doesn't espouse the rhetoric of Church doctrine in his work. Nor do his texts convey the sense that they are constrained in any way by what ecclesiastical authorities would deem to be acceptable in terms of content. Instead the Catholic imagery and references that appear in the texts emerge from the author's cultural context. As an ardent admirer of the Wagnerian developments in music, Nájera contemplated the ethereal aspects of music in his assessments of the German maestro's operas, and of the music of the Mexican composer, Juventino Rosas. He also employed synesthesia as a rhetorical device to connote a mystic experience and to paint with words the kinds of images that Wagner painted with sound. All of the aspects of the divine in Nájera's prose that this study uncovers –the objective and the subjective, aesthetic form and ethereal sensations, the collective and the personal, the outer world and inner experience– are exemplary traits of the *modernista* aesthetic in general. In this way, Nájera takes on the priestly role in secular society that Angel Rama has identified, not in the sense of reaffirming doctrinal religious precepts, but to address the needs of the spirit in an increasingly industrialized and rational society. In Nájera's literary production, the *modernista* aesthetic emerges as a means to infuse the secular realm with a spirituality that transcends not only materialism, but also a fixed institutional dogma.

Nájera, as the elder statesman of *modernismo* in Mexico City, was supportive of the younger writers in the capital. To this end, in 1890 he published in *El Partido Liberal* a favorable

review of a collection of short stories, *Del natural* (1889), by a writer he identifies as "mi buen amigo, el joven literato don Federico Gamboa" (*Obras* 1: 395). Nájera describes the narratives as "cuadros sociales," scenes of quotidian life in the city, written in an impressionistic style: "escritos al correr de la pluma, con notable desembarazo, casi hablados, en un estilo que […] hechiza por su desgaire, por su naturalidad y su gracejo" (395). He goes on to predict that, with dedication, discipline and study, the novice author is destined to become a worthy novelist.

> ¡Excelente pintor de género es Gamboa! Hoy se adiestra dibujando cuadritos, bocetos; traza aquí una figura picaresca, allá, una caricatura; acullá, un retrato; pero mañana, con todos esos materiales, hará una amplia y levantada obra de arte. Ahora estudia y describe retazos de realidad; después, en algún libro vasto y trascendente, estudiará la realidad entera (395).

Nájera's words of praise for the young writer once again demonstrates that realist writers and *modernistas* together formed the *clase letrada*, the educated, intellectual class. They all interacted with each other and exchanged ideas in regard to aesthetic theories and literary construction. In regard to Nájera's assessment of Gamboa's novelistic potential, history will ultimately corroborate his prediction, as Gamboa goes on to produce a series of novels, each of which renders a detailed and panoramic view of life in the Porfirian capital.

Turning to an analysis of these more complex narratives, my study will reveal similar themes in Gamboa's œuvre as those I have identified in Nájera's prose works, regarding the role of religion in modernity as a collective cultural construction. Many of the characters in Gamboa's novels wrestle with the Catholicism that permeates Porfirian society, the transformation of the religious impulse into other cultural forms, and the anxiety provoked by the competing discourses of Church doctrine and secular positivism. While all these aspects of the spiritual and the material in the *fin de siglo* era inform the content, of Gamboa's narratives, the conclusions of these stories offer a different resolution to the cultural tensions of modernity, one that arises from a closer adherence to orthodox Catholicism.

PART II.

FEDERICO GAMBOA: MODERNITY AND RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY

Like Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Federico Gamboa (1864-1939) was a product of the Reform era. He was born in Mexico City, in a family with close ties to the political leadership of the country on both sides of the liberal/conservative divide: his mother, doña Lugarda Iglesias, was the sister of José María Iglesias (1823-1891), a former minister of Benito Juárez, while his father, General Manuel Gamboa, served with Maximilian's imperial forces during the French Intervention. At the young age of ten, Federico suffered the tragic loss of his mother, doña Lugarda. A few years later the family moved to New York, where General Gamboa worked as a commissioner for one of US-owned Mexican railway lines. Upon his return to Mexico, Federico studied at the National Preparatory School, where the Catholicism of his upbringing came into contact with Porfirian positivism. Although he had intended to pursue the study of law, the death of General Gamboa in 1883 forced Federico to abandon his studies. At that time, he began to work as a translator and journalist for metropolitan publications such as *El Diario del Hogar*, *El Foro*, and *El Lunes* (Prendes Guardiola 67). In contrast to Nájera, who spent his whole life in the

Mexican capital, Gamboa's entrance into the Diplomatic Corps in 1888 provided him opportunities to live and work abroad –in Guatemala, Argentina, and the US–, and to travel in Europe. Throughout his diplomatic career, Gamboa wrote and published theater pieces, short stories, and novels, on the basis of the French aesthetic that pervaded Porfirian society. He also published a volume of memoires, *Impresiones y recuerdos* (1892), and kept extensive journals in which he documented many of the significant events of his life.

Gamboa was an avid reader of French and Spanish realist literature. Among the authors he identifies as significant influences in the development of his literary style are the French novelists Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), the brothers Edmond de Goncourt (1822-1896) and Jules de Goncourt (1830-1870), and Émile Zola (1840-1902), as well as the Spaniards Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920), José María de Pereda (1833-1906), and Juan Valera (1824-1905). The title of Gamboa's first published work, the collection of short stories *Del natural* (1889), is indicative of his particular affinity for Zola's naturalist doctrine, which promotes an objective analysis of reality, utilized toward the aim of uncovering social and hereditary forces that influence the actions of characters. In *Impresiones y recuerdos* Gamboa delineates his literary philosophy, indicating that the goal of the modern novelist is to render an honest portrayal of the society in which he lives: "decir la verdad, decir lo vivido, lo visto, lo que codeamos, lo que nos es familiar" (267). Despite this stated objective, Gamboa's narratives reflect the limitations of his Eurocentric perspective. That is, his vision of what constitutes "reality" focuses on the experiences of the *criollo* class and completely ignores the presence of the indigenous masses as a component of the society that he observes.

Gamboa's memoir further reveals that, in addition to naturalism, he incorporated the *modernista* attention to artistic craft in his literary constructions, even as he looked to the objective world as the source of that aesthetic: "El novelista de hoy, es un obrero que recoge los materiales del camino, […] y que se encierra a trabajarlos, a pulirlos, a darles belleza artística"

(269). These statements highlight Gamboa's intent to synthesize artistic aesthetic with the naturalist focus on even the sordid aspects of the physical world. In this regard, his philosophy coincides with Zola's naturalist manifesto, "Le Roman expérimental" (1880), which affirms that the experimental method must also include an attention to the form and style of prose (*Œuvres complètes* 1200).

There are three significant ways in which Gamboa's narratives diverge from Zola's doctrine. The first two are the underlying characteristics of didacticism and sentimentality. The third has to do with Gamboa's adherence to the religion of his youth, and his ambivalence toward secularization. In terms of the question regarding the immorality of naturalist content, Gamboa states in his memoir that "el arte no es moral ni inmoral, es arte; debe ser arte, y como tal, purificar lo impuro, que sin aquél, se quedaría de impuro para siempre" (*Impresiones* 268). The assertion that art should "purify the impure" attests to the moralism in his content, linking him, like Nájera, to a didactic tendency in post-independence Mexican literature. In addition to this trait, Gamboa maintains a tone of romantic idealism in his stories. While Zola specifically rejects sentimentality in the modern novel, the Mexican author identifies this characteristic as an integral aspect of Spanish American culture in general, asserting that the continued presence of romanticism enhances the literature of the region.

> En cuanto al otro romanticismo, el que todos llevamos en el alma, y los hispano-americanos más que cualquiera, por el complejo heredismo de que somos usufructuarios, en vez de dañar a la sinceridad artística, la ensancha y hermosea. Es un romanticismo que cautiva, muy hondo; un hambre de ideal, de ser poeta, de ser amado por mujeres excepcionales, de salir avante de peligros y de aventuras caballerescas… (271).

From this passage, it is clear that Gamboa was not passively mimicking his French literary sources, but was instead making active choices as to which of these he would employ, and to what extent he would use them. This very selectivity aligns Gamboa's statements with Octavio Paz's assessment of *modernismo* as Spanish America's true romanticism, a literary movement that emerges from the agency of the intellectuals themselves.

Gamboa's preoccupation with the place of the Church in modernity sets his novels further apart from the scientific, objective stance of naturalist literature. Indeed, his treatment of this topic even sets him apart from many of his colleagues in Mexico City. Of the three authors in this study, he is the most reticent about secularization. The narratives I will present in this part of the study are emblematic of Gamboa's reluctance to stray very far from the religion of his upbringing, even as he incorporates modern literary styles. The dictates of the Church, especially the Christian moral code, often looms over many of the characters in his narratives.

Chapter Three is devoted to an analysis of Gamboa's third novel, *Metamorfosis* (1899), which contains characteristics of both naturalism and *modernismo*. This latter tendency is present in the main narrative thread of the novel which reveals the transformation of the religious impulse into a worship of idealized beauty. This content alludes to the interrelationship between religiosity and eroticism. While Christian doctrine attempts to polarize these two domains of human expression, they overlap in Gamboa's tale, revealing an unconscious presence of a pre-Christian duality of the sacred and the profane. The protagonist in this story wants to assert agency over his erotic attraction to a virtuous woman, but wrestles with the religious dictates regarding sexuality instilled in him during his formative years. In this way, the narrative portrays the tension between the modern autonomous subject, and the restrictive nature of the traditional social order. The place of the Church in modernity remains ambiguous in the novel's conclusion, which mirrors the general reluctance toward secularization in Porfirian society. The next two chapters of this study show the author moving ever closer toward the Church to resolve this ambiguity, rather than away from it.

Gamboa delves even further into the tension between religion and sexuality in his most renowned novel *Santa* (1903), which I examine in Chapter Four. In spite of the vulgarity and the sordidness of this naturalist/decadent tale of a prostitute in the urban center, religious themes, both Christian and pagan, permeate the narrative. There are allusions in the novel to the ancient

duality of the sacred and the profane. However, the narrative's portrayal of sexuality in modernity parallels the contradictions of the uneven modernization in Porfirian society. On the one hand, the religious values of the traditional social order attempt to deny sexuality altogether. On the other, sexuality in the secular arena is reduced to a commodity in a capitalist society. In both of these scenarios, sexuality is devoid of its previous sacred context. In the dénouement of the novel, it is the religious values that prevail over the secular. In fact, Hispanic mysticism figures prominently in the redemptive outcome for the protagonist, lending an aura of sentimentality to the conclusion and demonstrating again that Gamboa did not strictly adhere to the empirical perspective of naturalism.

My reading of *Reconquista* (1906) in Chapter Five will highlight Gamboa's reaffirmation of institutional religious values. The protagonist of this novel is a typical *modernista* intellectual who channels the religious impulse into artistic creativity, while simultaneously affirming the positivism of the era. His intent to secularize the divine, however, leads him to excessive indulgence in bohemian activity. The novel continues to interrogate the conflict between religion and erotic desire, which manifests itself in the troubled sexuality of the characters. However, the primary thread of the narrative focuses on the competing discourses of Church doctrine and Porfirian positivism. The protagonist ultimately abandons not only positivism, but also the *modernista* association between creativity and divine inspiration as an abstract concept. It is when he returns to the religious beliefs of his youth that he gains access to the creative inspiration that he seeks. In this way, orthodox Catholicism is upheld as the antidote to the ennui of modernity, and the means by which the intellectual achieves transcendence from the material realm. But the narrative implies that this can only be achieved by embracing Church doctrine in its totality, abandoning the modern spirit of critical inquiry.

Chapter 3: The Sacred and the Profane in *Metamorfosis*

In terms of the role of religion in modernity, *Metamorfosis* (1899) is the most ambiguous of the three novels that are included in this study. The Church takes center stage in this tale about a star-crossed romantic attraction between a woman who has dedicated herself to the Church and a secular libertine dandy. A sub-theme in the narrative addresses the role of the Church in modernity, revealing the ambivalence toward secularization that Gamboa had expressed previously in his diary. The focus of the story, however, is on the intersection between religion and sexuality, and the conflict between the autonomous subject and the restrictive parameters of religious precepts. Against this backdrop, the two main characters wrestle with the emergence of erotic desire in a religious cultural context that restricts sexual activity to marriage, and only for the purpose of procreation. In addition to the Catholic themes inherent to the novel, my analysis uncovers an unconscious presence of a pre-Christian conception of the sacred and the profane as interrelated domains of human experience.

The protagonist of the novel is the worldly and sophisticated Rafael Bello, a widower and the sole remaining male descendant from an aristocratic family in Mexico City. His wife, Lupe, has died in childbirth, leaving him to raise their daughter, Nona. Although he is providing a religious education for his daughter, Rafael himself does not live by the Church's moral code. Instead, he devotes his attention to the satisfaction of his own interests and desires. Sor Noeline is a French nun who has come to Mexico with the Order of the Holy Spirit and teaches at the girls' school run by the convent. When Rafael meets the beautiful nun, he falls in love with her, experiencing a passion that falls unequivocally within the realm of interdiction. For her part, Sor Noeline realizes that she is attracted to Rafael, and is likewise acutely aware of the impossibility of her desire. This narrative portrays the Christian binary opposition between body and soul, as personified by several characters in the narrative. In terms of Rafael's relationship with his wife

Lupe, the division between virtue and sin follows on traditional gender roles of femininity versus masculinity. While Rafael embodies the sinful traits that are associated with the pursuit of worldly pleasures, his wife Lupe is a highly idealized personification of virtue. The narrative also portrays the Christian division between the spiritual and the sexual in the opposition of the two significant female archetypes in Christian iconography: the virgin and the prostitute. These are personified in the narrative by the beautiful nun sor Noeline and Rafael's lover in the secular realm, the former prostitute Amparo. In the dénouement of the novel, Gamboa attempts to reconcile the sacred and the profane when sor Noeline succumbs to the erotic impulse.

THE CHURCH IN THE URBAN CENTER

We know from Gamboa's diaries that he was ambivalent toward the liberal anti-clerical agenda. This ambivalence is reflected again in *Metamorfosis*, in two passages that raise questions concerning the place of the Church in modern society. The first is a conversation between Rafael Bello and his friend the middle-class and opportunistic Chinto. Troubled by his sacrilegious desire for Sor Noeline, Rafael goes to Chinto for his counsel on the matter. During their conversation, the latter offers the following observation:

> …yo no sé qué diablo de conflicto se establece entre la medicina y el dogma, que en ocasiones lo coloca a uno con los del pro y en ocasiones con los del contra. Yo hice entonces lo que calculo que hacemos todos: durante el día […] burlarme de curas y de creyentes, jamás pisar el templo; pero en la noche, mascullar siquiera las oraciones que me enseñó mi madre, en la soledad de mi cuarto estudiantil, sin muchos muebles, testigos ni censores; rezar, por si acaso sirve, y ser en definitiva con mi doble cara, tan poco honrado como las cuatro quintas partes de los espíritus superiores… (609).

There are two points that Chinto makes here. One is the adversarial relationship between positivism and religious doctrine. While scientific inquiry is one of the cornerstones of modernity, the knowledge that comes to light as a result of this process often has the effect of undermining religious tenets. Nájera had raised this point in the short story "La carta de un suicida" (1880). The author of that letter chose to take his life because science had provoked an

existential crisis in his psyche by disproving the religious beliefs of his childhood. Chinto's comments indicate that this dilemma was not uncommon for intellectuals in Porfirian society. This leads to his second point: the double standard that he identifies as a strategy for accommodating the two competing discourses. Like the two faces of the Roman god Janus, who looks to the future and to the past, Chinto presents a façade of secular sophistication when in public, displaying a cavalier attitude toward the religious teachings of his childhood, while in private he recites the prayers that his mother had taught him, just in case there might be validity to these beliefs. He suspects that there are other men like him who have also adopted this subterfuge, in an effort to resolve the antagonism between religion and science. We saw a similar dynamic in some of Nájera's short stories, in which the author associates traditional faith with the domestic sphere. Here, the fictional Chinto is suggesting that men in Porfirian society keep their religious practices hidden in private, while adopting the identity of a secular, urban intellectual in the public arena. Although he doesn't specifically associate religion with the feminine gender, he does marginalize it from the public (masculine) domain. In the world of secular modernity, religious practices are considered backward and associated with weakness. This adds another layer to the dilemma of the opposition between religious beliefs and secular modernity. The conflict was not only between science and religion, but also strength and weakness, which again breaks down along traditional gender roles of masculinity and femininity. And yet, despite their efforts to project a modern and secular image in public, Rafael and Chinto are still responding to the religious discourse of the Church, whose doctrines continue to exert influence in their life decisions.

The other passage that addresses the role of Church is articulated by one of the religious characters, the local parish priest Fray Paulino. In this excerpt the friar is walking through the city, on his way to the Palace of the Archbishop. As he strolls, this medieval-like man of God becomes the modern *flâneur*, immersed in the sights and sounds of the urban center. The streets

are filled with the movement of people and carriages, while conversations and laughter emanate from stores, cantinas and cafés. At first Fray Paulino is enchanted by all that he sees and hears. But he soon begins to meditate on the miserable lives of all these souls, the poverty and other social ills that plague the modern city. These observations are directly relevant to the objective of his visit to the Archbishop. Fray Paulino has requested this audience in order to secure permission to publish a treatise entitled *Del pecado*. He believes that his interpretations of Church doctrine will offer a solution to the very social problems that he is observing during his stroll. "–Mi libro curará el peor de los males, el mal que nadie ha logrado clasificar hasta hoy, complejo, atávico, potente y formidable: el mal del siglo. Este mal del siglo […] que no es en definitiva más que el mal de los pasados y de los futuros, la falta de ideal, la falta de fe" (630). Here Gamboa's text specifically links the nebulous anxieties of modernity to the loss of religious faith. This again recalls the anonymous author of the "Carta de un suicida." While the protagonist of Nájera's narrative was disillusioned by his loss of religious faith, Fray Paulino attributes the suffering of the masses to the secularization of society. In his view, the solution to the malaise of the era is to reaffirm religious values. The clergyman's observations of social issues also parallel the humanitarian tendency in Nájera's chronicles and short stories. This again distinguishes him from the French *flâneur*. Fray Paulino does not regard the city simply as his domain, but his responsibility. In addition, he brings a religious agenda to the resolution of urban problems such as poverty, alcoholism, or prostitution. His treatise on Church doctrine, *Del pecado*, is intended to be a sort of manual or guide for navigating the complexities of modern society. It is directed as much toward those Catholics who have strayed from the Church, as well as toward people of other faiths, the so-called enemies of the Church. In this regard, Fray Paulino represents a benign face of the religion. His text is not written in harsh rhetoric that would scold or condemn sinners. It is instead imbued with "…auras de piedad y benevolencia para todos, los comulgantes y los excomulgados" (623), to entice the fallen back to the true faith.

The fact that Fray Paulino has written such a treatise re-interpreting Church doctrine is indicative of the spirit of intellectual inquiry, one of the essential characteristics modernity. Ecclesiastical authorities, however, tend to discourage such activity. The Counter-Reformation itself arose in reaction to Protestant criticism of the established creed. In order to prevent the spread of "heresies" the Church became increasingly locked into fixed, official interpretations of its doctrines. Fray Paulino experiences firsthand the Church's suspicious view of new texts when he takes his opus to the Archbishop to attain official approval for its publication. The response from the superior toward this endeavor is restrained. Rather than supporting the priest's efforts to bring a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine to the masses, he tries to dissuade him, cautioning him that these works are not received in a favorable light in Rome.

> […] en Roma no son muy partidarios de estas publicaciones hechas por sacerdotes; en ocasiones, y con la intención más sana del mundo, el autor se alucina, los mismos problemas que desmenuza, a la larga le hacen ver blanco lo negro, suministrando en contra de su voluntad, muy en contra de su voluntad, armas a los enemigos de nuestra santa Madre Iglesia… (629)

In this context Gamboa presents Fray Paulino as a religious man who seeks to modernize the Church, while the ecclesiastical authorities are intent on keeping the institution rooted in its medieval worldview. As a result of the intransigence of the Church hierarchy, and notwithstanding Fray Paulino's dismay over secularization, the fact is that religious values did continue to permeate Porfirian society, as evidenced by Chinto's two-faced posture in regard to religion. Both of these characters, the secular man and the religious, express a desire to integrate the Church into modern society. The conflict that emerges for both men is not just a matter of modernity versus tradition, but specifically the emergence of the autonomous subject, which is itself a product of the modern era, in tension with an institution that seeks to thwart that autonomy, maintaining a traditional social order.

The main narrative thread of *Metamorfosis*, the romantic attraction between Rafael Bello and Sor Noeline, delves further into the incongruity between individual agency and the

constraints of religious dictates. Given the forbidden nature of their erotic desire, the two characters struggle to repress this very powerful impulse. This taboo that is so integral to the Christian worldview arises from the polarization of spirit and matter, the denial of the body's physical drives as a means to achieve the salvation of the soul. In a Christian culture this split extends to a series of binary oppositions that separate behaviors and personality traits into categories of virtue and sin. These in turn tend to break down along gender lines. That is, passive characteristics tend to be associated with femininity, while aggressive traits signify masculinity.

GENDERED IDENTITIES OF VIRTUE AND SIN

Before looking at how gender roles are constructed in the narrative around the binary opposition of virtue and sin, I will digress for a moment to trace the rise of this dynamic in western culture. The division between body and soul has not always existed as it appears in Christianity. The earliest human societies of the Neolithic period in Old Europe (corresponding to present day southeastern Europe) and the Near East perceived the world as a unity of spirit and matter. That is, spirit is immanent within matter. In that worldview, sexuality was linked to the forces that bring forth life and, as such, had a sacred connotation (Bataille 101-02; Gadon xii). Ritualistic practices based on the unity of the spiritual and the material eventually evolved into complex religions in Bronze Age civilizations of the region (c. 5300-1200 BCE). It was during the classical period of ancient Greece (c. 500–300 BCE) that this unified conception of existence began to dissolve. Plato (429-347 BCE) proposed a division of reality into opposing realms of spirit and matter, privileging the former as the higher, more perfect reality (Kraut). In terms of sexuality, there emerged during the classical era a preoccupation with curbing the body's physiological impulses, although this did not have a moral implication. Instead, Greeks and Romans regarded the erotic urge in the same vein as any of the other instinctual drives. They

encouraged temperance to promote the health of the body, rather than the virtue of the soul (Foucault *Sexualité* 2: 30-32; 3: 57-58).

In the Hellenistic period (c. 323-146 BCE) there was a proliferation of philosophical movements that expanded on Plato's metaphysics, which eventually influenced the Christian attitude toward the body. The Manicheans, for example, associated spirit with all that is Good in this existence, and identified matter as the source of Evil. They promoted ascetic practices in order to release the soul from its imprisonment in matter. Although Augustine of Hippo (354-430), one of the Christian Church fathers, repudiated the moral dualism of the Manicheans, he still maintained the division between the physical world and the spiritual realm. The former is subject to illness and death, whereas the latter exists in an atemporal eternity, free from the suffering that is caused by the physical senses and drives (Mendelson). At first, the early Christians regarded abstention from sexual activity, not as a moral issue, but rather as a means to subvert the endless cycle of birth and death. Their ultimate objective was to free themselves from the suffering inherent in the material world (Brown 483). As the early Church fathers developed the canonical texts of Christianity, the division between body and soul became more pronounced. The body was no longer merely the source of suffering, but also the source of sin. In this worldview, sexuality along with everything that has an earthy, animalistic connotation was completely divorced from the sacred context that it once had. Traits that emerged from the instinctual impulses of the body, such as pride, anger, and lust, were deemed sinful. Opposite these, the noble, spiritual traits, such as humility, charity, and chastity, came to signify all that is good.

In *Metamorfosis* this binary opposition of sin and virtue is personified by Rafael and his wife Lupe. The latter is only present in the narrative in Rafael's reminiscence of their life together. She had been an aristocratic woman, and was active in the Church, performing works of charity for the poor (482). These were the very characteristics that the Church and Porifirian

society sought to instill in middle and upper-class women (Carner; Giraud; Gonzalbo; Ramos). Although she felt passionate love for Rafael, they had a proper courtship that remained within societal limits: "[Rafael] la tuvo, en efecto, toda complete; come se tiene a una doncella honesta, sin restricciones ni reservas espirituales, cuidando sólo del pudor material, de los apretones de manos que no enmudecen, y de los besos fugitives que nos incendian" (483). In regard to her sexuality, the text describes how Lupe maintained the role of the virtuous woman even in her relationship with her husband. Although she experienced sexual desire, and received pleasure from intimate relations with him, she did not speak about those desires. Even when she informed Rafael that she was pregnant, she did so "entre pudores y sonrisas, como confiesan esas cosas las mujeres honradas" (485). In other words, she was inhibited from speaking frankly about sexuality and maintained an image of demure modesty.

In contrast to the virtuous Lupe, Rafael embodies the traits that are associated with the material world and the appetites of the body. He is devoted to the pursuit of worldly pleasures and to the acquisition and display of fine clothing and other material goods. He enjoys spending time gambling and drinking with his friends at the Sport Club, a modern space of leisure for middle and upper class men in the Eurocentric culture of Porfirian Mexico. He engages in sexual liaisons with women, of lower social standing of course, in keeping with the social convention to respect the honor of upper class women. Even though Rafael loved Lupe, he continued to be involved with other women even after they married, infidelities that Lupe suffered in silence, while remaining "pure" herself. After her death, Rafael berates himself for the way he had treated his wife and idealizes her virtue even further, projecting onto her the traits of "una santa medieval" (481). In this way the two of them together form the binary opposition in which she is the saint and he is the sinner.

The narrator expresses a tone of disapproval when detailing the indulgences of the protagonist. However, it is not so much his sexual exploits that are cause for scandal, but rather

his vanity. After returning to Mexico from Paris the text describes him as "muy joven, muy ignorantón y muy presuntuoso, llamando la atención en esta buena ciudad de México, por la elegancia de su ropa y por las fantásticas leyendas que espetaba a sus amigos, a cargo de su reciente residencia europea" (481). This subtle critique of the protagonist has both religious and secular undertones. On the one hand, Rafael Bello is indulging in pride of self, a trait that the Church categorizes as one of the cardinal sins. His vanity and his desire to be important and admired in the eyes of his peers contradict the Church's accepted virtues of humility and selflessness. Although these are not as scandalous as sexual transgressions, they are still manifestations of the body's instinctual impulses for survival. On the other hand, Rafael's attention to the elegance of his appearance also transgresses the secular idealization of a strong and virile masculinity as one of the primary components in the construction of national identity. In contrast to Nájera's robust protagonist in "Mi inglés," for example, Gamboa's text presents a more faithful depiction of the *calavera*, the Mexican dandy, as well as the disapproval with which Porfirian society often regarded this figure. The narrator's indictment of Rafael's vanity illustrates what Victor Macías has identified as porfirian society's censure of the conspicuous consumption of upper-class men. Rather than focusing on religious morality, the secular criticism was directed toward the unmasculine image projected by the "luxurious lifestyle" of these young men (227-28). Rafael's indulgences, then, are presented as transgressions of the secular code of an idealized, virile masculinity. In this sense, he personifies the decadence of the traditional ruling class in Mexico.

The ancestral mansion in the city where Rafael lives links him to the *criollo* elite in Mexico City, and by extension to the colonial social order. The degeneracy of the upper class is symbolically represented by the description of the family library, an eclectic collection of books –historical and contemporary, secular and religious–, in a state of disarray. This passage evokes an image of the crumbling ruins of what had formerly been aristocratic splendor. The narrator

describes the room as unkempt, dusty and humid. One of the shelves, weakened by age, has given way and sent some of the books crashing to the floor. Even the paintings on the walls are dusty and faded. A portrait of Rafael's grandfather, "Don Sebastián Bello y Cruces de la Torre y del Pinar," observes this cultural deterioration, as well as the decline of his own lineage, with sadness and disdain.

> Notábase, sin embargo, en la mirada y en el general conjunto, aires de distinción, costumbre de mando y no sé qué de grandeza entristecida, al contemplar con sus ojos de viejo y de pintura borrosa, el lamentable fin de una raza […] ¿Para qué servía el linajudo pasado? Para parar en la degeneración, en el aborto sociológico, un Rafael Bello, el último ejemplar masculino, el adiós del apellido sin ninguna de las virtudes de la progenie, maculado con los defectos y vicios atávicos (493).

As Rafael is the last male descendent of this aristocratic family, who cannot live up to the glory of his ancestors, his licentiousness is thus symptomatic of the loss of dignity and prestige of the the traditional ruling class.

The role of religious men in a Catholic culture destabilizes the masculine/feminine binary. On the one hand, the Church is a patriarchal institution that forbids women from officiating over any of the sacred rites. In this sense the religious men, from the local parish priest to the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy are always in a position of power over women. On the other hand, the members of the clergy are expected to adopt the same virtuous characteristics as women. They are taught to curb aggressive characteristics, including sexuality, and embrace traits such as humility, chastity, and selflessness. This is not to say that the clergy consistently live up to this ideal. But they strive to cultivate these virtues that in western culture are typically associated with the feminine gender.

Although men and women in the secular realm were subject to the same moral code in Porfirian society, the transgressions of men were more readily tolerated, even if they were met with disapproval. Women's behavior, on the other hand, was more strictly monitored, often by other women. Mothers, teachers, in-laws, and other female authority figures, who themselves had

internalized the religious precepts, would then impose these same restrictions on other women. (Ramos 153). But the Church also played a significant role, particularly in the control of female sexuality. It is ironic that the priests and clergy, men who adopted the same code of virtue and chastity were charged with controlling the sexual expression of others. They typically carried out this task by means of the confessional, where, notwithstanding their anti-sex rhetoric, they developed a peculiar obsession to talk about sexuality in explicit terms (Foucault *Sexualité* 1: 27-29; Parrinder 222).

In *Metamorfosis*, the responsibility for monitoring the virtue of women falls to Fray Paulino, the parish priest and confessor for the nuns at Santo Espíritu. There are two passages in the novel that offer insight into this character's role in the control of sexuality: one that describes his asexuality, and another that expresses his misogynistic perception of women. Fray Paulino does not feel erotic desire. It is not even a question of repressing the urge; he simply never experiences the impulse. The narrative traces the origin of this asexuality to his childhood in the Spanish province of La Coruña. The clergyman remembers how he would often hear his mother and father engaged in conjugal relations. The text describes the vocalizations that would emanate from the lovers, sounds that articulated a full range of passionate sensations: "hondos suspiros de satisfacción, como de quien mucho goza; lamentos truncos y fugaces, como de quien mucho sufre; repentino rumor de lucha, como de combate de bestias, y al fin, una inmovilidad y un silencio como de muerte" (551). The language in this passage describes the violence that is at the heart of the eroticism precisely because this powerful impulse is linked to the forces of nature that bring forth life (Bataille 66-69). Not understanding what was happening, the young Paulino sensed the animal nature of the act, as well as the association between eroticism and death. It is understandable, therefore, that a child who hears this act taking place would be left feeling frightened, confused, and repulsed by what he considered to be a vulgar and shameful act.

Sensing his own vulnerability in this existence, Paulino instinctively turned to God as a source of security: "seguro puerto y perenne fuente de venturanza" (552). Here the narrative hints at the erotic undertones of religious experience (Bataille 29-30), when it describes Paulino's desire to enter the monastery as a kind of courtship: "una verdadera persecución de enamorado, tímida, a hurtadillas, mirándolo sin verlo, cual si la tosca fábrica de piedra se percatara del galán" (552). The narrator also associates the young Paulino with the tradition of Spanish mysticism, by indicating that the young acolyte has within him "la semilla mística floreciéndole hasta por los poros" (554). Devoted to God in this way, Fray Paulino remains chaste throughout his life, unaffected by the very basic human desire that is the erotic impulse. "Fray Paulino, entre otras virtudes, contaba con una castidad inverosímil casi; nunca había palpitado su carne con el contacto íntimo de carne de mujer; el espasmo, que es causa del mundo y principio y fin de nuestra vida, le era desconocido […] la verdadera batalla de los sexos ¡la perpetua y mortal batalla!, jamás habíala librado" (554-55).

It is not a significant leap to go from being repulsed by the erotic act, to being repulsed by the feminine principal, the Other gender that Fray Paulino soon associates with carnality, and with everything that ails the world. It is in the confessional that he learns about the "horrores femeninos," given that he doesn't engage in sexual activity himself. As a result of what he hears, the friar comes to detest woman as "el mónstruo diabólicamente hechicero y tres veces impuro, que nos arrastra a la perdición" (556). In these harsh statements, we see another side of the friar. Like the secular Chinto, here is another Janus-like figure with two faces. The benign clergyman looks to the future of the Church, with his agenda for integrating the institution into modern society. The misogynist priest, however, looks to the past, to the early centuries of the Christian era when the Church fathers denigrated the body, the female body in particular, along with its physical drives. Fray Paulino specifically holds female sexuality responsible for all that is earthy

and carnal in this existence. On the basis of this asexuality and misogyny he is the man charged with controlling the sexuality of the nuns at Santo Espíritu.

THE VIRGIN/WHORE DICHOTOMY OF FEMININE IDENTITY

Metamorfosis presents the Christian polarization between religion and sexuality in the opposition of two female characters: the beautiful nun, sor Noeline and Rafael's lover, Amparo. Here we see the dichotomy between two archetypes of the female gender in Christian culture: the virgin and the whore, as personified by the Virgin Mary and the penitent sinner Magdalene. In the Bronze Age civilizations of Old Europe and the Fertile Crescent region of the Near East these two figures were not mutually exclusive. Instead, they represented two of the many facets of the feminine divine. The female deities of those cultures mirrored the roles that women played in the earthly realm, such as virgin, lover, wife, and mother. The characteristic of virgin, attributed to Greek deities such as Artemis and Athena –called Diana and Minerva by the Romans–, symbolized autonomy and independence, rather than ascetic chastity (Warner 48). The sexual aspect of the feminine divine was associated with fertility rites in agrarian cultures. In Canaan (c.2000-1300 BCE), for example, the hierodule of religious practices was a priestess who represented the female deity in the sacred marriage, a ritual reenactment of the marriage between Astarte, the Semitic goddess of love and fertility, with her lover Tammuz, the young, virile vegetation god (Gadon 138). The objective of this rite was to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom. Although the hierodule is often identified as the "sacred prostitute," she was a religious figure, not a woman who sold her body. In the pre-Christian and pre-Hebraic cultures of the region sexuality was associated with the female body. However, woman was not regarded as the source of evil, but of creation. She represented the life cycle of birth, death, and regeneration. As such, human sexuality was regarded as a regenerative power and a blessing from the divine (Gadon 138). The early Christian Church Fathers condensed the attributes of virgin and mother

into the figure of the Virgin Mary, subordinated her to the monotheistic God, and denied her the creative power of her sexuality. This latter aspect of female identity was projected onto the figure of Mary Magdalene, the repentant prostitute who had renounced her "sinful lifestyle," offering hope to "fallen women" who are not able to live up to the state of perfection as personified by the virgin mother (Gadon 206-07). In Gamboa's narrative, we see this split of the feminine divine, along with the Christian disdain for female sexuality, and the idealization of spiritual love and virtue, in Rafael's relationships with Amparo and sor Noeline.

Amparo is a courtesan in Mexico City, a prostitute whom Rafael has taken out of the brothel to be his mistress. The text does not provide very much background information about her, only that she is from Spain and of humble origins. She is probably from Andalucía, given that at one point Rafael asks her "canta tus malagueñas" (518), –songs from the city of Málaga. The description of the song that she begins to perform evokes the style of the *cante jondo* from the southern peninsular region: "Ella sola batióse palmas, marcaba el compás con un pie, abríase de codos, hasta que soltó, primero las ahogadas vocalizaciones de rigor en ese canto, que son casi lamentos" (518). By the mere fact that she is a prostitute, she is of course the personification of carnality. In addition to this, there is also a sense of her as an earthy, tangible woman. The text conveys the essence of her physicality in the description of her movements as she sings, and of the sounds that emerge from the vibrations of her body. According to Rafael's religious moral values, this association with the physical realm, in and of itself, links Amparo to the sinfulness of matter.

At the time that Amparo appears in the narrative, Rafael has recently distanced himself from her after learning of her liaison with another man. His pride, "su vanidad de calavera" (495), is wounded, yet he doesn't want to break off the relationship completely. Rafael's thoughts about Amparo reveal his ambivalence toward her, and the role she plays in his life. He is angry over her betrayal, yet still feels desire for her. His memories of their romance evoke contradictory thoughts

about her: "las nostalgias internas por la carne que aunque manche se adora" (496). The conflicted feelings that this statement expresses are indicative of the duality of eroticism: its pleasureable and violent aspects. Rafael attempts to reunite with Amparo, and the two spend a night together. However, the next day he immediately regrets the reunion. As he observes her while she is sleeping, he renders a frank and ungracious portrait of her, including references to her role as a prostitute, and the many men with whom she has been intimate.

> De pie junto a la cama, mirábala Rafael; seguía la deliciosa línea ondulante de ese cuerpo que había querido tanto, que tanto había besado, y sentíase un mundo de pequeñas repugnancias nacientes, tontas, sin razón de ser, supuesto que el cuerpo era el mismo, con más morbideces quizá, más macizas y sedeñas las carnes, más tentadoras sus bellezas. ¿Por qué sentía aquel asco, esa especie de pavor infantil que le aconsejaba una huida inmediata, a mansalva, en tanto que la otra dormía? ¿No había perdonado? ¿No había suspirado por volver a estrecharla, a pesar de la falta? Sobre todo ¿no conocía su origen? ¿No sabía de memoria que ese cuerpo y esa juventud habían servido de alimento a la lascivia multi-color y multiforme de la mayor parte del México masculino? ¿No la había sacado de una casa de prostitución, como quien saca una flor manchada ya pero bella todavía, del fondo de un estercolero? (515).

At the beginning of the passage, there is again the opposition of positive and negative terms: "la deliciosa línea ondulante de [su] cuerpo" in contrast to the "pequeñas repugnancies" that he feels toward her. The overall tone of the excerpt expresses Rafael's ambivalence toward sexuality. He experiences the sublime pleasure of the act, but also the undertone of repulsion toward the taboo. Amparo satisfies Rafael's physical desires, yet the carnal relationship leaves him feeling disgusted, as much with himself as with her. Lacking a sacred context for the conflicting emotions that he experiences, he resents that the imperious sexual urge overrules his reasoning mind. Even though he is a worldly, self-absorbed man, the religious teachings of his youth, which exalt the spirit, to the disdain of the body, are still present in his consciousness. In this cultural context, the sacred cannot encompass the sexual, but instead must remain chaste. It is from this perspective that he perceives his attraction to Sor Noeline.

As a woman who has dedicated herself to the monastic life of the convent, Sor Noeline is the archetypal virtuous woman. She is young, beautiful, and graceful, and exhibits a mother's

tenderness toward Rafael's daughter, Nona. The narrator attributes this characteristic to a maternal instinct inherent to her biological sex: "Sentía hacia ella hondas ternuras casi maternales; cuestión de su sexo, nacido más para la maternidad fisiológica que religiosa…" (470). This quote reveals a division between Earthly maternal love and spiritual religious love. The implication is that spiritual love is distinct from the love between human beings. The latter form requires work, sacrifice, and commitment from one to another. The former suggests an idealized conception of love that is beyond the rational realm. This is another nuance to the division between the physical and the spiritual. The text suggests that a woman who is drawn to the religious life would exhibit a love that is more abstract, not attached to quotidian relationships in the physical world. A woman exhibiting the physiological maternal love, on the other hand, would be more connected to the material realm. But in regard to Sor Noeline, the narrative is not equating the maternal instinct with carnality or the erotic impulse, even though the carnal act is necessary in order to bring the role of mother into existence. There are echoes here of the Church's construction of the virtuous woman, which extends even to the role of mother. While the text associates this quality with Sor Noeline's, there is still an aura of spiritual purity about her. This recalls the image of the Virgin Mary, who provides the (impossible) standard for women in Christian culture: to be a mother, yet remain virgin. Whichever path a woman chooses to take, to become a nun and dedicate herself to God, or to marry and bear "legitimate" children, in either case she must remain virtuous. As in the case of Lupe, she must at least project an air of modesty even in marriage.

The reference to Sor Noeline's maternalness suggests that she does not have a true religious calling, a point which is confirmed as the narrative continues. Prior to entering the convent in Bordeaux, she had been in love, and engaged to be married to a young military man named Gaston. Through a series of unfortunate events, the economic situation of her family came to a point of crisis in which Gaston had to break off the engagement, and Noeline was forced into

the convent for lack of other viable alternatives. By suggesting that this character really belongs in the physical world, rather than dedicated to a religious lifestyle Gamboa again affirms the split between body and soul. The text does not find fault with the Church's construction of this dichotomy. It only suggests that one needs to have an unreserved devotion to the religious life in order to be able to maintain his or her vows.

Although Rafael's desire for Sor Noeline is also an erotic attraction, because she is a nun, he initially doesn't think of her in carnal terms. He instead projects spiritual qualities on to her, and regards her as a potential surrogate mother for his daughter, Nona. When he first meets her and sees the gentleness with which she takes care of the child, he has the urge to kneel before her because she looks like a renaissance painting of a virgin: "de las que hay en los museos italianos, una madonna" (524). During another visit to the convent, at a time when Nona is gravely ill, he encounters Sor Noeline in the corridor and, in a moment of concern for his daughter, he takes the nun's hands in his, but this he did "sin la menor idea carnal –¡por Dios que no, antes al contrario! –deslumbrado por su belleza de madonna, como a una aparición celeste dispensadora de milagros…" (527). In other words, even though he is attracted to her, he cannot conceive of thinking about her in sexual terms.

This idealization of Sor Noeline's beauty recalls a similar portrayal of spiritual desire in another *modernista* novel, *De sobremesa* (written 1895, published 1925) by José Asunción Silva (1865-1896). Fernández, the protagonist of Silva's narrative, longs for an elusive woman whom he calls Helena. Like Gamboa's Rafael, Fernández ennobles the beauty of the blond and pale maiden by comparing her countenance to an iconic image of the Christian Virgin Mary. He specifically references one of the innumerable paintings of this subject created by the fifteenth century Italian Fra Angelico (1395-1455) (Silva 390), one of the early renaissance artists whose work influenced the aesthetic of the Pre-Raphaelites. An example of Fra Angelico's work shows how the artist created images that emphasized the spiritual essence of the young Mary, while

minimizing the physicality of her body (Figure 3.1). One of the hallmarks of his style is the attention he devotes to the figure's visage, creating a delicate and graceful image. The rest of the figure, however, consists of the simplified forms of her robes, without a sense of the volume of her body underneath them. This type of female figure, whose beauty is divorced from her sexuality, is the model for both Helena in *De sobremesa* and Sor Noeline in *Metamorfosis*. Fernández's desire is thwarted by the fact that he is unable to find Helena. Thus his romanticized conception of her remains in the spiritual realm, untarnished by sexuality. Rafael's desire, on the other hand, is thwarted by Sor Noeline's role as a nun. To compensate for this dilemma, he focuses on her spiritual qualities, thus affirming the Christian division between the religious and the erotic as two irreconcilable realms of human experience. He has no choice but to repress his desire, which only serves to intensify it further, until it escalates to the point of an obsession, not unlike Fernández's obsession for Helena.

FIGURE 3.1
The Annunciation of Cortona (c. 1433)
Fra Angelico
Tempera on panel, 69 x 71 in.
Diocesan Museum, Cortona, Tuscany, Italy

For her part, Sor Noeline also realizes that she is attracted to Rafael, a condition that causes her great dismay. Her attempts to repress her erotic longing take a toll on her emotionally and physically. In an effort to combat the imperious urge, she prays to an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that she has on the wall in her room, imploring the icon to remove the desire: "–¡Señor! ¡Señor! ¡Ten piedad de mí! –dijo al entrar, a una imagen del Sagrado Corazón en cromolitografía" (598), but to no avail. The imagery that the text uses to depict her struggle against the obsession destabilizes the virgin/whore polarity, the idea that a virtuous woman cannot be sexual. Sor Noeline feels that Rafael has somehow entered into her, "dentro del pecho" (617), but in a spiritual manner, rather than the physical consummation of romantic desire. She also wrestles with the so-called voices of temptation, which try to convince the nun that her passion is normal. "Secretas voces asegurábanle que las hembras, como ella, nacen para todo eso" (618). By characterizing these voices as malign, the text alludes to the association that Christian theology makes between eroticism and sinfulness. And yet, even as Sor Noeline wrestles with these conflicting thoughts, the narrative sexualizes her. As she is trying to light a candle before the image of the Sacred Heart, her nightgown slips off and the omniscient gaze of the narrator describes her body in Parnassian terms of idealized beauty.

> Primero asomó el busto, un busto admirable, que a la escasísima e inquieta luz de la lamparilla, adquiría contornos de estatua de museo, desvanecidas transparencias de alabastro; luego, surgió el vientre, y surgieron las caderas y los muslos y las piernas; una explosión muda de blancuras y de curvas, una materialización de la omnipotente carne femenina, de la suprema creación, de la obra maestra de la naturaleza que realiza las dos misiones más sublimes: la de Amante y la de Madre (619).

There are references in the passage to the sculptural form of Sor Noeline's body, as well as the artistic aesthetic and divine essence of her beauty. There is also a reference to her flesh signifying an actual woman in the physical realm, rather than a hard, unchanging statue. In addition, the nun is unaware that her nightgown has slipped off, which makes the narrator's description seem voyeuristic, and a transgression in and of itself. The passage also identifies the two roles of

Amante and *Madre* that a woman is destined to fulfill. These are the two roles that women play in the secular realm, both of which are associated with eroticism, –notwithstanding the Christian concept of the virtuous mother. They are also two of the manifestations of the ancient feminine divine, such as Aphrodite and Demeter in the Mycenaean and Greek cultures, representing eroticism and the regenerative power of sexuality respectively.

There is a hint of mystic devotion, in this passage of the nun alone in her cell, praying to an image of Christ, the male icon of the Western religious tradition: "el Salvador, de busto, risueño, entreabriéndose las ropas con sus dos manos para dejar ver su corazón defectuoso anatómicamente, suspendido a la mitad del pecho, sin arterias ni nada que lo sostuviera, con diminuta corona de espinas circundado, y una flama rematándolo" (598-99). In the description of this common Catholic icon, the Christ figure seems personable, with its smiling expression. He is opening his clothing to reveal his heart, lending a romantic air to the scene. The text also makes light of the anatomically incorrect heart, depicted as if it were hovering on the outside of the figure's body. This description heightens the intimacy of the moment and minimizes the sense of reverence one would typically devote to such icons. The intersection of mysticism and eroticism in the passage recalls the writings of the Spanish mystic Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582). In her autobiography, Teresa describes her ecstatic experiences during periods of contemplation. An example of this prose recounts a visit she received from an angel, in language that is highly suggestive of a passionate encounter between the two.

> …vía un angel cabe mí hacia el lado izquierdo en forma corporal, lo que no suelo ver sino por maravilla. […] Víale en las manos un dardo de oro, largo, y al fin de el hierro me parecía tener un poco de fuego. Éste me parecía meter por el corazón algunas veces, y que me llegaba a las entrañas. Al sacarle, me parecía las llevaba consigo, y me dejaba toda abrasada en amor grande de Dios. Era tan grande el dolor, que me hacía dar aquellos quejidos, y tan ecesiva la suavidad que me pone este grandísimo dolor, que no hay que desear que se quite, ni se contenta el alma con menos que Dios (*Vida* 187-88).

While Teresa always insisted that her rhetoric was meant to be a metaphor for the spiritual union between her soul and God, the eroticism of her prose is unavoidable. Even the Italian baroque

artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) created a sculptural representation of this passage (Figure 3.2) in such a way as to emphasize the eroticism expressed in Teresa's text, despite her stated religious objective.

This same mélange of religiosity and sensuality permeates Sor Noeline's room in her moment of crisis. Nevertheless, she is not seeking a spiritual union with the divine. Her desire is for Rafael, and she is praying that Christ remove the yearning from her so that she can remain virtuous. What her religious tradition doesn't allow her to see is that she has been struck by what Plato described as a form of divine madness that allows one to see an image of the deity in the face of the beloved (Reeve; Vernant 470-71). Eroticism by its very nature unites the physical, in the embrace of the lovers, and the spiritual, in the transcendent experience of the climax. Yet, Sor Noeline's religious context denies her this experience. However, the powerful force at the heart of the erotic impulse eventually overrides the nun's rational attempt to circumvent it. When the she eventually falls asleep, her body asserts itself in an erotic dream.

When Rafael finally acknowledges that he is in fact in love with Sor Noeline, he must confront the sinful nature of his longing. However, the erotic impulse eventually overwhelms his

FIGURE 3.2
The Ecstasy of St. Theresa
(1647-52)
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Marble, 5 ft. tall.
Cornaro Chapel of
Santa Maria della Vittoria,
Rome

reason, and he resolves to take her out of the convent. "¿Que su amor por la monja era pecado?... pues quería pecar hasta perderse… con tal de alcanzarla, de sentirla junto de sí…" (546). When he appears in the convent garden, Sor Noeline faints at the sight of him. Thus she exercises no agency over the events that follow, but instead becomes an object that Rafael can move at will. When he removes her from the convent, Rafael's relationship with Sor Noeline then parallels his relationship with Amparo. Both are women who resided in a community of other women. And in both cases, Rafael's desire for each one impels him to take her out of her respective community, and claim her as his lover.

Once installed at his house in the city, Rafael exhibits a tension between the spiritual and the sexual. He continues to treat Noeline (he drops the title 'Sor' after he takes her out of the convent) with religious reverence, and struggles to refrain from seducing her immediately. He even dares to pray toward that end, a prayer that reveals his desire to restore the unity of the sacred and the profane: "–¡Dame fuerzas, Señor, dame fuerzas para esperar y para que sor Noeline sea mía!" (696). Noeline begins her "metamorphosis" from virginal nun to secular, passionate woman. She first sheds her nun's habits as if shedding a layer of skin, indicating that her identity as a nun was something worn on the surface, but did not penetrate to the core of her being (698). As in Judith Butler's concept of the "performative" nature of social roles (Butler 12-15), Noeline's habits were the appropriate costume for her role as nun. She is now donning secular clothing for this new identity, this secular role that she is thrust into. The process of the transformation is choreographed by Rafael, while Noeline remains his idealized image, the embodiment of a perfect, transcendent beauty, but she is now tangible, within his reach. She is "convertida ya en mujer y en mujer enamorada" (713). The text justifies her sudden change in identity by indicating that Noeline did not have a true religious calling when she entered the convent, and that she really belonged in the secular world.

The passage depicting the consummation of their relationship evokes the sacred connotation that sexuality once had. Noeline is "orgullosa de encarnar la Forma, la belleza eterna de la carne" (713). This statement attributes spiritual characteristics to the body, combining both transcendent and sensuous traits in this character. The text compares Noeline to the feminine divine of ancient religions: "En su desnudez absoluta, se irguió triunfante, con soberano impudor de diosa antigua" (713). There is even a specific reference to her transformation from virgin to lover: "La monja, metamorfoseada en Mujer, cumplía su misión: quemaba sus alas de virgen, vibrando de anticipada gratitud al Hombre" (713). Here again Rafael's devotion to Noeline is presented as a form of religious worship, in the ancient sense.

In *De sobremesa*, Fernández never has the chance to meet Helena or interact with her in any way. As the narrative progresses, she becomes an ethereal figure that exists only in the mind of the protagonist, a condition which emphasize the divine nature of her beauty. Fernández ultimately projects onto her elevated, noble qualities that are lacking in the women with whom he has had sexual liaisons. This is the same type of distinction that Rafael initially makes between Amparo and sor Noeline. The sexual woman cannot be spiritual, and the spiritual woman cannot be sexual.The difference between the two narratives is that Rafael manages to attain the object of his desire. For Fernández, Helena can never be an actual physical woman in his life. He will never be able to develop a real-world relationship with her. Rafael on the other hand, by taking Noeline out of the convent attempts to integrate the sacred and the profane into one woman.

One of Gamboa's contemporaries, the journalist Victoriano Salado Álvarez (1867-1931) critiqued *Metamorfosis* in a review he wrote the year after its publication. While he applauded Gamboa's florid and elegant style in the first part of the novel, he objected strongly to its implausible story line: "Los amores de Rafael y Noeline me parecen radicalmente falsos, mal pintados y antiartísticos" (63). Although he concedes that nuns are human and therefore subject to experiencing erotic love, he doesn't believe they would act on that impulse. Sor Noeline in his

opinion turns out to be "una ramera de la peor laya" (67). This harsh indictment of the love-struck nun not only reiterates the virgin/whore dichotomy, it also highlights the extent to which Catholic values were still deeply entrenched in Porfirian society. The critic's outrage that a nun could be sexual exemplifies the restrictive nature of the religious and social moral code in regard to women in particular. This comment also reveals just how subversive Gamboa's text was at the time. However, Salado Álvarez does have a point regarding the unconvincing dénouement of the novel.

In the final passage of the novel, Rafael seems to have achieved the unity of the physical and the spiritual, the tangible and the transcendent. This facile conclusion however, avoids resolving the opposition between religion and sexuality. There is the question of the incompatibility of body and spirit that so permeates the Catholic cultural context. The narrative does not acknowledge how Rafael's perception of Noeline will change after they succumb to their desire for each other. Although he worships the virgin, "arrodillóse nuevamente a los pies de la virgen que adoraba" (685), his treatment of Amparo shows that he detests the whore. According to this logic, Noeline will most likely become tainted by her carnality, just like Rafael's former lover. In spite of his efforts to the contrary, his worldview cannot conceive of the sexual and the spiritual existing together in the same woman. Gamboa also posed questions about the traditional social order at the end of the century, as Rafael was initially presented as the decadent end of his aristocratic lineage. At the end the question remains, is Rafael inspired by an idealized love to mend his ways? Or is his abduction of Sor Noeline another manifestation of his self-indulgence? I suggest the latter, for the same reason stated above, that he will not be able to maintain his idealized image her after they have consummated their relationship. The questions raised in the novel regarding the role of the Church in modernity are also left unresolved. That Gamboa is ultimately unable to reconcile the polarization of religion and sexuality is evident in his next two novels, both of which reaffirm Catholic values.

Chapter 4: The Christian Mystic Path in *Santa*

Santa (1903) is the most widely studied novel of Gamboa's literary œuvre. While Juan Epple (1999) reads the text as a metaphor for the Díaz régime's incomplete process of modernization, Salvador Oropesa (1996) looks at how Gamboa addresses questions of national identity in the novel. Guadalupe Pérez Anzaldo (2007) analyzes the role of the prostitute in the narrative, who becomes symptomatic of the social ills in the modern urban center, despite her marginalization. The studies of Ellen Maycock (2000) and Gerardo Bobadilla Encinas (2006) focus on Gamboa's application of the naturalist method in this novel. Most relevant to my study, however, is Silvia Ruiz Tresgallo's (2006) reading of *Santa* as a parody of medieval hagiographic literature, idealized chronicles of the lives of the saints. Her article insightfully indicates the similarities between the convent and the brothel. Both are composed of a community of women who are denied reproductive capacity, and subjected to a rational rule of order. I depart from her thesis in the sense that I don't read *Santa* as a parody of the life of a saint, but rather as an extension of the Christian logic that polarizes body and soul.

This novel examines sexuality in the naturalist and decadent vein. On the surface this narrative, which depicts the sordidness of the demimonde in Mexico City and the moral excesses in all levels of the social hierarchy, seems to be the furthest removed from religiosity or the divine. However, Catholic values continue to permeate the cultural context of the characters. In this novel Gamboa continues to portray the opposition between spirit and matter that Christian theology promotes, and the troubling sexuality that is symptomatic of this division of body and soul. While Amparo is a minor character in *Metamorfosis*, in this novel the prostitute takes center stage. In this sense, Santa is the antithesis of Sor Noeline. Both of these women live in a female community, which is designed to control female sexuality. And both characters enter into their respective institution –brothel or convent– out of economic necessity. The method of control in

the convent is by means of virtue, that is, complete abstinence from sexual activity. The brothel is a parallel female community, devoted to the indulgence of sin. But the women are still under the control of secular authorities, in order to serve the needs of male sexuality, while protecting the health of the male patrons and preventing the spread of disease.

Santa also invites a comparison with Zola's *Nana* (1880), not only in its depiction of the courtesan as the central figure and her relationship to the modern urban center, but also in terms of the protagonist's name. Although she shares a phonetically similar name with her French counterpart, the unavoidable religious significance of the name "Santa" is indicative of the Catholic undertone of the novel, signalling from the very start that the narrative will diverge from the scientific objectivity that is essential to Zola's conception of naturalism.

VIRTUE AND SEXUALITY OF SANTA

In their respective essays, both Georges Bataille and René Girard have indicated a close relationship between eroticism and the violent forces of nature. The impulses of living creatures are violent precisely because they are expressions of the metaphysical forces that continually bring them into existence in the physical realm. Early religious practices, according to these scholars, emerged as a means to mediate the destructive power of these forces. In these early practices, restrictions were placed on sexual activity, not because it was sinful, but precisely because it was sacred. The very force of the erotic impulse linked it to the divine realm. Religious rituals developed as a means to quell the violent forces of nature, which are at the heart of our instinctual drives as living beings (Bataille 71-78; Girard 34-35). We see this relationship between Santa and the forces of nature in the depiction of her childhood, which unfolds in the village of Chimalistac, near San Angel on the outskirts of the city.

The text presents Santa as an essentially virtuous child who receives the requisite religious education, and who is idolized by her mother and brothers. The narrator depicts this

rural setting as an archetypal paradise, in contrast to the corrupt city. She is adored by her mother, the elderly Agustina, as well as her brothers, Esteban and Fabián. The description of her as "el ídolo de sus hermanos" (99), has a religious connotation which alludes to the feminine divine. However, it is Santa's virtue that her brothers idolize. Christian culture demands that she remain in an idealized state of purity, to the denial of the creative power of her sexuality. As mentioned previously, female family members and the men of the Church contributed to the control of women's sexuality in Porfirian Mexico. The text makes references to both these trends. As her body is maturing, the priest in the confessional counsels her to maintain her "pureza de virgin" (99). He also urges her to ignore her sexuality and remember her religious teachings. He even advises her to channel her romantic desires into the religious devotion of a spiritual being: "enamórate del Ángel de tu guarda, único varón que no te dará un desengaño" (99). When she begins to menstruate, Agustina's counsel in regard to this bodlily function is ambivalent: "—¡Chist! —repuso la anciana, besándola en la frente—, esas cosas no se cuentan, sino que se callan y ocultan… ¡Es que Dios te bendice y te hace mujer!" (107). On the one hand, she acknowledges this phase in the female life cycle as a blessing from God; on the other, it is something that must be kept hidden.

Notwithstanding her virtuous characteristics, Santa also exhibits curiosity in regard to her awakening sexuality. The text also links her to the forces of nature, stating that she grows like a wildflower: ignorant, chaste, and strong, "al cuidado de la tierra, nuestra eterna madre cariñosa" (95). The narrator also describes the Earth as a living organism, and acknowledges the sacredness of her capacity to bring forth life: "su sagrada fecundidad infinita de madre amantísima" (103). The text specifically links Santa to this sacred aspect of nature, and also highlights the interrelationship between heaven and Earth: "Santa, impresionada, levanta los ojos al cielo, dilata la nariz y quédase extasiada, incorporada sin percatarse de ello a la honda acción de gracias mudas, a la plegaria sin palabra de la Tierra" (103-04). Santa enters into a chaste and meditative

communion with nature. However, as there is no one to guide her through the physiological changes that her body is experiencing, she is filled with a vague melancholy: "—Mi tristeza es una tristeza que me sale de mi cuerpo, del pecho" (107). She is experiencing romantic desires, a yearning for "besos que no sean pecado; caricias castas; pasiones infinitas; hadas y magos" (110). The tension between the virtue that her family and the clergy expect from Santa and these nebulous desires that emerge from within her ultimately culminates in her transgression of the sexual taboo, when the handsome military officer, Marcelino Beltrán seduces her.

The text describes how Santa does not know how to defend herself from Marcelino's persistent advances, and how she ultimately succumbs to his seductive embrace and his false promises of love. The passage that depicts the seduction includes references to the sacredness of the erotic act. Santa worships Marcelino, and her surrender to his seduction is described as idolatrous.

> —Suéltame, Marcelino, suéltame, por Dios Santo… ¡que me muero!... (114).
>
> Sin responderle y sin cesar de besarla, Marcelino desfloró a Santa en una encantadora hondonada que los escondía. Y Santa, que lo adoraba, ahogó sus gritos —los que arranca a una virgen el dejar de serlo. Con el llanto que le resbalaba en silencio, con los suspiros que la vecindad del espasmo le procuraba, todavía besó a su inmolador en amante pago de lo que la había hecho sufrir, y en idolátrico renunciamiento femenino, se le dio toda, sin reservas, en soberano holocausto primitivo; vibró con él, con él se sumergió en ignorado océano de incomparable deleite, inmenso, único, que bien valía su sangre y su llanto y sus futuras desgracias, que sólo era de compararse a una muerte ideal y extraordinaria (114).

The passage also makes the association between the sublime pleasure of erotic experience and death, the suspension of ego boundaries and the (temporary) return to the state of continuity, which occurs at the moment of climax. However, Santa's cultural context does not allow for this sacred aspect of sexuality. Filled with shame over the incident, she knows that she cannot face her mother and brothers; that they would kill her if they knew what she had done. When his battalion is reassigned, Marcelino abandons Santa without a word, leaving her heart-broken, and pregnant. Her family learns of her transgression when she suffers a sudden miscarriage. In the midst of the

life-threatening hemorrhaging that Santa suffers, Agustina's first thought is to beat her and curse her for her shameful act. The vehemence with which Santa's family expels her from this primordial paradise indicates the extent of the Christian disdain toward sexuality. They had idolized her as a virgin, but not as a sexual being. She goes to Mexico City and enters Elvira's brothel. Here again is the Christian split between virgin and whore. The very act of defloration deprives her of the spiritual significance of the virgin and impels her into a life of prostitution, a life devoted to sexuality completely devoid of any sacred context.

Unlike the rural paradise of Santa's upbringing, Nana's childhood unfolds in a poor neighborhood in Paris. She is portrayed as mischievous, precocious, and even "merdeuse" (*L'Assommoir* 264) at an early age. She is a flirtatious child, "les yeux déjà pleins de vice" (264), a detail that suggests that she was predestined for a life devoted to sexuality. Although her parents are not overtly religious, they enroll her in catechism in the hopes of curbing her lascivious behavior. Another contrast between the two protagonists is that while the virtuous Santa is adored by her family, Nana's adolescence is marked by poverty and the alcoholism of her parents. The French girl is not banished from her home for her unvirtuous comportment. Rather, she chooses to leave to escape these increasingly unbearable circumstances (376-78). Thus, Zola attributes Nana's entrance into prostitution to biological and environmental causes, two of the hallmarks of his naturalist doctrine. While Nana tends to wield her sexuality as a means to further her own self-interests, the question of morality permeates Santa's consciousness. She has fleeting moments of remorse over her lifestyle, and even avoids ever mentioning God out of a superstitious fear. "…se aferró a no mentar el divino nombre para no profanarlo con sus labios impuros" (128). However, these thoughts, along with the religious teachings of her childhood, wane as the days go by. As the virgin and the whore cannot exist together in the same woman, she immerses herself in her new role as prostitute. Gamboa does make a reference to naturalist theory, when he ascribes a biological explanation to the facility with which Santa abandons

herself to her profession: "gérmenes de muy vieja lascivia de algún tatarabuelo que en ella resucitaba con vicios y todo" (127). However, the focus of the narrative remains on the question of morality, and the opposition of virtue and sin in this protagonist.

Where Ruiz-Tresgallo reads *Santa* as a parody of the lives of the saints, I find instead a parody of the sacred prostitute of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures. It is in this regard that Gamboa's protagonist has more in common with her literary role model. In contrast to the unavoidable Christian significance of Santa's name, Zola's protagonist bears a name with a striking similarity to Inanna, the Bronze Age era fertility goddess of Mesopotamian cultures, called Venus by the Romans in the Hellenistic period. Zola's text specifically associates Nana with the Roman incarnation of this deity, beginning with her performance in the title role of *La Blonde Vénus*, a low-brow operetta which is itself a parody of the pantheon of Gods from the Greco-Roman world. In this way, Nana is linked to pagan religions. Both novels then portray the intersection of religion and sexuality, the one Christian, the other pagan. As the reigning figure of the demimonde in her respective city, each protagonist enacts a parody of the ancient hierodule, the so-called sacred prostitute. Both Santa and Nana are acclaimed for their beauty, and venerated for their sexuality by the dandies and distinguished upper-class men that surround them.

Santa is often escorted to the restaurant/cantina El Tívoli Central by a group of *catrines*, or dandies, from the Sport Club. She is like a trophy that belongs to all of them, and they each take a turn spending the night with her. "De ahí, pues, el diario aparecimiento de Santa con sus escolta de paladines ricos, de notorios apellidos y ropas londinenses" (158). The text specifically identifies her as an idol, and her followers as the idolaters that worship her: "todos disputándose sus besos a nadie escatimados por sus labios rojos, tentadores y frescos, que se dejaban aplastar de los labios masculinos que se les ayuntaban secos, ardientes, contraídos de lúbrico deseo; todos de ella hambrientos, lo mismo el de turno que el de la víspera y el del día siguiente" (165). As a character, Santa personifies the rupture in Christianity between the virginal and sexual aspects of

the feminine divine. While Santa's brothers had worshipped her as a virgin in their rural paradise, the *catrines* in the corrupt urban center worship the prostitute.

This parody of the sacred prostitute also extends to a parody of the Dionysian mysteries, rituals that were celebrated in the ancient world with intoxicants, music, and dance. Although these festivals had an objective, to dissolve the sense of individual isolation among the participants, and restore the state of oneness with all that is, in the context of Santa's life, they merely degenerate into a frenzy of unrestrained violent impulses. There is an aggressive side to Santa that emerges in her drunken state, completely antithetical to the image of the virtuous woman that the Church and Porfirian society strive to cultivate in upper class women. She directs this violent, masculine behavior toward any man who happens to be nearby, as an effigy of Marcelino Beltrán, "aquel que le quedaba lejos, en sus borrosos recuerdos de virgen violada" (159). The pain she had experienced at the hands of the officer, his subsequent betrayal, and the rejection by her family, all of this surfaces in a fury, along with a desire to avenge her suffering. At the end of the outburst, Santa often ends up crying, "mitad de histeria y mitad de pena, sobre el hombro del varón a que pertenecía esa noche por precio fijo y voluntad propia" (160).

As Santa's admirers are the middle and upper-class men from the Sport Club, the novel also portrays the relationship between the decadent state of the ruling class and prostitution. Although in *Metamorfosis* Gamboa alludes to this aspect of porfirian society, in *Santa* this connection is central to the narrative, as it is in Zola's *Nana*. However, where Zola identifies the prostitute as the embodiment of a corrupting force that is undermining the social order of Second Empire Paris (236), Gamboa focuses on the hypocrisy of bourgeois morality in porfirian society, which creates a need for prostitution. In his previous novel Gamboa had raised questions about the troubled sexuality of both men and women in a Catholic cultural context. The Church limits sexuality to marriage, and only for the purpose of procreation. In this regard, the contradictory nature of the virgin mother, the impossibility of being both virgin and mother simultaneously,

comes into play. Within this context, all sexual activity outside of the parameters of marriage, is considered a mortal sin. Within marriage, it is an ambiguous blessing at best. If female sexuality is the root of all evil, and if the woman he loves must be virtuous, how does a man come to terms with his own sexual desires? As Elvira explains to Santa soon after her arrival at the brothel, men come to prostitutes to satisfy their sexual needs "precisamente porque [sus novias y esposas] son honradas" (83). These men come from all levels of the social hierarchy: husbands and fathers from upper class families, Catholic men and freethinkers, philanthropists and bureaucrats. The brothel system then develops as an institution devoted to satisfying the sexual needs of upper-class men, so that they can preserve the honor and virtue of their wives. Secular authorities allow the brothels to operate, but monitor the health of the prostitutes in order to prevent the spread of disease among the male patrons.

The decadent upper class is personified in the narrative by el señor Rubio, "un caballero muy fino," who falls in love with Santa and offers to take her out of the brothel and set her up as his mistress in a house of her own (134). She eventually takes him up on his offer, but they both soon become disillusioned with the arrangement. For Rubio the enchantment of his attraction to Santa wanes. He realizes that he doesn't really love her, and ends up feeling as sexually unfulfilled in his relationship with the courtesan as he is in his marriage. "Exasperado Rubio con su esposa, acababa de exasperarse con su manceba; iba de la una a la otra con la certeza de que ya habrían cambiado y alguna de las dos satisfaría lo que él venía persiguiendo" (303). This recalls Rafael Bello's disenchantment toward Amparo in *Metamorfosis*. Both male characters believe that the satisfaction of their desire for the prostitute will bring sexual gratification. But their cultural context is such that they cannot perceive the sacredness of sexuality. Instead they equate the carnality of these women with that which is base and vulgar. When Rubio compares his wife and his lover, we see the same virgin/whore dichotomy as expressed by the opposing aesthetics of Parnassianism and naturalism: "¡alabastro la una, lodo la otra!" (303). Rubio also exemplifies the

moral hypocrisy of Porfirian society in regard to sexuality: "la falsa moral burguesa practicada por Rubio desde niño" (303). He initially believes that he can compartmentalize love and sexuality. The respect that he feels toward his wife is distinct from the carnal relationship that he has with the courtesan. However, in spite of the differences in their respective social standing, Rubio finds that both women have similar emotional responses to him, and comes to realize that "–¡Entre las mujeres no existen categorías morales, sino categorías sociales. Todas son mujeres!" (303).

For her part, Santa's arrangement with Rubio does not bring the idyllic lifestyle that she had imagined. She senses Rubio's disdain for her, and begins to indulge in liaisons with other men. When Rubio learns of her infidelities, he immediately ends the relationship, and evicts her from the house he had provided. In this regard, Santa again contrasts markedly with her French counterpart. Nana's protector, count Muffat, likewise provides a house for the courtesan, yet she is dismissive toward him, and takes lovers with impunity. The weak-willed count not only tolerates her betrayals, he continues to provide for her and cater to her whims. While Nana exercises agency in her life choices, particularly in her relationship with the emasculated Muffat, Santa frequently suffers retribution for her transgressions. In Zola's novel, the prostitute is the personification of forces that undermine the social order. In Gamboa's narrative, the prostitute does not undermine the social order; she is merely symptomatic of its moral decadence. The ruling class, however, still maintains its authority. Again, Gamboa's commentary is directed toward the morality, not only of the prostitutes, but of the men who frequent the brothels.

Another passage in *Santa* that parodies the sacred prostitute is when the protagonist is chased from the temple by the bourgeois women. After learning of her mother's death, Santa goes to the temple to grieve, and pray for the matron's soul. The description of her grief again presents the opposition of body and spirit. Santa, the prostitute, feels that she is "un pedazo de barro humano, pestilente y miserable" (170), all pejorative terms that associate her with earthiness. She

raises her heart and her consciousness to contemplate the stars in the heavens, "única región de la que podía venirle alivio" (170). She is completely associated with matter, as represented by her body, and cut off from spirit. She reminisces about the primordial paradise of her childhood, from which she had been banished. When she lost her virtue, she also lost her connection to the spiritual realm. While in the temple, Santa experiences a desire to change her lifestyle. Here Gamboa describes the type of mystical ambience that we have seen in some of Nájera's narratives. Santa is moved by the sound of the organ music in the nave: "acentos de otros mundos, graves, temblorosos, sostenidos, casi celestiales, que a ella le producían bien y mal a un propio tiempo" (176). She is aware of the split between virgin and whore, as she alternately experiences the hope of being pardoned, which recalls the repentance of Mary Magdalene, and the certainty of being punished. The sensation of well-being prevails and Santa then experiences an ecstatic state in which she senses the nearness of God. "Santa, en éxtasis, pidió mentalmente la muerte, olvidada de su vida y de sus manchas. Morir ahí, en aquel instante, frente por frente del Dios de las bondades infinitas y de los misericordiosos perdones" (177). There is an association between mysticism, ecstasy, and death, all states that transcend the physical, and restore the continuity of being. This is reminiscent of the writings of Spanish mystic nun, Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582), in which she described her own ecstatic states in meditation, as well as her desire for death as a means to be united with God (*Vida* 187-88).

In typical Christian narratives, Santa's mystic experience in the temple would be the point at which the prostitute renounces her sinful lifestyle, and vows to devote herself to God. In other words, rather than a parody of the lives of the saints, Santa's story up to this moment is the very narrative that is recounted in hagiographic literature. However, this conversion does not happen for Santa. Her enchantment is broken, as much by the rationality of modernity as by the Christian opposition of religiosity and sexuality. She is chased from the temple by the sacristan, at the insistence of a group of bourgeois women: "una media docena de damas principalísimas –

presidentas, secretarias y tesoreras de no sé qué cofradías" (177). Here again is the hypocrisy of the upper classes and their values in regard to sexuality. Not only is there no place for her sexuality within the Church, Santa is even denied the opportunity to repent.

THE MASCULINE DIVINE

Where Rubio represents the decadent ruling class in porfirian society, there are two other significant male characters in the narrative, who each represent a different aspect of the masculine divine in pagan religions: the Spanish bullfighter, El Jarameño, and the blind pianist at Elvira's brothel, Hipólito. El Jarameño represents a sacred aspect of masculine sexuality, which transcends the banality of the bourgeois and upper class clients. He is described as exuding both strength and seductiveness, "…con esa misma fuerza que se mostraba apenas y prometía un apoyo hercúleo, primitivo, bestial" (136). He is not a typical client in the sense that his interactions with Santa are not strictly a business transaction, not limited to the commodification of sexuality. Instead, there is almost a courtship that takes between the matador and the prostitute. He toys with Santa, draws her close, and then releases her with an air of disdain, as if he were doing the same kind of choreographed movements that he would perform in the bullring. For her part, Santa is attracted to El Jarameño, but she's also afraid of him. Her pride is wounded by the detached attitude he displays toward her (139).

There are several passages that reveal the divine aspect of El Jarameño. The first of these describes how he would often arrive at El Tívoli with his own entourage of *banderilleros*, *picadores*, and *mozos de espada*, followers and servants who would treat the matador with "singular estimación y respeto" (161). The *cuadrilla* would make a boisterous and triumphal entry, eliciting admiration from both men and women throughout the restaurant (162). El Jarameño and his followers are portrayed as the exotic Other, representatives of a culture that is

distinct from bourgeois porfirian society. They reminisce about their homeland in Andalucía, and often break into spontaneous performances of the *cante jondo*.

> El menos desafinado de la cuadrilla rompía el canto y los demás rompían a jalearlo con los bastones sobre el piso, con las "cañas" sobre el mármol de la mesa, con palmas, olés y palabras cortadas […] Todos cantaban, alternados, en una especie de junta sentimental y poética; […] después, posesionados de nostalgias, cerrando los ojos al brotar de sus gargantas los versos intensos, para mejor verse por dentro de lo que por dentro les bullía y ahogaba (162-63).

As a bullfighter, El Jarameño merits the adoration of his people, not only those of his entourage, but also the other peninsular expatriates at the boarding house La Guipuzcoana where he lives. The residents there also treat him with reverence: "Se entronizó; era el cuerno de la abundancia, fuente inagotable de gracejo y la alefría de la casa" (227). "Era mucho hombre; […] lo adornaban magníficas prendas" (227). There is also the passage that describes the ritual of the matador, as he prepares for the bullfight, in which even Santa is in awe of him. There is a pagan connotation to her observation of the beauty of his nude body. "Y Santa, aunque sin hablar, lo admiró en su belleza clásica y viril del hombre bien conformado" (239). There is a sense of awe in the descriptions of the various articles of clothing that make up the *traje de luces* (240-41).

The mystique of El Jarameño emerges from the very symbolism of the bullfight itself, which has pre-Christian origins. In the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean and Fertile Crescent regions, the bull was a sacred symbol of potency, a symbol of the male god. In the second millennium BCE, the bull was the major cult object of the Canaanite god El, and his son, the thundergod Baal (Gadon 175). The bullfight also has the connotation of sacrificial rituals of so-called primitive societies, the objective of which is to quell internal violence within the community and restore harmony (Girard 8). In addition to these characteristics, the text also reveals the syncretism of pagan and Christian symbols by the inclusion of a makeshift altar that El Jarameño has set up in his room, dedicated to the Virgen de los Remedios. Like a priest performing a sacred ritual, the matador lights the candles on the altar, and kneels in silent

contemplation of the image before he leaves to go to the bullring. The candles remain lit until he returns safely. Although the pagan significations of the bullfight may not be consciously present in its modern manifestation, they are part of a mythological reminiscence that, along with the reverence that the *peninsulares* extend to El Jarameño, presents this character as a rival deity to Santa.

When El Jarameño takes Santa out of the brothel, to live with him at la Guipuzcoana, the two reenact the ancient ritual of the sacred marriage, the coupling of Astarte and Tammuz, the female deity and her consort. In the depiction of the consummation of their relationship, the text describes how the duality of the sacred and the profane is restored.

> El Jarameño y Santa, al fin, otorgábase el don regio de sus mutuos cuerpos, de sus mutuas juventudes y de sus mutuas bellezas. Oficiaban en el silencio y en la sombra, rompiendo el silencio con el eco difuso de los labios que encuentran otros labios o que recorren toda una piel sedeña y dulce que se adora hace tiempo; […] Y del amor que se desperdiciaba por los resquicios, se llenó, transfigurándose La Guipuzcoana entera, como si invisibles manos compasivas la incensaran pausadamente, totalmente, y desterraran vulgaridades, envidias, codicias, cuanto de ordinario formaba su oxígeno respirable. No eran Santa y el Jarameño una meretriz y un torero aguijoneados de torpe lubricidad que para desfogarla se esconden en un cuarto alquilado y ruin, no, eran la eterna pareja que entonaba el sacrosanto y eterno dúo, eran el amor y la belleza. ¡Oficiaban!
>
> Doña Nicasia [la dueña de la casa] se apartó respetuosa, cabizbaja, grave, como se aparta uno siempre de los lugares en que se celebran los misterios del nacimiento, del amor y de la muerte; ¡los misterios augustos! (232).

In this context, Santa is no longer a prostitute, at least not in the modern sense. In this relationship, she is not selling her body like a commodity. Rather, her body recovers its sacredness. With the *catrines* at El Tívoli, she appears as a parody of the sacred prostitute. In this passage, however, she is the hierodule. Even with the preponderance of Catholic dogma that permeates his literary œuvre, Gamboa captures in this passage the intersection of religiosity and sexuality. But this only lasts for a brief time.

In her life with him at La Gipuzcoana, the admiration that is bestowed on El Jarameño eclipses Santa's former status as the religious idol. She soon becomes bored with this honest

lifestyle. This coincides with Bataille's observations on sexuality within marriage, that when the sex act becomes licit, it loses its transgressive nature and becomes banal (Bataille 123-24). One Sunday when the matador is at the bullring, Santa sabotages her relationship with him by seducing Ripoll, one of the other residents at the boarding house. El Jarameño walks in on them, and becomes enraged. He throws a dagger at Santa, but misses and instead hits the image of the Virgen de los Remedios hanging on the wall: "–¡Te ha salvado la Virgen de los Cielos!... sólo Ella podía salvarte… ¡Vete!, ¡vete sin que yo te vea!, ¡sin que te oiga!... ¡vete!... porque si no, yo sí me pierdo…" (247). Although the sacred prostitute is saved by the Virgen, the rupture of the feminine divine into the opposition of sexuality and spirituality is still in place. The Prostitute and the Virgen are not equals in this scenario because the former has no power. Thus she is subordinate to the Christian icon of chastity. Santa is rejected by El Jarameño for her betrayal and is banished from his realm. Just as she had been chased from the Christian temple, she is chased from this pagan temple. For a brief time, the sacredness of her body had emerged. But once again the sacred and the profane are divided into irreconcilable realms.

The other significant representative of the masculine divine in this narrative is the blind pianist Hipólito. There are aspects of this character that associate him with both matter and spirit. This lower class man embodies male sexuality as a base impulse, in contrast to the troubled morality of the middle class Rubio, or the divine eroticism of El Jarameño. The text describes Hipólito as "un sátiro impenitente" (129), with a "temperamento vicioso de fauno" (182). These statements refer to the mythological half goat/half human creatures, called satyrs by the Greeks, and fauns by the Romans. In the ancient world these woodland divinities whose powers were linked to sexuality, the fertility of nature, and the abundance of the earth, were often depicted as followers of Dionysus. In the Hellenistic era, the satyr/faun came to symbolize lust and lasciviousness. This figure appears frequently in *modernista* literature and visual art, as the personification of unrestrained male sexuality. Displaying a particular affinity for these creatures,

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the Mexican symbolist artist Julio Ruelas (1870-1907) often rendered them, as well as other mythological beings, in paintings, drawings, and illustrations for the *Revista Moderna* (Figure 4.1). By characterizing Hipólito as a satyr/faun, Gamboa's text associates him with sexuality as an animal instinct. Developing an affectionate friendship with the novice prostitute, Hipólito becomes like a mentor to Santa in the world of vice in the brothel. The text describes him as having "experiencia de veterano en libertinaje" (129), and characterizes his counsel to Santa as "la cátedra del pervertido de Hipo" (135), underscoring again his salaciousness.

In addition to his base sexuality, Hipólito is also connected to the crudeness of matter by means of his grotesque appearance, which the text emphasizes repeatedly. When he first appears in the narrative, he is introduced as a man "mirando sin ver con sus horribles ojos blanquizcos, de estatua de bronce sin pátina" (88). This descriptive phrase is repeated throughout the text, like a refrain, whenever the narrator refers to this character (128, 142, 256, 330, 338). Although the phrase compares him to a statue, this is not in the Parnassian vein of idealized form, but rather, the antithesis of that aesthetic. He is a statue of bronze, rather than elegant materials such as porcelain or marble. This description adds to the sense of baseness already established in this character.

Rubén Darío's short story "El sátiro sordo" (*Azul* 162-67) maintains the polarization of spirit and matter by identifying the title character as a denizen of the forest and emphasizing characteristics of lasciviousness and savageness. In addition, the satyr in Darío's narrative is denied the transcendent pleasure of music when the god Apollo renders him deaf (162). In

contrast to this, Gamboa attributes to Hipólito two aspects that associate him with spirit, despite the ignoble physiognomy of his appearance. One is his blindness, which links him to the invisible realm. The text at various times describes his capacity to "mirar sin ver," as if he had the capacity to "see" reality on a different plane; as if he had the capacity to "know" certain aspects of reality, even though he cannot see physical forms. Hipólito is also linked to the transcendent realm by means of his role as a musician.

Gamboa based this character on a musician and composer he knew in the capital, Teófilo Pomar (c.1860-1890), who performed in dance halls around the city. Like Nájera in his articles on the life of Juventino Rosas, Gamboa renders a literary portrait of the musician in his memoir *Impresiones y recuerdos*, noting the contrast between the boisterous energy of the people who attend the dances, and the melancholy of the pianist. His description of Pomar depicts a man who is content in the dream state, but agitated in the physical realm where he must perform. And yet when he begins to play, the pleasurable sounds of his music contrast markedly with his outward appearance of discomfort. While playing, he is then transported back to that intangible realm. In his friend, Gamboa notes the intersection of music, sadness, and passionate love: "sus últimas producciones estaban impregnadas de melancolia, era la melancolía suya que se le iba a los dedos, que no podía dominar" (96). It was these very attributes that attracted the writer to the musician: "me he detenido siempre, ante un hombre que llora; y a Pomar le vi llorar, una madrugada en que juntos salimos de uno de los bailes semanales" (94). Gamboa drew upon some of the characteristics of his friend to construct Hipólito.

The duality of spirit and matter in Hipólito is evident in the contrast between the pleasurable sound of his music and his grotesque appearance. Even Santa perceives the tension between the idealized form of spirit and the crudeness of matter, qualities that are both present in Hipólito, when she observes: "¡Qué lindamente tocaba y qué horroroso era!" (88). The text repeatedly emphasizes Hipólito's ugliness, including the reaction to him by other prostitutes: "no

podían menos de confesárselo en los momentos supremos del espasmo, asustadas de él: '–¡Qué feo eres, Hipo, qué feo!'" (182). And yet, when the narrator describes one of Hipólito's waltzes, there is a sense of elegance and beauty in the evolution of the melody, its movement through the various rhythms and the association between these and emotions.

> La primera parte del vals brotó de las manos del ciego, acompasada y voluptuosa (131).
>
> La segunda parte del vals, mucho más alegre y ligera que la anterior, se escapaba de los amarillentos dedos de Hipólito, que la perseguía por entre las teclas enlutadas y blancas del piano (131).
>
> La tercera parte del vals, lenta, desfallecida, melancólica, se esparció por los ámbitos de la sala del prostíbulo (132).
>
> La coda del vals se extendió rítmica y quedamente en el teclado (133).

At the end of the waltz, the narrator compares the final notes to death, linking music to the transcendental realm, and the return to the state of continuity. "El vals, de retorno a su primera parte, moría y era sepultado en las teclas por las manos de Hipólito, acentuando los compases finales…" (134). In a later passage the narrator also makes a reference to the Wagnerian association between music and emotions, in the vein of Nájera's novella "Juan el organista" (*Cuentos completos* 261). After falling in love with Santa, Hipólito becomes jealous whenever she is with a client. As he is playing the piano, he imagines what the client might be doing to her at that moment, and his intense emotions merge with the music. "No tocaba entonces –aquello no era tocar–, con movimientos titánicos hacía que las notas aullaran y maldijeran, improvisando arpegios enlazados que resultaban danza de un extraño sabor, que quizá subirían al cuarto excomulgado a arrullar a la pareja en los desfallecimientos mudos de la carne satisfecha" (183).

Hipólito's love for Santa is the only constant in her life. He is an advisor and a confidant to her. After she learns of her mother's death, he comforts her and arranges for her to spend the night in a hotel, away from the brothel. He cares for her when she is ill. Most importantly, he remains steadfast in his devotion to her, even when she takes other lovers, and when she is rejected by those lovers, and when she is no longer welcome in the elegant brothels. For her part,

Santa feels affection for the blind pianist, but not erotic love. However his unwavering faithfulness eventually reaches her heart, and she comes to love him at the end of her life. The relationship between the two is analogous to the Christian mystic path, that is, the yearning of the soul to achieve oneness with God. Although he does express sexual desire for her, his love for her transcends the mere satisfaction of instinctual drives. "Santa antojábasele diferente, de pasta distinta… reputábale inasible y domiciliada en regiones quiméricas de bienaventuranza y ensueño" (182). Thus Hipólito's love for Santa is both sexual and spiritual, which is a manifestation of the traits associated with both spirit and matter that are inherent in this character.

As the narrative unfolds, the lives of the two characters –Hipólito, in his desperation to be united with the object of his desire, and Santa, as she plunges further into *los bajos fondos*, the underworld of vice and crime–, parallel certain aspects of the stages of spiritual perfection on the Christian mystic path.

THE MYSTIC REDEMPTION OF SANTA

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the three states through which souls pass in their journey toward Christian perfection are the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way. The purgative way is the state of spiritual novices who struggle to resist the temptations of passions and evil inclinations. In this state, they perform acts of self-mortification and self-abnegation in order to purge themselves of their sins and cleanse their soul. Souls in the state of the illuminative way have their greater passions better under control, but still struggle with lesser, venial sins. In this state the mind becomes more and more enlightened as to spiritual things and the practice of virtue. The unitive way is the state of grace of those souls who have drawn their minds away from all temporal things. This is the state of perfection in which the soul is united to God in love (Devine). Although it's true that, throughout the narrative, Santa and Hipólito are identified with vice, and that neither of these characters is actively pursuing this state of Christian

perfection, the dénouement of their story reveals similarities with this process. Both characters achieve a state of grace and redemption from their sinfulness. Given the intimacy that they ultimately find in their relationship, this state reveals the erotic undertones of Christian mysticism, a remnant of the ancient duality of the sacred and the profane.

The narrative highlights the tension between spirit and matter by suggesting at various points that Santa's life is subject to the forces of nature. Each time she is rejected by someone, she senses that her life is controlled by those energies that exist outside of herself. When she is chased from the Christian temple by the bourgeois women and the sacristan, she confides to Hipólito: "–Si parece que me empujan y me obligan a hacer todo lo que hago, como si yo fuese una piedra y alguien más fuerte que yo me hubiera lanzado con el pie desde lo alto de una barranca" (180). After she is banished from La Guipuzcoana by El Jarameño, she justifies her betrayal of the matador by resolving to abandon her spirit to those impersonal forces, in the same way that she had already abandoned her body. She likens her sexuality to the flowing of a river, which can be tranquil or, under stormy conditions, destructive. There is no moral judgment of the river; it just flows under whatever conditions are present in a given moment (254-55). When Rubio evicts her from the house he had bought her, the text describes Santa's rapid social decline. It was as if Rubio had gained some superhuman strength that sent her hurling into an abyss (306). It is this rejection that precipitates her descent into illness, alcoholism, and poverty. As Santa is associated with sin through the prostitution of her body, her body in turn is associated with disease, and ultimately death. Thus there is a correlation here between Santa's sexuality and the destructive capacity of nature. Sexuality, along with everything that is associated with matter and physicality, is portrayed as corrupt and corrupting.

Santa had been plagued by pneumonia and other unnamed illnesses for quite some time when she leaves Elvira's brothel the second time. The text suggests, although it doesn't state directly, that she had contracted syphilis (316). After her failed relationship with Rubio, her

physical ailments become increasingly painful, and she begins drinking heavily as a form of self-medication. She also turns to the remedies offered by *curanderas* on the outskirts of the city: "la magia y el ocultismo, las frases portentosas, los quietismos, las invocaciones diabólicas de enmarañado sentido, las herejías y las impiedades, cuanto daña el espíritu sin aliviar la carne" (317). Here the text makes a reference to folk practices of Mexican spiritualism. The narrator expresses disapproval of these practices and casts doubt on their effectiveness. This reflects the disapproval of the clergy toward popular religious practices. Although these methods at times alleviate some of Santa's symptoms, her illness persists.

As clients no longer solicit her for fear of contracting her disease, Santa becomes caught in a downward spiral. She descends to lower levels of the underworld, until she ends up in a decrepit house on the outskirts of the city. The narrator describes the image of a saint in the hallway, "la imagen en fotografía de un santo, clavada con tachuelas en sus esquinas, rodeada de flores de papel, luciendo dos o tres exvotos de plata enmohecida" (326), as being almost sacrilegious, given its sordid surroundings. Here again is the division between the sacred and the profane. Although one would think that the residents of this locale would have the greatest need to call on the divine to intercede on their behalf, the narrator depicts the presence of this saintly image as an impropriety. In the same way that Santa, the prostitute, does not belong in the sacred space of the temple, the sacred icon does not belong in the profane and miserable house of vice. This decrepit house is where Santa ends up, destitute, impoverished, her body ravaged by illness, which has escalated to the point that she can no longer bear for her clients to touch her. Finally, she sends word to Hipólito, for him to come and take her out of this place.

In his obsessive desire for Santa, Hipólito enacts the "noche oscura del alma," that is, the period of desolation on the spiritual path, as described by the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591). The very blindness of the character is indicative of the 'dark night,' the metaphor for the suffering that the soul experiences in the material world, mourning the

absence of the divine. At the same time, there is still the sexual component to Hipólito's desire. Each time he goes to rescue Santa at some dingy, disreputable hotel where she has just entertained a client, his carnal desire for her escalates, at which point he acts out the role of the satyr, and refers to her as the pagan religious idol:

> –¡Yo!, ¡yo! –gritaba–, ¡alguna vez yo, que me muero por usted! ¡Yo, Santita, sea usted compasiva, que si más aguardo, no me tocará nada! Todos pasan sobre usted, Santita, como si fuera una piedra de la calle…¿yo yo, que la idolatro, oigo el tropel y con eso he de saciarme?...No Santita, así suceda lo que suceda… ¡Hoy paso yo!... (321).

The phrase "me muero por usted" recalls the verses of Teresa de Ávila that describe the suffering of the soul imprisoned in matter, who desperately desires the union with God that can only come in death: "Vivo sin vivir en mí / y de tal manera espero, / que muero porque no muero" ("Villancicos" 121). In this way Hipólito's love for Santa is both sexual and spiritual. Gamboa's narrative thus highlights the erotic undertone that is often present in religious experience, notwithstanding the Christian polarization of these two domains.

For her part, Santa eventually comprehends the depth of Hipólito's love for her. She wants to reciprocate, but is so immersed in sinfulness, "tan manchada y sucia" (322), that she feels tainted and therefore unworthy of such a profound love. "–¡No, Hipo, por Dios! Es usted demasiado bueno y no merece que yo me le entregue como estoy. ¡No, le digo a usted que no"! (321). No longer repulsed by his grotesqueness, it is her own self-loathing that prevents her from drawing near to him. "Quería dársele después de una interrupción en su degradado vivir, que medio la limpiara y medio hiciérala digna del amor del pianista que, al cabo, esplendía por sobre las negruras de su despeñamiento, igual a antorcha de salud, a estrella celeste que le garantizaría perdón, descanso, olvido" (323). Her desire to purify herself before being intimate with Hipólito parallels the purgative way of the mystic path, transforming the musician into a personification of the divine.

When Hipólito rescues her from that last decrepit house, and brings her to his home, the text depicts the inner peace that Santa experiences, similar to the religious ecstasy of the Christian union of the soul with God. "Echóse Santa en brazos de Hipólito, cegada por la llama de aquel amor que, lejos de extinguirse, trazas llevaba de perdurar hasta la muerte de quien lo nutría o de quien lo inspiraba; quizás hasta después, más allá de la muerte y del olvido" (336). Here again is another reference to Spanish mystic literature, this time the poetry of Juan de la Cruz, when he depicts God's love as an eternal flame: "¡O llama de amor viva, / que tiernamente hieres / de mi alma en el más profundo centro!" (310). This also corresponds to the enlightened state of the mind in the illuminative way of the mystic path, in which Santa's love for Hipólito transforms his ugliness into a spiritual beauty.

> Muy impresionada, veíalo Santa, sin reparar ya en la fealdad de su adorador último, antes descubriendo en ese propio rostro infamado con la triple marca de la viruela, del padecer y de la miseria moral y material en esos ojos blanquizcos de estatua de bronce sin pátina, una hermosura extraña, un atractivo de persona martirizada, que ha apurado hasta las heces, solitario y mudo, el cáliz amarguísimo de todas las desgracias (338).

There is an element of religious devotion when Santa bows before him: "una onda formidable de piedad la acercó a Hipólito, la prosternó a sus plantas, abrazada a sus rodillas" (338). For his part, Hipólito quells the unrestrained sexuality of the satyr that he had displayed earlier. He acknowledges Santa's physical ailments, and is more concerned with getting medical treatment for her.

> –Tienes razón, mi Santa, estás enferma y yo lo olvidé, perdóname y duerme, ¡pobrecita!, me basta con tenerte aquí… Sí, acostada en mi brazo… así, Santa, así… ¡descansa, duerme! Indudablemente fue aquella noche la más casta que nunca tuvo Santa, purificada por el dolor, que no le daba punto de sosiego, y saturada por el amor de Hipólito, que ni se movía, para ver de proporcionarle la quietud que a una demandaban el cuerpo enfermo y el espíritu no muy sano de la muchacha (341).

The intimacy that Santa experiences with Hipólito in these passages is a chaste intimacy, in contrast to the eroticism, the integration of the sacred and the profane that characterized her union with El Jarameño. Hipólito's love for Santa ultimately transcends sexuality, and rises to a more

noble level of spiritual love, in keeping with the Christian polarization of the sexual and the spiritual. The depth of his devotion, however, does not suffice to save Santa's physical body, ravaged by cancer. In spite of the efforts of modern medicine, she ultimately succumbs to the illness.

Hipólito buries her in the cemetery at Chimalistac, as per her request. Thus, in death she not only returns to the state of oneness with all that is, she also physically returns to the primordial paradise of her childhood. Hipólito wants to pray for her, but wonders if he can, if his prayers would be effective given the depth to which both he and Santa had been immersed in sinfulness.

> De rodillas junto al sepulcro, resistíase a orar… ¿Qué eran ella y él?... ¡Ah!, ahora sí que veía, veía lo que eran: ¡ella, una prostituta, él un depravado y un miserable! Sobre ella habíanse cebado los hombres y las concupiscencias; hallábase manchada con todos los acoplamientos reprobados y con todas las genituras fraudulentas; había gustado todas las prohibiciones y todo lo vedado, inducido al delito, sido causa de llantos y de infidelidades ajenas… Él no andaba mejor librado, y los dos habían vivido en todos los lodos y en todas las negruras, fuera del deber y de la moral, ¡despreciados y despreciables! (361).

He comes to understand that God would accept them both, even if bourgeois society continued to reject them: "Dios recibe entre sus divinos brazos misericordiosos a los humildes, a los desgraciados" (362). He then recites a Hail Mary for Santa's soul. Hipólito's love for Santa then extends into death, and inspires him to repent for his sins. Santa's physical body dies, but her soul is redeemed by a transcendent love. In this way the narrative ends with a sympathetic tone and the hope of Christian redemption for both of these characters. This redemption, however, is contingent on the renunciation of their sexuality. In this way, the novel upholds Catholic values and maintains the opposition of body and soul.

Although Gamboa's novel is typically characterized as naturalist for its frank depiction of the decadence of the upper classes and the sordidness of the underworld, the undertone of morality and Catholic virtues that permeates the narrative is antithetical to Zola's theoretical doctrine regarding the objective, scientific observation of society. The sentimental and religious

conclusion of *Santa* contrasts markedly with the dénouement of *Nana*, whose protagonist continues to enact the parody of the sacred prostitute to the end, while the men around her are spinning out of control. In the penultimate chapter, count Muffat discovers his mistress in bed with his father-in-law, the marquis de Chouard. The text describes her extravagantly ornate bed as her altar, "un autel d'une richesse byzantine, digne de la toute-puissance de son sexe" where she lays "dans une religieuse impudeur d'idole redoutée" (451). Muffat is horrified and devastated at the sight of this scene. Having tolerated multiple infidelities from his mistress, he can no longer continue in this way, and implores God to relieve him of his suffering. He is the one character in the novel who turns to religion as the antidote to his lust for Nana. However, Zola does not idealize this as a redemptive or uplifting experience. Muffat has merely changed religion, and transferred his worship of Nana to the worship of the Christian God, "avec les balbutiements, les prières et les désespoirs, les humilités d'une créature maudite" (453). [with the stammering, the prayers, and the despair, the humbleness of a cursed creature.] In this context, religion does not appear as a viable solution to the ills of modernity, but rather another form of irrational behavior on the part of the decadent upper class.

Like Santa, Nana also ultimately succumbs to disease, the small pox virus that she contracts from her child. However, in contrast to the mystical ecstasy that Santa and Hipólito experience, there is no sacred significance to Nana's death. As the other courtesans mourn her passing and keep vigil over her body, there is a sense of anxiety in the room regarding the finality of death, the Nitzschean concept that there is no purpose to this existence. The passage depicts the decay of Nana's body as a biological process, again associating sexuality with disease, and with corruption and rotting matter.

While both narratives address aspects of social corruption in modernity, each author regards the decadence of his respective society from a slightly different point of view. In Zola's text the prostitute appears as a symptom of the breakdown of social order in Second Empire Paris.

In Gamboa's novel she is portrayed as a victim of the immorality of porfirian society. By reaffirming Catholic values in *Santa*, Gamboa never resolves the question regarding the tension between sexuality and religiosity that he raised in *Metamorfosis*. The narrative does not critique the cultural context that dooms Santa to a life of prostitution, circumstances that were set in motion by her seduction at the hands of an older man. When she dies, she is the repentant prostitute in the vein of Mary Magdalene, the image in Christian iconography that the Church allows to fallen women, while still denying them the creative power of their sexuality. The narrative proposes a return to Catholicism as the means for relieving the suffering of both Hipólito and Santa. This reiterates Fray Paulino's proposal in *Metamorfosis* that a return to the values of the Church would resolve the *mal del siglo*, the ills of modern society. Gamboa continues this trend toward upholding orthodox Catholicism in his next novel, *Reconquista*, which addresses the tension between religion and positivism in porfirian society, as wells as the intersection of art, religion, and nationalism in Mexico at the turn of the century.

Chapter 5: Art, Religion, and Nationalist Concerns in *Reconquista*

In *Reconquista* (1906), Gamboa presents a protagonist who embodies many of the characteristics and values of the *modernista* intellectual. But this character also has a specific social agenda for his creative expression. Although the novel promotes an idealized aesthetic in art and literature, it explicitly rejects the concept of *el arte por el arte*. The protagonist, Salvador Arteaga, maintains throughout the story that art should be used in the service of the Nation. In terms of the search for the divine in this narrative, there are two tendencies that emerge: one is the modernista perspective on art as a spiritual process, the other is Salvador's return to Catholicism as a means to transcend the suffering that he experiences in the material realm. This implies a return to the institutions of the former colonial social order as vehicles for improving the lives of the masses and consolidating national identity.

There has not been much scholarly study done on *Reconquista* (1906). With the exception of Robert J. Niess' 1946 article, which compares this work with Émile Zola's novel *L'Œuvre* (1886), critics generally mention this novel only briefly when considering Gamboa's literary production as a whole. Most of these references agree on two points: that *Reconquista* is an autobiographical story and that *L'Œuvre* had served as a model for the narrative (Hooker, Menton, Niess). The similarities between the two novels are readily apparent. In both narratives the protagonist is an artist, Claude Lantier in *L'Œuvre*, and Salvador Arteaga in *Reconquista*. Each one has a friend and confidant who is a writer, Pierre Sandoz and Julián Covarrubias respectively. Both protagonists are dissatisfied with the conventional, academic art of their respective cultures, and both hope to achieve a revolutionary artistic ideal. Finally, each one sets out to create a grand canvas that will encompass thematically the spirit of the metropolis in which he lives –Paris for the first, Mexico City for the other– and both are equally frustrated by their inability to achieve their artistic objective. The autobiographical nature of each of these novels is

represented in the duality of the protagonist artist, and his friend, the writer. In *L'Œuvre* Sandoz is constructed on the basis of the author's own characteristics, and he often recites many of Zola's principles of literary naturalism (66-67, 191-92). Claude's struggles as a painter are also reflective of the author's anxiety over the creative process. In *Reconquista* Covarrubias often engages in debates with Salvador over religious and secular questions. In these discussions he, like Sandoz, verbalizes much of the author's own doctrine, in this case, religious doctrine (1048-49). In addition, the spiritual evolution of Salvador is a fictional rendering of Gamboa's own downward spiral and his subsequent "reconversion" to Catholicism.

The protagonist of *Reconquista* is the recently widowed artist Salvador Arteaga, who is raising two young daughters. He receives a coveted professorship at the Academia de San Carlos, the national art academy which had been the center of fine art education in Mexico since the late colonial period. In regard to his own artistic production, Salvador has a grand vision for a master work that he hopes will capture the cultural essence of Mexico, but finds himself unable to realize that vision and becomes increasingly frustrated by this inability to achieve his artistic ideal. He begins to frequent the taverns in the city with other artists and writers, an activity which soon turns into excessive indulgence in alcohol. His drinking escalates to the point that he sabotages his closest relationships, as well as his career. He spends much of the narrative debating the validity of religious precepts, first with Covarrubias, later with his fiancée Carolina and his daughter Magdalena. After many discussions, and continued artistic and economic struggles, Salvador affirms a new religious faith, returning to the teachings and practices of Catholicism as the remedy for his suffering. The novel promotes a return to the teachings of the Church for the protagonist's personal redemption, and by extension, for the well-being of the nation. The narrative also reflects the author's own 'reconversion' to Catholicism a few years prior.

The formative experience of the fictional Salvador was common to many intellectuals of Porfirian society, including Gamboa himself. As a child in a provincial town, Salvador had been

raised in the Catholic Church. But upon moving to the capital he came under the influence of the secular, positivist education system. Gamboa's protagonist is one of the *científicos*, a young man indoctrinated in the positivist world view and immersed in the secular sphere of the modern city. In the same way that Comte had identified stages in the evolution of human societies, Salvador regards his religious upbringing as his "período teológico," which he will leave behind as he enters the positivist phase, founded on the perspective of "una sana razón [y] un criterio científico" (934-35). However, in spite of the secularization of society by the liberal State, the Catholic Church continued to be an influential institution, and Porifiro Díaz himself initiated a conciliatory policy toward the Church. The tension between these two ideologies is present throughout the narrative of Reconquista. Even though Salvador had abandoned his former religious beliefs, and had come to regard them as childhood illusions which no longer served a purpose, the narrative reveals that these religious teachings persist in his psyche, to the extent that he is constantly debating the validity of secular versus religious principles.

SECULARIZATION AND THE *MODERNISTA* AESTHETIC

The narrative presents the secularization of society in pejorative terms, describing the city as "la gran ciudad, pecadora y viciosa", a place that has a corrosive effect on provincial religious beliefs. The text denigrates the entire liberal educational project, ridiculing modern ideas as cheap, but also denouncing the destructive effects of these teachings.

> Pero si su cuerpo [de Salvador] no sufrió mutaciones perjudiciales, cosa distinta acaecióle a su espíritu: todas las ideas hechas y baratas –¡sobre que la instrucción oficial y laica es gratuita!– de las escuelas superiores a que concurría, ideas demoledoras e iconoclastas ¡no una sola creadora!..., fueron incrustándosele y modificando su manera de ver y de pensar. ¡Cómo derribaban, Señor Dios! ¡Cómo echaban abajo, de un azadonazo verbal e imaginativo, el edificio de sus creencias, tan sólido al parecer, tan inconmovible! (930)

Salvador initially supports the secularization of society and the changing status of the Church brought by the anti-clerical reform laws, such as the restrictions on Church property, and the closing of convents. But there is a negative tone in the way the narrator presents this topic, calling

the destruction of convents and churches the work of "piquetas revolucionarias" (1103). Even though the protagonist initially embraces these modern and secular philosophies, the narrator's criticism of these ideas suggests that the religiosity of Salvador's childhood, "la íntima y enraizada creencia en Dios," is still present, even if just below the surface of his consciousness (931). This latent religiosity becomes channeled into Salvador's artistic philosophy.

In his inaugural address to his students at the Academia de San Carlos, Salvador expresses his aesthetic doctrine in terms that convey the principles of Parnassian *l'art pour l'art*. His rhetoric also presents art as a new religion for the modern era, an idealistic conception of art and beauty, as well as a messianic message of salvation. Salvador "ascendería, acabaría la dificilísima ascensión de la escala santa, seguido de unos cuantos enamorados del arte, […] de los pocos discípulos que resultasen artistas de verdad y a pesar de lo ingrato del medio, por alcanzar el ideal en las regiones misteriosas y serenas donde palpita, resueltos lo persiguieran" (956). As Nájera had done earlier in "El arte y el materialismo," Salvador's monologue associates art with the sacred realm, incorporating biblical references such as "la escala santa," an allusion to the image of Jacob's ladder as a means to ascend into heaven. The passage also conveys the romantic notion of the artist as one who has a special sensitivity to art, and he will be followed only by those students who share this vision.

After guiding the students into the heavens, Salvador then proposes to lead them to "una isla encantada." Although this is an earthly realm, it is an exotic place, not the mundane material world. This language of enchantment and exoticism is characteristic of Spanish American *modernismo*, rather than the detached, impersonal, scientific observation of reality promoted by naturalism. As Salvador continues his speech, he makes another religious reference: in order to arrive at that exotic place, one needs to have faith. He idealizes the Spanish conquest of the Americas, which is of course the origin story of modern Mexico, and compares the adventurous

nature of the conquistadores to the restless spirit of the artist who is not content to remain comfortable amid the banality of bourgeois society.

> Tales embarcaciones, sin embargo, siempre arriban, porque el piloto que las conduce es la Fe y no admite a su bordo sino a los creyentes y a los bravos; porque son las carabelas históricas, las de los nautas heroicos, las tripuladas por los descubridores y conquistadores de los mundos nuevos, que llegan siempre y descubren y conquistan las tierras de riqueza y de ensueño… (957)

This comparison constructs an image of the romantic artist as strong and vigorous, the antithesis of the sorrowful, melancholic male hero that one typically finds in romantic literature. Salvador doesn't critique the motives or the consequences of the colonial enterprise, but instead idealizes the actions of these men who venture out toward unknown lands. But once they have conquered, those that come after them settle into a comfortable existence, a status quo that inhibits the creative spirit. In this critique of the superficial values of bourgeois society, Salvador makes a reference to a French Renaissance novel by François Rabelais (c.1494-1553), specifically the third in his series on Gargantua and Pantagruel, *Le tiers-livre du bon Pantagruel* (1546).

> …después se instalan los de Panurgo, la masa, los gobiernos, los sabios oficiales, los enriquecidos… Y entonces, hay que embarcarse una vez más ¡donde la masa penetra el arte muere! Hay que llegar a la isla encantada que huye de las multitudes bárbaras… Y la peregrinación perdura, perdurará, es la perpetua cruzada para ir a defender y rescatar la Belleza, grande y eterna… (957)

The reference has to do with a passage in which Panurge, a rogue and a libertine in Rabelais' novel, throws a sheep into the sea and an entire herd of sheep blindly follow the first. The critique here is not directed toward the exploitive nature of the colonial enterprise, but toward the insular, small-minded masses that populate the colony once it is established. As they settle into a comfortable existence, a cultural complacency sets in. At that time the noble spirit must venture out again to another exotic land.

Along with the lofty idealism of Salvador's rhetoric in these passages, there is also an undertone of positivism in his discourse; the protagonist's insistence on continuously expanding the boundaries of creativity connotes an evolutionary process. What results in the speech is an

eclectic layering of romantic elements, Parnassian aestheticism, religious references, and Mexican history, all expressing a disdain for bourgeois values. Salvador's inclusion of religious imagery highlights the continued influence of his religious upbringing, even as he claims to have abandoned those beliefs.

The transcendent imagery that Salvador uses in expressing his artistic doctrine constructs a concept of art as a new type of religion in modernity. He rejects the teachings of his Catholic upbringing and instead turns toward the scientific and philosophical currents of his positivist education. But in spite of his claim to atheism, his artistic philosophy is filled with religious imagery. The worldview that had been instilled in Salvador at an early age is still an integral aspect of his psyche, even if he wants to dismiss those teachings as antithetical to modernity. He expresses a concept of art as divine, a creative process that is intangible, and originates in a realm beyond rationality. The language of Catholicism is a familiar cultural construct for Salvador, and he uses that language to speak about creativity.

Salvador's speech expresses ideas similar to those found in José Enrique Rodó's (1871-1917) *Ariel* (1900). In this essay, Rodó utilizes characters from Shakespeare's tragicomedy *The Tempest* (c.1610-11) to outline his vision for Latin American culture. In Rodó's text, an elderly and wise professor, called Próspero by his students after the sorcerer in Shakespeare's play, addresses a group of students in a similar manner as that of Gamboa's Salvador. In highly idealistic rhetoric, Próspero expounds the superiority of idealized aesthetic form over utilitarian materialism, represented by the spirit Ariel and the monster Caliban respectively:

> Ariel, genio del aire, representa, en el simbolismo de la obra de Shakespeare, la parte noble y alada del espíritu. Ariel es el imperio de la razón y el sentimiento sobre los bajos estímulos de la irracionalidad; es el entusiasmo generoso, el móvil alto y desinteresado en la acción, la espiritualidad de la cultura; la vivacidad y la gracia de la inteligencia –el término ideal a que asciende la selección humana, rectificando en el hombre superior los tenaces vestigios de Calibán, símbolo de sensualidad y de torpeza, con el cincel perseverante de la vida. (1)

The profesor emphasizes the value of a transcendent artistic aesthetic and the love of idealized beauty as "un motivo superior de moralidad el que autorizaría a proponer la cultura de los sentimientos estéticos, como un alto interés de todos" (17). These ideas are extensions of the doctrine of art for art's sake, the philosophy of the aesthetes. But Rodó adds a social agenda to the rhetoric. He regards these values as inherent to Latin American culture in contrast with the materialist culture of the United States. While Rodó associates Caliban with Anglo-American culture, in postcolonial theory Caliban is often adopted as a metaphor for exploited indigenous peoples in conquered lands. This is another parallel between Rodó's text and Gamboa's novel. As the Uruguayan intellectual associates Latin American culture with the transcendent Ariel and denigrates Caliban as the embodiment of base materialism, he is also expressing the perspective of the Eurocentric *criollo* class in the hemisphere during the post-independence era.

Like Rodó's Próspero, Salvador Arteaga expands on his artistic doctrine to include social objectives, toward which he believes art should be directed. In fact, the protagonist specifically rejects the concept of art for art's sake, and declares unequivocally that the lofty ideals he ascribes to art should be used for the benefit of society, to help the impoverished, disenfranchised masses.

> Yo aborrezco el arte estéril, no creo en la doctrina de "el arte por el arte", no, no creo, jamás creí; y si fuese verdad yo no sería artista, sería cualquiera, una unidad silenciosa, una partícula trabajadora de la multitud. Yo amo el arte viril, sacerdote y apóstol; el que lucha por hacerse escuchar de los desheredados de este mundo; […] Yo amo el arte que sin menoscabo de su majestad, se simplifica para que lo comprendan las muchedumbres encadenadas a las desigualdades seculares y a los abusos y despojos milenarios; […] Yo amo el arte que con la peña esculpida perpetúa la memoria de las hazañas y de los héroes… (1092-93)

In this passage Salvador equates the doctrine of art for art's sake with sterility and femininity. It is a veiled critique of the ambiguous gender identity of the *lagartijo*, the Mexican dandy. As we saw in Nájera's "Mi inglés," the effeminate image projected by the aesthetes, was one that did not coincide with an idealized robust masculinity, one of the cornerstones of national identity in

Mexico. Here Gamboa's protagonist values the romantic notion of art and the Parnassian aesthetic as emblematic of modernity. But he rejects the feminization of the artist which often accompanies aestheticism. In the same way that Salvador masculinizes the image of the romantic hero by equating him with the conquistador, he does the same with artistic principles in general, hence his preference for a virile art. In addition to this, he again uses religious terminology to describe his ideal art: priestly and apostolic.

Salvador's social agenda for his art is evident when he describes his concept for a master work, a grand painting that will capture not only the essence of the metropolis, Mexico City, but of the entire Nation. His objective is to capture on canvas "el Alma Nacional," the national soul of Mexico, an image that will encompass the centuries of Mexican history since the time of the conquest.

> Magna de veras: nada menos que perpetuar en la tela la vieja ciudad colonial de los virreyes hispanos, no sólo en su aspecto de metrópoli que lentamente se moderniza y hermosea, sino en el de su fugitiva fisonomía moral, su alma de siglos y de luchas —alma en la que por muy común inconsecuencia creía Salvador firmísimamente, aunque no creyese en cambio en la suya propia. (958)

Salvador identifies the source of the soul of Mexico as residing in the colonial era. He speaks of the centuries of struggle that have contributed to the evolution of the metropolis, but only since the time of the Spanish viceroys, effectively excluding the centuries of the indigenous civilizations of Mexico in the pre-conquest era. This nostalgia for the viceregal metropolis, together with Salvador's romantic idealization of the conquistador and the persistence of religious authority, as embodied in a 'priestly and apostolic' art, all of this is antithetical to Salvador's championing of progress and modernity. This reactionary undertone to Salvador's vision notwithstanding, at the heart of the narrative is his inability to integrate his social agenda with his aesthetic ideals: "Pero el asunto huíale, se le escapaba más de entre los pinceles que del cerebro fevricitante" (960). The text attributes this frustration to the abandonment of his former religious beliefs. In the passage above, the narrator hints at the discrepancy between Salvador's firm belief

that the nation has an all-encompassing soul, even though he doesn't believe in the existence of his own soul.

In an effort to arrive at a more profound understanding of the national soul, Salvador takes to wandering the city at night. He becomes the *flâneur* who takes possession of the city with his gaze. He also becomes the positivist observer of the people and places in the city, even though what he is searching for is something intangible, in the realm of symbolist art, rather than realist. In his search for the images that will inspire him, Salvador critiques the city as he wanders. He abhors the 'Europeanization' of Mexico in the form of "pseudo-palacios ostentosos, 'villas' recargadas y deformes, incómodas viviendas burguesas, cursis y sin solidez…" (963). He regards this type of architecture as simply following European fashion. Salvador also contemplates the social ills of the urban center. Like the omniscient narrator in Nájera's short stories and chronicles, and Fray Paulino in *Metamorfosis*, Salvador meditates on the miserable conditions of the underclass in the impoverished neighborhoods, and notes the stark contrast between these and the elegant residences of the wealthier districts (964-65). However, in contrast to the friar's religious solution to urban ills, Salvador proposes a secular agenda. Although he does not include the Church in his vision of modernity, he upholds the Eurocentric perspective of porfirian society, which maintains the colonial social order. He believes that the salvation of the masses lies in European modernization. He believes that the goal of intellectuals should be to bring western culture to the masses, to educate them, and dress them in modern European clothing. He berates the *criollo* class, not for being culturally elitist, but rather for neglecting what he sees as its responsibility to "civilize" the people. He believes that bringing European culture –not just literacy, but also painting, sculpture, and music– to the masses will alleviate poverty (964-70). This is the agenda that he envisions as the antidote to Mexico's social and economic problems. But he's still searching for the soul of Mexico. His intent in using western models is to use them as instruments, not to create an imitation of Europe, but to construct a modern national identity in

Mexico. Unfortunately, these nightly wanderings do not bring him closer to producing his grand canvas, but instead lead him back to the urban nightlife of artistic circles.

In his depiction of Salvador's "correrías nocturnas," Gamboa presents the bohemian aspect of the *modernista* intellectual, in the spirit of Baudelaire's exhortation in the prose poem, "Enivrez-Vous" (1867) to transcend the rational realm by any means possible, including, but not limited to the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs "de vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise" (*Spleen de Paris* 152). However, Gamboa's narrative does not idealize this lifestyle, but instead portrays the toll that alcoholism takes on Salvador's life, work, and spirit. Although the protagonist had once frequented the taverns more regularly, while he was married he had made an effort to curtail his indulgences. Now recently widowed, he feels a sense of freedom to return to that nocturnal lifestyle, and interact with other like-minded artists, writers, and musicians. Although initially, when Salvador begins meeting up with these "intelectuales militantes" in the taverns, he considers it to be a harmless activity, an opportunity to discuss and debate current artistic and social philosophies with other intellectuals, and in turn be inspired by the dialogue. But this activity soon turns into habitual indulgence in alcohol. "Las horas corrían tan de prisa como las espumas de la cerveza vertida que se apagaban y convertían en hilos blondos, sobre los mármoles de las mesas" (973). Rather tan a source of inspiration, these excesses in vice soon become a distraction that prevents him from achieving his artistic vision: "Lo que a los pocos días pintó –de seguir frecuentando el cenáculo de la cervecería– fue su propio descenso espiritual" (975), and eventually send him into a social and economic decline. This ultimately interferes with all of his objectives: political, social, as well as artistic. His drinking escalates to the point that he loses his teaching position at the academy, he jeopardizes his relationship with Carolina, and he loses both of his daughters –one marries and moves away, the other enters the convent. While in a drunken stupor, he falls from a cliff in Chapultepec Park, but miraculously survives. It is during

his convalescence that Covarrubias begins to persuade Salvador to reevaluate his abandonment of the religious beliefs of his childhood.

As Zola based the protagonist of *L'Œuvre* Claude Lantier on artists that he knew in Paris, most notably Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) and Edouard Manet (1832-1883) (Cook-Gailloud; Philonenko), it is likely that Gamboa may have also modeled his protagonist on some of the artists in Mexico City's *modernista* circles. In terms of Salvador's alcoholism, Gamboa may have drawn on some of the life circumstances of the symbolist painter and illustrator Julio Ruelas. Like Salvador, Ruelas frequented the German taverns in the city, where he drank heavily, and on several occasions jeopardized his teaching position at the Academia de San Carlos as a result of his excesses (Conde 20-21). These aspects of Ruelas would have figured into Gamboa's construction of Salvador's bohemian lifestyle, but not his artistic doctrine. In contrast to the nationalist agenda of the fictional artist, Ruelas created images that are intensely personal. He was one of the decadent artists whose work Gamboa found to be disturbing. In a diary entry from 1897, the author wrote this description of Ruelas and his art:

> Está Julio Ruelas, un dibujante educado en Alemania, taciturno y talentoso, aunque con un talento que si no todos comprenden desde luego, sí á todos hace sufrir; es esencialmente un atormentado. Sus dibujos parecen ideados por el Dante, Edgar Allan Poe ó Baudelaire; son siempre cráneos perforados por picas retorcidas; mujeres que sonríen mientras á su vista se despedazan los cortejos enfurecidos; sujetas con cadenas implacables, madres desventuradas que presencian cómo canes hambrientos y flacos devoran á sus hijos, florecillas de carne sonrosada que patalean y lloran ante las dentelladas feroces; artistas que se arrojan á simas de infierno y de desesperanza; una obra que lo sobrevivirá, que lastima la vista y el espíritu pero que revela gran posesión de la técnica é imaginación á todas luces excepcional y alta. (*Mi diario* 2: 39-40)

While the author acknowledges Ruelas' skill as a draftsman, he is disconcerted by the haunting images. Many of these are illustrations that appeared in the periodical *Revista Moderna*. Two examples of them are drawings that Ruelas created to accompany Jesús Valenzuela's poem "Piedad" (Figure 5.1) and Amado Nervo's "Implacable" (Figure 5.2). The central image in both

FIGURE 5.1
"Piedad" (1904)
Julio Ruelas
Ink on paper, 8 x 4¾ in.
Morillo Safa Collection

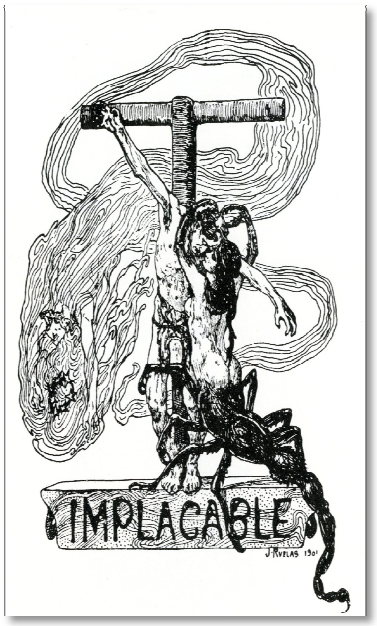

FIGURE 5.2
"Implacable" (1901)
Julio Ruelas
Ink on paper, 6½ x 4¾ in.
Morillo Safa Collection

drawings is a tortured figure of the crucified Christ in a space imbued with erotic tension. In "Piedad" a beautiful woman with a serpent sits at the foot of the cross, while an otherworldly specter hovers over the Christ figure. In "Implacable" a strange creature that is half woman and half spider embraces the Christ and takes him down off the cross. Despite the fact that Gamboa found this type of imagery to be unsettling, Ruelas depicts in these examples the same questions that Gamboa has raised in his narratives regarding the anxiety that emerges from the intersection of religiosity and sexuality. Nevertheless, the artist/protagonist of *Reconquista*, speaking on behalf of the autor, denounces this style of art as "el arte de los neurópatas, de los exquisitos, de los raros" (1093).

In terms of Salvador's subject matter, the nationalist theme that he projects for his masterpiece reflects a cultural dynamic that was prevalent in the capital at the turn of the century. Many artists at that time were making a shift away from the cosmopolitan style of their formative years, toward images that would reflect an inherently Mexican content. Two of Ruelas' colleagues at the Academia de San Carlos, Germán Gedovius (1867-1937) and Alfredo Ramos

Martínez (1871-1946), and others like them, could very well have contributed to Gamboa's construction of his protagonist. Ramos Martínez in particular was urging his students to leave the confines of the studio in order to explore the people and places around them in the city, and in countryside, in order to create uniquely Mexican images. It would be this younger generation of artists who would eventually achieve the fictional Salvador's objective of infusing their canvases with "el alma nacional de México." In Gamboa's narrative, however, Salvador himself is unable to create the grand work that he envisions. He is unable to access the transcendent realm that is the source of creativity, and continues to feel thwarted in his artistic process. As his frustration escalates, his life circumstances continue to deteriorate. As a means to alleviate his suffering, Salvador makes a decision to return to the Catholicism of his youth, rejecting the materialism of bourgeois society, as well as the scientific basis of positivism.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SALVADOR'S RECONVERSION

We have seen previously, in Nájera's short stories and articles, as well as Gamboa's novel *Metamorfosis*, that Catholicism was increasingly limited to the domestic sphere, the domain of women and children. In *Reconquista* Gamboa maintains that opposition between religiosity and secular society by portraying the female characters in the novel as having an active role in Salvador's reconversion. The significant women in his life, his deceased wife Emilia, who is present in his memory, and his *novia* Carolina are both represented in the text as virtuous and devoted to their religious practices. His two daughters Magdalena and Evangelina together personify the Christian opposition between the spiritual and the physical that we have seen in both *Metamorfosis* and *Santa*; with the exception that here Gamboa presents both of these young women in a positive light. Each one adopts one of the socially acceptable roles for women in a Christian culture: virgin and mother.

Magdalena is instinctively drawn to the metaphysical realm from an early age. She is fascinated by the religious stories told by the children's nanny, and soon develops her own religious practices and rituals: "A mística tiraba Magdalena […] diose a la compra de novenas y triduos, que compungidamente barbotaba de rodillas junto a su cama colgada de medallas, rosarios e imágenes" (970). When she grows up she decides to enter the convent and devote herself to God. There is a certain irony in the fact that Gamboa named this virginal, spiritual character after the repentant prostitute of Christian iconography, the inverse of giving the prostitute of his previous novel the name of Santa. Notwithstanding the connotation of her name, Magdalena does not exhibit any indications of sexuality. In this character, Gamboa maintains the opposition between religion and sexuality, as Magdalena does not struggle to repress any erotic impulse that would conflict with her religious calling. The question simply never arises in regard to this character. The narrative portrays her as content and at peace with her life in the convent without any of the unpleasant undertones of physical desires.

Evangelina, on the other hand, is associated with the material world. She shows no interest in saints or prayers, but instead displays an inquisitive nature toward the physical realm. She is a physically active young girl, given to running, jumping and exploring the natural world around her. But even as the text associates her with matter, in contrast to her spiritual sister, Gamboa does not equate her with sinfulness. Rather she represents the secular option available to women in Mexican culture at that time: the role of wife and mother. She is not asexual, but her sexuality is not emphasized. The significant aspect of this character is that her sexual expression is limited to the role that is approved by the Church and society, which is the conjugal relationship and procreation. Gamboa portrays both these young women as virtuous, each in their respective realm.

Salvador's relationship with Carolina also reaffirms the cultural taboo against female sexuality outside of marriage. She is a humble but honorable working woman. Although she does

feel the temptation of desire, she is able to restrain that impulse and remain pure, at least until she becomes engaged to Salvador. In a moment of weakness she gives in to his seductive embrace. Even though Salvador really loves Carolina, and intends to marry her, after the seduction, she becomes tainted in an indefinable way. He withdraws from her partly out of shame for his transgression. But he also blames her, as the virtuous woman cannot be sexual at the same time. As we saw in the previous two novels, the cultural restrictions on female sexuality are as problematic for men as they are for women. Nevertheless, Salvador feels remorseful over having seduced and abandoned Carolina. The narrator is sympathetic to her dilemma, and presents her as an essentially "good" woman who experiences a moment of weakness. But there is still a tone of morality in regard to female sexuality outside of marriage. Carolina regrets her failing and throws herself all the more into her religious practices. After she and Salvador reunite, she remains steadfast in her refusal to be intimate with him again until their union is sanctioned by the Church. After they marry she tries to persuade Salvador to see the value of religious practices. In his debates on the topic, he presents the arguments of anti-clerical liberals. Toward the end of the narrative, Salvador begins visiting Magdalena in the convent. Through their conversations he ultimately comes to perceive the validity of religious beliefs.

These passages portray the ethereal, mystic mood of the sacred spaces that we have seen in Nájera's "La primera communion" and "El vestido blanco," as well as Gamboa's *Metamorfosis* and *Santa*. Salvador is moved by the ambience of the convent as soon as he arrives. The description of the convent's orchard alludes to the pre-Christian relationship between nature and religiosity: "un huerto […] que ostentaba muchas más flores, muchos más árboles corpulentos y añosos secreteándose druídicas historias indescifrables" (1111). Salvador then hears religious music, "arpegios errabundos de órgano distante, armonías dulces de voces femeninas" emanating from a chapel (1111). When he sees his daughter, he is in awe of her "acentuada belleza mística" (1113). Salvador's attraction to this sacred space exemplifies one of the options that Baudelaire

lays out in "Enivrez-Vous" as a means for transcending the physical realm: vertu, the cultivation of a religious experience that allows one to escape from the confines of ego boundaries, and return to the state of continuity.

Although Salvador is intrigued by Magdalena's choice of lifestyle, he is not ready to let go of his current secular worldview, and he continues debating the rhetoric of secularization versus the benefits of the serenity that he perceives at the convent, and in Magdalena's demeanor. On one of his visits, he finally asks her to speak to him of God, underscoring again that religion in Porfirian society is the domain of women. The text characterizes her rhetoric as unsophisticated and child-like. But her naiveté somehow enhances the depth of the truths that she speaks: "la creencia católica en todo su sencillo esplendor prístino, sin dudas, sin impiedades, sin blasfemias" (1117). Salvador leaves these conversations "transfigurado." He clearly wants to return to his previous religious beliefs, but he needs to be convinced of their validity through rational arguments. He finally comes to believe, simply because he wants to believe.

> Este esfuerzo de su voluntad lo aleccionó, sobraba con querer; ¡él quería creer, y creería! ¿No cuando las tesis antirreligiosas y los escepticismos y descreimientos que las escoltan se adueñaron de él, hubo necesidad de no prestar oídos a los pensamientos creyentes que lo asaltaban, de repudiarlos con voluntad enérgica, pensando en otras cosas?... Pues con análogo procedimiento, rechazaría ahora cuanto se opusiera a la reflorescencia de la fe, que pugnaba por anidársele de nuevo. Se zanjaba el conflicto, sencillísimamente –que en el batallar de las conciencias no puede haber medio distinto– creemos lo que queramos creer… (1120-21).

What is significant about Salvador's reconversion is the either/or binary that he sets up for himself. In order to return to the teachings of the Church, he must by necessity renounce the liberal principles of secularization, as well as the scientific perspective that is inherent in positivism. He makes a conscious choice to relinquish one worldview, and embrace instead its opposite. Although religiosity brings him relief from his suffering, it also implies embracing the conservative political stance of the Church.

It is evident from some of Gamboa's diary entries that Salvador's reconversion is a fictionalized account of the author's own return to Catholicism. Between 1897 and 1902 there are several passages that recount his own struggles with overindulgence in vice, including an affair with a married woman (*Mi diario* 2: 31-37, 54-56) and other liaisons, while on diplomatic assignment in Guatemala, which almost cost him his position (*Mi diario* 3: 144-146). Some of these entries are ambiguous as to the extent of his inappropriate conduct. But the entry that recounts his official return to Catholicism, in January of 1903, is quite specific.

> 23 DE ENERO. —Esta noche me he operado de las cataratas de mi espíritu.
>
> Al cabo de mucho meditarlo, y convencido de que sólo en el seno de Dios debemos refugiarnos, desengañado, —ya era tiempo, — de todos y de todo, convencido de que el Eclesiastés tiene razón, de vuelta de muchas tempestades y siniestros, que pudieron y debieron haberme aniquilado moral y materialmente, con más canas por dentro, de las muchas que ya blanquean mi cabeza, viejo prematuro, retorno de bonísimo grado a mi fe infantil, la que no razona ni discute, la que cree totalmente, simplemente, eternamente, la que consuela y levanta, la que promete y sana…
>
> Y fuí y me confesé con el P. Labastida, Prepósito de la Profesa; un sabio varón, mi amigo y compañero de Academia (*Mi diario* 3: 210-211).

Thus, the romantic idealism of Salvador Arteaga's reconversion is not as implausible as it might seem, but is instead a literary rendering of Gamboa's own experience. What is significant here is that, for the author as well as for the fictional character, there is no room for compromise between secular and religious ideologies. The novel implies that Salvador either has to abandon his religious beliefs if he accepts the positivism, or denounce his secular education in order to embrace Church doctrine in its totality. Gamboa's search for the divine led him back to the religion of his childhood. As he still qualifies this faith as childish, it still remains separate from the public, masculine sphere. But he embraces this "fe infantil" anyway, without questioning.

RELIGIOSITY AND CREATIVITY

The thesis of *Reconquista* is that the loss of religious doctrine and the adoption of the skeptical ideas promoted by positivist philosophy are the obstacles to Salvador's ability to realize

his artistic goals. The text mentions the influence of the pessimistic German philosophers, such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. There is a specific reference to Shcopenhauer's doctrine of "el Genio de la Especie" (1014), or Will, the mindless force in the universe that propels animalist impulses which override reason. Salvador also wrestles with Nietzsche's concept of annihilation in western culture, the concept that there is no purpose to our existence: "Salvador por mucho tiempo creyó en ese aniquilamiento total" (1116). The narrative suggests that these philosophies, as well as Salvador's rejection of Catholic doctrine, are what prevent him from carrying out the grand work that he envisions. However, his free will triumphs over determinism in the optimistic ending of the novel. Although Salvador's reconversion is highly idealized, the narrative recounts Gamboa's own intellectual/spiritual evolution, a renewed religious faith that conflicts with the positivist world view. As we saw in the comparison between Santa and Nana, the sentimental dénouement of Reconquista departs emphatically from Zola's naturalist doctrine. Comparing the outcome of Salvador with the fate of Claude Lantier, in *L'Œuvre* we see that Gamboa's novel comprises a response to some of the French author's main points regarding the preeminence of scientific objectivity.

In Zola's preparatory notes for *L'Œuvre* he attributes Claude Lantier's artistic failure to a biological cause inherited from the Rougon-Macquart family line. "Ce qui le rend impuissant à se satisfaire [c'est] sa physiologie, sa race, la lésion de son œil" (*L'Œuvre*, "Notice" 434). In true naturalist fashion, the author gives a scientific explanation for the artist's frustration, and his subsequent decision to take his life. In the final chapter, as Pierre Sandoz is contemplating his friend's inability to achieve artistic satisfaction, he blames the pessimism of the era, a veiled reference to the German philosophers, for Claude's tragic end, but also finds fault with the nostalgia for religion as a contributing factor to the artist's unhappiness.

> C'est une faillite du siècle, le pessimisme tord les entrailles, le mysticisme embrume les cervelles; car nous avons eu beau chasser les fantômes sous les grands coups de lumière de l'analyse, le surnaturel a repris les hostilités, l'esprit des légendes se révolte et veut

> nous *reconquérir*, dans cette halte de fatigue et d'angoisse […] il me semble que cette convulsion dernière du vieil effarement religieux était à prévoir. Nous ne sommes pas une fin, mais une transition, un commencement d'autre chose… Cela me calme, cela me fait du bien, de croire que nous marchons à la raison et à la solidité de la science… (404-05). (Emphasis added.)
>
> [This is a failure of the era, pessimism twists the entrails, mysticism clouds the mind; though we have done well in chasing away phantoms under the harsh light of analysis, the supernatural has resumed hostilities, the spirit of legends rebels and wants to *reconquer* us, while we are halting with fatigue and anguish […] it seems to me that this last convulsion of the old religious terrors was to be foreseen. We are not an end, but a transition, a beginning of something else… It calms me and does me good to believe that we are marching towards reason and towards the soundness of science…] (Emphasis added.)

Although religious concepts did not plague Claude Lantier, as they had for Salvador Arteaga, Zola's text nevertheless makes the same association between imagination and religiosity that Gamboa later makes in his novel. But for Zola this link between art and the divine is Claude's fatal flaw. The artist's inability to maintain the role of the detached, scientific observer of society is the source of his frustration. Zola's text links romantic idealism with superstition and religion, everything that is antithetical to a scientific world view. The passage also presents the lingering religiosity in western culture as a potential threat to the comfortable stability that, in Sandoz's view, the scientific method provides. He believes that scientific progress will continue to move forward in spite of the 'religious backlash,' that attempts to reconquer the society that has moved on beyond the theological stage of development.

What is revealed in these two dénouements is thesis and antithesis. In the passage from *L'Œuvre* cited above, Zola uses the word *reconquérir* to describe what he perceived to be a reactionary trend, that the persistence of idealism in art signified an attempt by a religious worldview to recover its influence over western culture. It is highly probable that Gamboa used this passage as the point of departure for his own novel, not only because he called it *Reconquista*, but because his narrative essentially responds to the points that Zola lays out in the monologue by Sandoz. Where Zola's narrative ends with a funeral, Gamboa's novel begins with a

funeral –the interment of Salvador's recently deceased wife, Emilia– and ends with an affirmation of the creative spirit. Where Sandoz finds comfort in science and blames idealism for the death of his friend, Salvador rejects positivism and finds relief from his suffering in religious ideals. Although Zola did not consider determinism to be synonymous with fatalism (*Œuvres complètes* 1190), his novel ends on a fatalistic note: "Allons travailler" Sandoz says to Bongrand (Claude's mentor) after the two bury their friend. After recounting the anxiety that pervades the life of the artist and the writer, there's nothing else to do except to continue working. Gamboa's novel ends after Salvador's reconversion, at which time he associates faith with the creative process: "¡Creer, Crear!" he says, creating a refrain with these two phonetically similar verbs. He too will go to work, but not with the same sense of stoic resignation that emanates from Sandoz's final words. Having let go of the scientific world view, Salvador is inspired to now ascend to the divine realm that he spoke of earlier, a romantic and optimistic dénouement to say the least. Thus, the idealism that dooms Claude Lantier is precisely what saves Salvador Arteaga.

In *Reconquista* Gamboa again upholds the validity, and even necessity, of Catholic values in modernity. In doing so, however, he also renounces the liberal and secular agenda for bringing Mexico into the twentieth century. The novel had initially proposed that the urban artist and intellectual, as personified by Salvador, could play a vital role in regard to questions of national leadership during this period of modernization in Mexico. As his return to Catholicism signals the abandonment of his support for the processes of secularization, it also implies reinstating the influence of the Church. This is an extension of Salvador's nostalgia for the vice regal era, his tendency to look back toward history, rather than forward, in his search for the national soul of Mexico. This is also a reflection of Gamboa's own conservative political stance. He had after all championed the perennial presidency of Porfiro Díaz, and later, after the Maderista Revolution, supported the military coup of Victoriano Huerta, as did other conservative Catholics (Menton 8).

Salvador's social agenda for art reflects many of the propositions that a group of young intellectuals in Mexico City was setting forth at the time that Gamboa was writing this novel. These were the founders of the *Revista Savia Moderna*, many of whom would later form the intellectual group el Ateneo de la Juventud. This younger generation of intellectuals, Antonio Caso (1883-1946) and José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) among them, would take on the cause of bringing education to the masses. This would be one of the objectives of the Ateneo in the forthcoming revolution. However, rather than looking back to the colonial era, they would look forward. Rather than reinstating the prestige of a colonial institution, that is the Church, they would look to the arts, as the *modernistas* had done before them. In adopting this focus, these younger writers and artists would break from the *criollo* obsession with European cultural forms, turning their focus instead to México. And Saturnino Herrán (1887-1918), one of the artists who contributed to the *Revista Savia Moderna*, would eventually achieve the objective of the fictional Salvador Arteaga. He would find in the mestizaje of Mexico, the mixing of races and cultures, the "alma nacional" that had eluded Gamboa's Eurocentric protagonist.

An example of Herrán's dualistic conception of Mexican culture is a series of sketches he created in preparation for a mural project. Although he died before he could carry out the plan, the sketches themselves demonstrate his intent to embrace both the indigenous and the Hispanic cultural currents that contribute to the formation of modern Mexico. Entitled *Nuestros dioses*, the project consists of two horizontal panels and one vertical panel in the center. The left panel portrays a procession of indigenous people bringing gifts to their gods (Figure 5.3). The right panel shows a similar arrangement of Spaniards bringing offerings to the Christian god (Figure 5.4). The two groups meet at the center panel, Herrán's rendering of the Aztec deity Coatlicue with a Christ figure embedded in the drawing of the idol (Figure 5.5). In this way Herrán sought to depict the merging of the two races, forming what José Vasconcelos called the "raza cósmica".

FIGURE 5.3

Nuestros dioses, indígenas (Left panel) (1915). Saturnino Herrán
Watercolor and crayon on paper, 22½ in. x 5 ft. 9 in.
Museo Nacional de Arte, México, D.F.

FIGURE 5.4

Nuestros dioses, españoles (Right panel) (1915). Saturnino Herrán
Watercolor and pastel on paper, 22½ in. x 5 ft. 9 in.
Museo Nacional de Arte, México, D.F.

FIGURE 5.5

Coatlicue y Cristo (Center panel) (1915)
Saturnino Herrán
Watercolor and crayon on paper, 16 x 12½ in.
Museo Nacional de Arte, México, D.F.

The three novels presented in this study show that Gamboa's search for the divine in Porfirian Mexico led him to return to orthodox Catholicism. *Metamorfosis* suggests that the Church could have a role in relieving the ills of modern society, but questions the Christian opposition between spirituality and sexuality. The juxtaposition of Sor Noeline and Amparo in the narrative establishes the virgin/whore dichotomy of Christian culture. However, at the end of the novel Noeline comes to embody two aspects of the ancient feminine divine: virgin and lover. Gamboa's imagery in this final passage is characteristic of the *modernista* aesthetic. As the *modernistas* sought to uncover the system of universal correspondences that exists beyond physical reality (*Cuadrivio* 18), they often looked to Greco-Roman mythology of the classical ancient world as the source of those correspondences. This is not surprising, given that the polarization of spirit and matter in Christian culture is the very antithesis of an interrelationship between diverse elements. In this sense, *modernismo* as a creative movement intervenes in the doctrinal precepts of Catholicism, to express a spirituality that does not deny the sexual. This is not a minor task, given that the Church as an institution looms large over the cultural context of Spanish American intellectuals. However, what we see in Gamboa's narratives is a theological intervention in his own creative process. The outcome of *Metamorfosis* attempts to restore the unity of the sacred and the profane, but the question remains unresolved. This is partly because Noeline has to be removed from her religious tradition in order to experience her sexuality. But also Rafael's worldview cannot accommodate a woman who is both spiritual and sexual. In Gamboa's subsequent novels this theological intervention becomes increasingly solidified.

In *Santa* Gamboa constructs a narrative that parallels Zola's *Nana*, although the two protagonists are very different from each other. As in the case of Nájera, Gamboa's use of French literary models does not merely constitute an emulation of the novelists that he admired, but rather a response to those works, from the perspective of his own cultural context. The Catholicism that permeates *Santa*, in and of itself sets Gamboa's novel apart from that of his

literary role model. Here he continues examining the Christian division between body and soul. That this is a cultural construct is evident in the rendering of Santa's childhood, in which she exhibits characteristics of both, virtue and sexuality. In her culture, however, she cannot be both. While her brothers in Chimalistac worshipped Santa as a virgin, the dandies in the urban center worship the whore. The duality of the sacred and the profane is briefly restored in this novel, when El Jarameño, as a personification of the masculine divine, and Santa, as the ancient hierodule, consummate their relationship. But the predominant narrative thread is Santa's mystic redemption, which Hipólito's love allows her to achieve. Here the author reveals the erotic undertones of Christian mystic experience, thus again highlighting the tension between the religious and the sexual. But in the end he still upholds the polarization of spirituality and sexuality, and reaffirms Catholic values. There is a sympathetic tone for Santa at the end, but that sympathy is contingent on her being the 'repentant' prostitute, who renounces her sexuality.

In *Recnoquista* Gamboa returns to the *modernista* aesthetic which he envisions as an instrument for the construction of a national identity, and the promotion of social change in México. The protagonist, Salvador Arteaga, rejects the notion of creating art purely for its own sake, insisting instead that art should serve a purpose to the nation as a whole. The narrative recounts Salvador's struggles with vice, as well as his debates between the religious teachings of his childhood and his secular, positivist education. This novel constitutes a direct response, on the part of Gamboa, to Zola's thesis on the relationship between scientific objectivity and the creative process that he laid out in *L'Œuvre*. Gamboa's novel ultimately rejects the scientific basis for understanding reality, and instead reaffirms sentimentality, idealism and most importantly, Catholic values. As this is a fictional rendering of Gamboa's own return to Catholicism, the theological intervention here is much more significant. *Reconquista* not only upholds the polarization of sexuality and spirituality, it also renounces the liberal agenda for secularization. The novel raises questions in regard to improving the condition of the masses, initially identifying

the urban artist/intellectual as instrumental in that process. Salvador's vision for educating the people links Gamboa to the educational programs of the Ateneo de la Juventud in the coming Revolution. It also links his literary production to the early narratives of Mariano Azuela, a trend that would eventually culminate in the novel of the Revolution. However, Salvador's reconversion to Catholicism and his rejection of secularization implies a reactionary, rather than revolutionary, stance toward social change. In terms of restoring the divine to Porfirian society, it is clear that Salvador's, and Gamboa's, objective is to access the mystic current of Catholicism, as a transcendental element. However, to do so, he believes that he must affirm Church doctrine without question. The attempt to live by the rational dictates of institutional religion would have the opposite effect; that of keeping him rooted in the physical realm, a perspective that accounts for Gamboa's conservative political stance.

I mentioned above that Saturnino Herrán was one of the real-life artists who achieved Salvador Arteaga's objective of capturing the national soul of Mexico in his creative work. His sketches for the mural *Nuestros dioses* rightfully affirm the indigenous and the Hispanic races as equally integral components of Mexican cultural identity. Notwithstanding Herrán's insightfulness on the topic, the western opposition of spirit and matter is still present in his images. His rendering of the indigenous people (Figure 5.3) emphasizes the physicality of their nude torsos, in much the same way that Gamboa associated Amparo in *Metamorfosis* and the eponymous protagonist of *Santa* with earthiness and sexuality. In contrast to these images, Herrán portrays the Spaniards in the opposite panel (Figure 5.4) draped in robes and clothing that conceals their bodies, not unlike Fra Angelico's paintings of virgins. Although the artist's intent in creating these images was to highlight the mixing of races and cultures, they still associate the indigenous race with earth, and the European race with the Christian conception of spirit. As I turn my attention to Amado Nervo's texts in the next part of this study, I will examine how he perceives these kinds of oppositions, not only between spirit and matter, but also between

opposing discourses such as religion and science, as well as polarized notions of gender identity. Nervo, as the truly modern mystic, demonstrates an ability to disrupt these binary oppositions, attempting to integrate the fluidity of the spiritual realm into the rational framework of modern society.

PART III.

AMADO NERVO:
CATHOLICISM, MYSTICISM, AND BEYOND

Amado Nervo (1870-1919) was the most spiritually inclined of the three authors in this study. He was naturally drawn to the metaphysical realm from an early age, a penchant which developed from his cultural foundation of Catholicism. He was born in Tepic, the present day capital of the Pacific coast state of Nayarit. In an autobiographical statement, Nervo specifically associated his family with Mexico's *criollo* class, describing himself as a descendent of "una vieja familia española que se estableció en San Blas, [Nayarit] a principios del siglo pasado" (*Obras completas* 2: 1064). The ambience in his household was politically and culturally conservative. Keeping within the confines of Catholic doctrine, any books that were deemed harmful to the soul were forbidden from his home, including French romantic literature, works that contained erotic themes, and even scientific texts regarding the body and its functions. In terms of political reading material, any texts that were supportive of the liberal, anti-clerical policies of Juárez and Lerdo de Tejada were likewise banned from the family library (Monsivais 20). As he was from a *criollo* family, the world view that he developed in his formative years

stemmed from the Hispanic tradition in Mexico, rather than the indigenous. However, it is possible that he was exposed to cultural elements from the aboriginal peoples in Nayarit, primarily the Huichol and the Cora, and that some of their syncretic religious beliefs, including their views on topics such as mortality, the vulnerability of humankind, and the process of spiritual transformation, might have contributed to his pluralistic perspective on religiosity and spirituality (Durán 50-51).

Nervo spent his adolescent years in Michoacán, where he attended the Seminary of Zamora. He completed his preparatory studies there, and then enrolled in the law program. In 1891 he transferred to theology, embarking on a career path toward the priesthood (López Ordaz 36). He studied the writings of the great Christian philosophers and mystics such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), John Chrysostom (347-407), Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). After a year, however, Nervo had to leave the seminary due to his family's economic situation. Although this was the primary reason given for his decision, there was also a more personal matter that contributed to Nervo's change in plan: the tension between his spiritual calling and the erotic impulses of the body. At first he believed it was possible to renounce physical, sexual love, in order to devote himself to the divine love of God. However, the requisite vow of chastity proved to be daunting. But even after leaving the seminary his quest for a spiritual understanding of existence would remain a constant throughout his life and literary career (Monsiváis 21). What is unique about Nervo's writings on religious and spiritual subject matter is that he brings an intuitive, transcendental interpretation to these topics. Even when addressing Christian themes, he does not focus on the rational, doctrinal precepts of the institutional Church. But instead expresses a personal, subjective experience of the metaphysical realm.

Nervo began writing short stories and essays during his student years in Zamora, where he immersed himself in romantic literature. Among his earliest influences he counted Johann

Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), George Sand (1804-1876), Ángel de Saavedra, Duque de Rivas (1791-1865), José de Espronceda (1808-1842), Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870), and Jorge Isaacs (1837-1895). After leaving the seminary in 1892, he gained access to publications from the metropolitan press of Mexico City and soon became an avid reader of Nájera's prolific journalistic production, which served as his introduction to the *modernista* aesthetic (Jiménez 23). That same year, Nervo began his career as a journalist at *El Correo de la Tarde* in the port city of Mazatlán, which provided him with an even wider exposure to international literary sources, such as French magazines, and works by other prominent Spanish American writers (Jiménez 59, 66-67). During the two years he spent in Mazatlán, Nervo's prose style began moving away from romantic elements and incorporating the *modernista* aesthetic of both Nájera and Rubén Darío (1867-1916) (Cruz Mendoza 43-45).

In 1894 he moved to Mexico City, where his career as a journalist would flourish. He met and worked with many of the *modernista* intellectuals in the capital, including Nájera who became one of his mentors. He continued writing in prose and verse, articles, chronicles of the city, and narrative fiction, which he would publish in many of the city's leading journals, such as El Mundo *Ilustrado*, *El Partido Liberal*, *El Nacional* and Nájera's *Revista Azul*. From this point on Nervo's life and career would be immersed in modern urban culture, alternating between three metropolitan centers: Mexico City, Paris, and Madrid.

In terms of his literary career, Nervo has received more recognition as a *modernista* poet. The earliest studies of Nervo's work focus on the mystic essence of his verse (P. Phipps 1925, Meléndez 1926, Wellman 1936, Molina 1949, Umphrey 1949). However, Nervo's later volumes of poetry have been criticized as overly sentimental. Jorge Cuesta (1903-1942), for example, excluded Nervo from his volume *Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna* (1928), and the generation of poets and artists during the 1920's and 30's known as Contemporáneos dismissed

Nervo's work as superficial (Conway 462-63). Notwithstanding this criticism, Nervo also produced an extensive body of prose literature. His narrative fiction, primarily novellas and short stories, exhibits characteristics of decadent and symbolist literature, and his articles, chronicles, and essays treat a wide range of philosophical and religious/spiritual topics. These prose works, which have only recently begun to attract scholarly attention, reveal a more complex dimension to Nervo's literary œuvre.

Nervo's upbringing in the provinces is reflected in many of his early narratives. In fact, the author's first two novellas, "Pascual Aguilera" (1892/1896) and "El bachiller" (1895), are not typical *modernista* narratives, precisely because these stories unfold in rural settings. As modernization in Mexico was primarily limited to Mexico City and the state capital cities, the hacienda system in the provinces continued to function according to the feudal social order that had been in place since the colonial era. The land-owning class of *hacendados* was at the top of the social hierarchy, and the Church continued to be an influential institution. Thus the protagonists in these narratives are not archetypal urban intellectuals that typically appear in *modernista* prose. Chapter Six will focus on these two novellas, which portray the role of the Catholic Church in the lives of characters who are not directly affected by the technological and cultural advances of the urban centers. In these narratives, Nervo does not present a sentimental image of the Church, as Nájera had done in his chronicles and short stories. Nor does he present the Church as an institution that could have a function in modern society, as Gamboa's novels suggest. Instead, Nervo critiques fanatic religiosity, and portrays the consequences of the Church's intervention in the most intimate aspects of the characters' lives. One element that these stories share with Gamboa's narratives is the troubled sexuality of some of the characters, which results from the religious doctrine's attempt to control the powerful force at the heart of the erotic impulse.

Chapter Seven examines chronicles and articles that Nervo produced in Mexico City as well as his third novella, "El donador de almas" (1899). These texts will reveal how the author continued to pursue his mystic inclination in the context of modernity, with its emphasis on secularization, technological innovation, and materialism. The pathos and the angst that Nervo expresses in his first two novellas are absent from these later narratives. The tone of these works tends to be lighter, and often humorous. In spite of this change in mood, he still retains an air of mysticism in his portrayal of religious themes, as well as in his explorations of alternative avenues that lead toward a transcendent experience. In these works we find him developing many of the themes of French symbolism, and investigating the plurality of spiritual and esoteric currents in western culture, trends that move beyond Catholicism and allow for a more subjective experience of the divine.

Chapter 6: The Church and the Feudal Social Order in the Provinces

In contrast to the urban setting of Gamboa's novels, the narratives of Amado Nervo's early novellas, "Pascual Aguilera" (1892/1896) and "El bachiller" (1895), unfold against the backdrop of a provincial ambience. Like *Metamorfosis* and *Santa*, these stories examine the dilemma posed by the Church's division of body and soul, but in a rural setting far from the processes of modernization. As I showed in Chapter Three, Gamboa's treatment of this topic in *Metamorfosis* doesn't fully examine the impact of the religious discourse on the lives of the two main characters in the aftermath of their transgression. Nervo, on the other hand, does render a critical analysis of this dynamic in the two novellas presented in this chapter. He specifically interrogates the concept of religious passion in a Christian context, showing the interrelationship between the spiritual and sensual, as well as the destructive consequences that result from the attempt to repress the powerful force that is the erotic impulse. Again like *Metamorfosis*, Nervo's texts reveal the pre-Christian unity of the sacred and the profane, but delve further into the effects of the religious discourse that attempts to deny that unity.

The first of the two narratives presented in this chapter associates a strict adherence to religious doctrinal precepts with a lack of passion. While the devoutly religious doña Francisca de Aguilera is the embodiment Christian virtue, hers is an austere and rigid virtue. In other words, the western polarization of spirit and matter not only deprives her of erotic pleasure, it also prevents her from having a passionate religious experience. In contrast to the matron, her stepson Pascual personifies sinfulness in the form of licentious behavior. He manifests an unrestrained sexuality that is disconnected from its sacred context. A third character in the narrative, the campesina Refugio offers the possibility of restoring the ancient unity of the sacred and the profane. However, this will take place apart from the influence of the Catholic moral code. The second narrative features a male protagonist, the seminarian Felipe, who does experience both the

spiritual and the sensual aspects of mystic experiences. But again his religious tradition declares these two domains to be mutually exclusive. Both "Pascual Aguilera" and "El bachiller" ultimately expose the vulnerability of the opposition of body and soul when the erotic impulse suddenly arises from within both of the "virtuous" protagonists.

RELIGION AND TRANSGRESSION IN "PASCUAL AGUILERA"

Although "Pascual Aguilera was Nervo's first novella, written in 1892, he did not publish it until several years later, in 1896. The protagonist of the narrative is the matron doña Francisca Alonso de Aguilera, widow of don Pascual Aguilera. She lives at the family estate, the Hacienda de la Soledad, with her stepson, also named Pascual, the title character of the novella. Although he was the illegitimate son of her husband, the elder don Pascual, doña Francisca had agreed to raise him as if he were her own child. As the narrative takes place in the provinces, Nervo reveals the feudal-like social order in rural Mexico, headed by the landowning class and the Church, with the masses of *campesinos* living as serfs under the authority of the *hacendado*. As was typical for the feudal lord in this type of society, the younger Pascual is accustomed to having his way with the local women in the region. However, when the beautiful campesina Refugio rejects his advances, Pascual's frustrated sexual urge leads him to a confrontation with doña Francisca that results in tragic consequences for both the matron and her stepson. Each of these characters personify one side of the Christian polarization between virtue and sin, a split which breaks down along gender lines, as we saw in Gamboa's *Metamorfosis*. Doña Francisca is the virtuous woman who is meticulous about her religious practices, while Pascual is a licentious young man who is driven by an insatiable libido. The campesina Refugio transcends that binary opposition, as her character incorporates traits that have both an erotic and a divine connotation.

Doña Francisca, the embodiment of the charitable Christian woman, is described by the local chaplain, don Jacinto Buendía, as "una santa, una paloma sin hiel, una mujer fuerte que de

seguro se iría al cielo con zapatos y todo" (161). Her virtue is the result of the rigorous religious education that, according to the narrator, was typical for *criollo* women of her generation. Nervo's text presents a detailed depiction of what that type of upbringing entailed. The young Francisca learned the Catholic Catechism and was taught to develop a pious character. A typical day for her consisted of a structured schedule which included attending mass in the morning, praying the Angelus and the Rosary with her mother in the afternoon, and reciting evening prayers before retiring. She also learned to perform the domestic tasks required of a wife and mother. Contemporary studies on women's education in nineteenth-century Mexico confirm this to be an accurate portrayal of the topic, as the primary objective of their formation was to prepare for marriage (Carner; Giraud; Gonzalbo; Ramos). This educational process was often monitored by the clergy, with the objective of channeling sexual activity into the sacrament of matrimony and only for the purpose of procreation (Carner 100-01). Female elders in the family, who themselves had internalized the religious moral code, also contributed to this process (Ramos 153). Nervo's text makes a subtle reference to the role of other women in Francisca's upbringing when it indicates that she came from a long line of women who embodied this type of piety: "pertenecía a esa familia de matronas cristianísimas, prudentes, hacendosas y longánimas" (161). In contrast to Gamboa's depiction of the virtuous woman in his novels, Nervo's text does not idealize this archetype, but rather questions the efficacy of a rationally constructed religiosity. What we see in doña Francisca is not an idealized image of a saintly, pure, ethereal woman, content in her maintenance of Christian practices. Although she obediently complies with all of the Church's precepts, and devotes herself to performing the requisite works of charity, doña Francisca never develops any emotional depth to her religious practice. She is instead a pious and dutiful matron, whose religiosity remains within a rational framework.

Doña Francisca's adherence to the rationality of Church doctrine paradoxically deprives her of access to the divine forces of the metaphysical realm. This leaves her barren, physically

and spiritually, as well as completely devoid of passion. In her youth, Francisca had not even read the popular romantic literature of the day, such as Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1801), *Paul et Virginie* (1787), by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737-1814), or the historical novels of Walter Scott (1771-1832). However, she had been exposed to the passionate writings of the mystic saints, texts in which the interrelationship between the sacred and the profane persists, albeit in a subliminal manner. But these descriptions of exalted spiritual states did not manage to penetrate to the soul of the melancholy young woman. Nervo's text utilizes the *style indirect libre* to reveal doña Francisca's thoughts on this particular body of literature with which she is familiar. She accepts the Church's official explication of these texts, which interprets their passionate imagery as a rhetorical device for depicting experiences that are divine, unconnected to the earthly realm: "Cierto es que la iluminada de Ávila en modo tal adolecía de amor, que según las palabras del maestro Luis de León, 'el ardor grande que en aquel pecho santo vivía salió como pegado con sus palabras, de manera que levantan llama por dondequiera que pasan'" (163). This reference to Teresa de Ávila includes a quote by her contemporary, the lyric poet and Augustinian friar Luis de Leon (1527-1591), who defends the ardor in her writings as being purely spiritual. As I mentioned previously in my study on Gamboa's *Metamorfosis*, Teresa would always maintain that her depiction of the ecstatic state was a metaphor for the spiritual union between her soul and God. In the quote above, Fray Luis supports her reasoning. And yet, the eroticism in her prose is inescapable. The immovable matron, however, rationalizes this characteristic away, precisely because Teresa is a saint. As such, her experiences must, by definition, be distinct from "las pasiones mezquinas de la tierra" (163).

In her ruminations on mystic literature, doña Francisca also considers one of the legends of the thirteenth-century founder of the Franciscan Order, Francis of Assisi, concerning an exchange he had with his disciple Clara: "Cierto es igualmente que el Corderuelo de Asís se consumía en inextinguible fuego de caridad, hasta iluminar con flamígeros fulgores el cuarto en

que con Santa Clara 'departía de las cosas de Dios'" (163). As the story goes, the "spiritual passion" between the two was so great that the convent where he was visiting her burst into flames. The passage also mentions a seventeenth-century French noblewoman widowed at a young age, Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, who took a vow of chastity and adopted an ascetic lifestyle, in order to devote herself to God. "Y no menos verdadero que la 'Baronesa de Chantal' pasó sobre el cuerpo de su primogénito para seguir al Esposo, que le hacía fuerza" (163). In reference to the poetry of Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), the Baroness of Chantal regarded God as her husband throughout the remainder of her life. All of these figures have in common the presence of erotic undertones to their religiosity, revealing the persistence of the ancient unity of these two realms of human experience. Doña Francisca, however, dismisses the sensuality of these mystic legends: "transportes tales había aprendido Francisca a hallarlos justos y lógicos, puesto que se hacía objeto de ellos a la misma divinidad" (163). She is unable to perceive the link between erotic love and the ecstasy of the exalted states described by Teresa, and the other mystic saints.

As a reader of mystic literature, doña Francisca's inability to recognize the ecstasy of the mystics is symptomatic of the extent to which she represses her own passions. In this sense she is the antithesis of the title character in Gustave Flaubert's (1821-1880) *Madame Bovary* (1857). Flaubert's protagonist, Emma Bovary, like a female Baudelaire, wants to escape from the banality of her existence. She wants to feel *félicité*, *passion*, *ivresse* (94). She does read romantic literature, such as *Paul et Virginie*, and the novels of Walter Scott, and longs to live a life comparable to the lives depicted in those literary works. Emma also perceives the passion inherent in the mystic ambience of a chapel: "elle s'assoupit doucement à la langueur mystique qui s'exhale des parfums de l'autel, de la fraîcheur des bénitiers et du rayonnement des cierges" (95). [she dozed sweetly amid the mystic languor that emanated from the incense on the altar, from the freshness of the holy water and from the radiance of the candles.] However, Flaubert's

protagonist is not interested in religious doctrinal precepts. As she seeks to cultivate only those experiences that will bring her a feeling of well-being, Emma rebels against the rigors of monastic life (99). Doña Francisca, then, appears as an anti-madame Bovary. She is a woman unconcerned with flights of fancy, and instead embraces the stern discipline of her religious upbringing. As such, she is restrained within a rational austerity that deprives her of a transcendental spiritual experience, as well as the sensual pleasures of erotic love, even in her marriage to don Pascual.

The narrator indicates that for doña Francisca the question of repressing the erotic impulse doesn't arise. She simply never experiences any sentiment of romantic or passionate love, not even in private: "Jamás el simún de las pasiones conmovió su organismo, perfectamente equilibrado" (163). When she married don Pascual, the young Francisca was not in love with him. He was merely a suitable husband with sufficient economic resources to support her. She received no pleasure from their conjugal relations, and found the act to be demeaning and vulgar. But in this regard she still complied with the dictates of the Church which declared that sexual activity must be limited to relationships consecrated by holy matrimony, and only for the purpose of procreation (Seper). In spite of her repulsion toward the sex act, doña Francisca believed that, as a Mexican wife, she was obligated to comply with her husband's demands. She believed that marriage was "una sumisión incondicional a todos los ultrajes íntimos" (181). Again, contemporary studies confirm that this is an accurate depiction of the general experience of women in nineteenth-century Mexico. Once married, a woman was typically subjected to the authority of her husband, and the Church supported this subordinate status of the feminine gender. Church doctrine even states that submission and obedience were traits that God required of all women, regardless of social status (Gonzalbo 56). In the text the narrator presents a detailed account of just how degrading conjugal relations with her husband were for the matron.

> Luego el brusco despertar en los brazos de un hombre que, al querer saciar en ella sus brutales apetitos, le había hecho daño sin proporcionarle goces, no buscando jamás la coincidencia en el espasmo, inhábil para otra cosa que para hartar su hambre libidinosa de macho a costa de la hembra sumisa y resignada al martirio diario, al ofensivo alarde de un apetito siempre naciente (181).

This description coincides with what the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray identifies as a male-centered sexuality (25). Doña Francisca essentially functions as a prop for her husband to satisfy his own sexual appetite, without any regard for her pleasure. Upon the death of don Pascual, the matron breathed a sigh of relief that she wouldn't have to do that again. She could refocus her life on religious practices, works of charity and "la tranquilidad de su vida austera" (181). One more cruel irony in the matron's acquiescence to her husband's libidinous demands is that their union did not produce any children. Although the legitimate use of the sexual faculty was for the purpose of procreation, doña Francisca was unable to accomplish that objective. In terms of the relationship between eroticism and the divine realm, the asexuality of doña Francisca leaves her unable to receive pleasure from sexual relations, and also deprives her of access to the creative forces that bring forth life.

Opposite the religious and asexual matron, the narrative presents her stepson, the younger Pascual Aguilera, who, like Rafael Bello in *Metamorfosis*, embodies the traits that are associated with the violent impulses of the body, traits which the Church deems sinful. However, in contrast to Gamboa's protagonist, the transgressive behavior of this character is much more extreme. He manifests an insatiable sexual appetite that ultimately leads to destructive consequences. Unlike Rafael, Pascual does not feel any remorse for his inappropriate behavior. His only regret is that he is not able to have his way with Refugio. The narrative opens with a description of the landscape at La Soledad which makes a reference to the pagan world. The narrator compares the herds of goats grazing in the pasture to the fauns of ancient Rome, the part goat, part human followers of Bacchus (the Roman counter part of the Greek Dionysus): "los faunos caprípedos que paseaban su lujuria por los bosques de la antigüedad" (158). Here again is the figure of the faun/satyr, the

embodiment of unrestrained male sexuality as in Darío's "Sátiro sordo" and Gamboa's Hipólito in *Santa*. In Nervo's text, the reference to these creatures serves as a prelude to the introduction of the title character. At the onset of adolescence, Pascualillo begins to exhibit characteristics of the satyr, as the text indicates that he is "dominado por un erotismo salvaje" (165), thus associating him with the untamed and animalistic forces of nature. He begins acting out sexually with girls at school, displaying "los más asquerosos erotismos" (166). At home he spies on the servant women and his own stepmother when they bathe. After being informed by the schoolteacher don Estanislao about Pascualillo's repeated offenses, the elder don Pascual decides to send his son to live at the hacienda in an effort to expose him to a more vigorous lifestyle. This proposed solution recalls the pre-Christian attitude toward sexuality in the Greco-Roman world of the Hellenistic era. At that time, the restrictions that were placed on sexuality did not have the same connotation of morality that developed later in Christianity. Rather, Greeks and Romans believed it was necessary for the individual to gain mastery over the body's instinctual urges (*Histoire de la sexualité* 3: 30-34). In other words, sexuality was regarded in the same vein as any of the body's other appetites. According to this perspective, one practices moderation for the health of the body, not the virtue of the soul. By sending his son to the countryside, don Pascual hopes that the hearty, physical work of the hacienda will enable Pascualillo to gain control of his body and his actions. Don Pascual's objective for his son's development also coincides with the idealized image of masculinity that was integral to the Mexican national identity. This change in ambience, however, ultimately fails to shape the young Pascual's character. Although he does develop a penchant for hard work, in terms of his erotomania, "se tornó en poco tiempo tan montaraz como un toro bravío" (167). His promiscuous behavior continues into adulthood, and escalates to the point that it becomes even more excessive than that of his father.

The narrative offers two perspectives on the causes of the protagonist's crude behavior: biological and religious. On the one hand, the narrator suggests that the sexual excesses of the

elder don Pascual and the alcoholism of Pascualillo's birth mother could be physiological factors that contributed to his lasciviousness (168). On the other he offers an explanation based on religious determinism, with its emphasis on the sinfulness of humankind. According to this rhetoric, Pascual's licentiousness is not just a sin, but the great sin, "el gran pecado." Here the narrative identifies the erotic impulse as a manifestation of the forces of nature that are at the heart of the cyclical process of birth and death. "Su pecado era el gran pecado que clama al cielo y labra perpetuamente las cadenas de la humanidad […] que estanca y retiene sin remedio el progreso y la felicidad de los seres, impidiendo el perfecto matrimonio intelectual, soñado por los apóstoles de la civilización" (168). This passage also implies that nature compels beings to leave the state of continuity, the sensation of oneness with all that is, in the metaphysical realm. In contrast to that transcendent state, the forces of nature bring living creatures into the physical realm, into an existence of individual isolation. This is the very process that the early Christians sought to subvert when they began promoting the concept of abstention from sexual activity. Nervo's narrator echoes that same disdain for sexuality by calling nature's endless perpetuation of the species: "un principio estúpido […] como si fuera preferible que la especie continuara su vida de desolación sobre la tierra ingrata donde los clamores del sufrimiento son infinitos" (168). Again the language used here reflects the Christian disdain for the body and the physical realm. Pascual's unrestrained fornication is symptomatic of the force that keeps the human race trapped in the cycle of life and death, of creation and destruction; this is Pascual's great sin.

Doña Francisca's crisis occurs in a moment of vulnerability, when she is suddenly overwhelmed by the erotic impulse. This takes place when Pascual, frustrated by his thwarted advances toward Refugio, and in a state of extreme sexual arousal, grabs the matron and satisfies his urge with her. The passage is disturbing on several levels. First there is the ambiguity of the text in regard to whether this was a rape or a seduction. Because of the violence and the force of Pascual's actions the case could be made that he raped his stepmother: "…llegando de un salto

hasta la matrona, alzóla en vilo con fuerzas centuplicadas por la locura y desapareció con su carga en la obscuridad de la estancia" (180). But afterward she herself describes the experience as "una hora de amor", indicating that she felt erotic pleasure for the first time. She put up what she herself called feigned resistance, "un simulacro de resistencia" but then willingly consented to the transgression. Because of the matron's naïveté in regard to her own sexuality and the eroticism of her body, we can at the minimum qualify Pascual's action as sexual abuse. There's also the question of incest in the passage. Even though doña Francisca is not Pascual's biological mother, she raised him. In terms of their relationship with each other, she is his mother. The matron suffers debilitating shame over the experience, not only for having participated in it, but for having received pleasure. She knows that it was a sinful act, according to her religious beliefs, and the fact that she enjoyed it increases her level of remorse about it.

What this passage describes is the violent aspect of eroticism that Bataille and Girard have discussed in their respective essays. According to Bataille, a taboo on sexuality exists precisely because it is a powerful force (51). Yet, Christian theology attempts to control the impulse and maintain it within rational parameters. Girard notes that, because of its violent nature, when sexual desire is repressed, it "accumulates energy that sooner or later bursts forth, causing tremendous havoc" (35). This is what Nervo has described in this passage, how the energy suddenly burst forth from the sexually austere matron, causing "tremendous havoc." The polarization of the sacred from the profane thus culminates in this unexpected sexual encounter that leaves doña Francisca wracked with morbid guilt. Bataille also describes the two contradictory aspects that comprise the sacred. Interdictions on sexuality inspire both terror of the taboo and an awed fascination with transgression (68). Doña Francisca expresses both of these sensations as she wrestles with the implications of her fall from grace. She is repulsed by the transgression, which she describes as "tan sucio, tan feo, tan vulgar" (181). But she also has the memory of the sublime pleasure of the act. These two simultaneous emotions torment her.

Although her transgression disrupts the opposition between spirit and matter, it does not restore the unity between the sacred and the profane. This is because her religiosity is still a barren practice that does not connect her to the divine, and her eroticism, in her own judgment, is still sinful. As such, her transgression is an act for which she must be punished.

Nietzsche in his critique of Christian values claimed that the very concept of morality functions in opposition to the instinct for self-preservation, because it leads to self-deprecation, and ultimately to self-torture (*Geneology* 72-73). We see this very self-deprecation in doña Francisca's indictment of her own behavior. The depth of the shame that she feels over her failing is so great that she intends to resort to ascetic methods of self-mortification, that is, the use of instruments to inflict physical pain on her own body. She prostrates herself before the statue of the Virgen de la Soledad, a figure which also plays a significant role in her punishment. Just as we saw earlier that women often internalized the Christian moral code and imposed it on other women, they also had in the image of the Virgin Mary an icon of the feminine aspect of the divine, which served to reinforce the ideal of purity.

In my analyses of Gamboa's novels, I noted that the ancient archetype of the divine Virgin was transformed in Christian iconography, from a signification of autonomy to one of ascetic chastity, along with the moral implications of the maintenance of virtue. The feminine divine was deprived of the life giving power of her sexuality when the Church founders condensed the attributes of the Great Mother and the Virgin into one figure. As a result, the Virgin Mary, although still a powerful icon in the Western psyche, symbolizes the impossible ideal that the Christian religious tradition expects of women: to deny the erotic impulse, to remain chaste, but also to procreate, to be a mother. Nervo's novella underscores the impossibility of this objective by emphasizing the sculptural form of the Virgen de la Soledad in the chapel, and the role of this static figure in doña Francisca's self-torture. Although the statue does have a human expression, its eyes lifted up to heaven as if contemplating the cruel death of the Son of Man, the

image is not an actual woman. The phrase that the narrator repeats several times in the last few chapters, "…la Virgen, perpetuamente inmovilizada en su actitud de mística desolación" (180, 182, 185), underscores the hardness of the sculptural form. There is no sense of maternal warmth that one might associate with the divine Mother. Nor is there a sense of spiritual comfort for the distressed doña Francisca. Instead, she is prostrated before an icon that is unchanging, unmoving, perpetually frozen. The statue is quite literally a rational construct, as is 'chastity,' the concept that it represents. As such it is antithetical to the fluidity and unstructured nature of the sacred realm. Doña Francisca feels the pressure of this impossible standard weighing down on her. "…sentía sobre su espíritu, sobre su cuerpo, sobre su vida toda, que ya no sería sino un expiar incesante, la presión regeneradora, pero terrible y misteriosa, de la Madre de Dios" (185).

At this point, the Church's representative at the hacienda, don Jacinto, asserts his authority, and his role as confessor. He seeks to restore control over the matron's body, brings her back into the rational order, and once again represses her sexuality. Don Jacinto Buendía, is an extreme religious zealot that the text associates with Jansenism, a controversial branch of Catholicism that flourished in seventeenth-century France. Theologians of this movement promoted a rigid interpretation of the writings of Augustine of Hippo in regard to Original Sin and Predestination. They placed a heavy emphasis on the bestial and evil nature of sexuality, and they believed that all men and women are born with an inherent depravity to commit this act. Don Jacinto displays these extreme views as he counsels the matron, and revels in what he sees as the depravity of her transgression. He insists that she surrender to the will of God, and that she submit to whatever punishment is administered by the divine: "¿Desea usted expiar su pecado? Pues acepte desde ahora, incondicionalmente, las penalidades que Dios le envíe" (183). He then suggests that God's will might be that she bear a child as a result of the transgression, thus having to suffer a public humiliation for her sin. This, according to the chaplain, would strip her of what she values most, her reputation as a good and honorable woman. Here the text specifically links

the chaplain to Jansenism, identifying him as "[el] prosélito inconsciente del inexorable Jansenius" (183). The dénouement of the novella reveals that the chaplain's prophecy actually materializes, adding another cruel irony to the matron's life: she had been unable to bear children in her marriage, the legitimate place for her sexuality, but this sinful union does produce a child. This returns us to the concept of eroticism that is linked to creative forces. In the Christian tradition she had committed a vile sin. Yet it was this very act that allowed her to access the irrational realm of the divine.

The destructive effects of the transgression extend to Pascual as well. The physiological excess of the experience overwhelms his body and leads to his demise. While the libertine is not held accountable for his licentiousness by any institutional form of punishment, one could characterize his death as a form of divine punishment for a lifetime of transgressions against the Christian moral code. But his behavior was also an affront to the secular order. The medical doctor who examines the body gives a typically positivistic diagnosis to explain Pascual's sudden passing: "una hemorragia cerebral con inundación ventricular, ocasionada por alguna intensa conmoción fisiológica debida a la histeria mental" (184). Until the nineteenth century, there had been a tradition in western medicine, going back to Hippocrates (c. 460 BCE – c. 370 BCE) and Galen (129 – c. 200) that linked hysteria to disorders of the female body (Scull 14-15). It was believed that the symptoms of the illness were rooted in the female reproductive organs, specifically the womb (23). Although in Nervo's lifetime, neurologists were beginning to challenge this perception, male hysterics were still generally "dismissed as effeminate, sedentary, or studious" (125). Thus, the use of this term to describe Pascual's erratic behavior again signifies the weakness of his character, which is antithetical to the idealized image of masculinity that he was expected to uphold. The soliloquy in the text which summarizes Pascual's life and death again addresses the relationship between the erotic impulse, the creative and destructive forces of nature, and the return to the continuous state in death (Bataille 62-63). Here Pascual expresses

these ideas in first person, from beyond the grave, as if in death he has acquired a clearer awareness of the significance his life when he existed in the physical realm.

> He aquí que se ha disociado este accidental núcleo de fuerzas de mi existencia física… Ignotos ímpetus y tendencias hereditarias me llevaron, primero a la lujuria y después a la muerte… Yo no había nacido para amar el ideal y no hubo en mi espíritu un rinconcito donde el ideal se acurrucase… Una necesidad orgánica me impulsaba a apacentarme en el placer, y en él abrevé mi anhelo sitibundo… Ahora ya no desearé más, ya no sentiré más estremecimientos, ni me atormentarán más avideces. Digo a la podredumbre: 'Tú eres mi madre'; y a los gusanos: 'Vosotros sois mis hermanos y mis hermanas.' Ellos, a su vez, morirán, llevando algo mío a esa obrera incansable que se llama la tierra, y a esa incansable transformadora que se llama la fuerza (184).

The passage starts with a purely scientific foundation for his existence. Although it does make reference to his spirit, this is only to assert that his is not a romantic spirit. The main emphasis of the passage is on the physiological processes of life, and death. This explanation keeps Pascual linked to the rational realm. His soul was "[un] accidental núcleo de fuerzas." The uncontrollable erotic impulse was composed of "ignotos ímpetus y tendencias hereditarias," an organic need that drove him to feed on pleasure.

By letting go of worldly attachments, the mystic seeks to die to him or herself, not to literally die, but to let go of "la pesanteur freinant [du] profound attachement à soi-même" (Bataille 254) [the dragging weight of attachment to the self], in order to transcend the state of isolation in the physical realm. Pascual achieves this goal only by literally dying. In death, he is finally released from the burden of attachment to his bodily impulses. However, the sacred context in which to interpret his life and his death is absent. His body is simply a rotting corpse that forms part of the ecosystem of the physical world, decaying matter that in turn will be transformed into the substance of new life. This lack of spiritual context extends even to the level of Christian theology. There is no mention of the Christian concepts of original sin or inherent human depravity; no reference to any penance that his soul might pay for having lived a sinful life. The passage suggests instead that he was a biological anomaly whose violent impulses did not fit into the mechanisms of the rational social order. But even on a profane level, his life was

disconnected from the divine connotation of sexuality that would have given it a higher significance, leaving only a rational positivistic interpretation of both his life and death.

The tragic outcome for both of these characters is indicative of the destructive effects that result from the division between spirit and matter. While doña Francisca's consequences arise out of a religious determinism, the predestination promoted by Jansenism, Pascual's death is assessed from the perspective of a secular determinism, the empirical basis for understanding reality. Nervo, the *modernista*, then critiques both of these worldviews, the restrictive religious precepts of the Church in the feudal society of rural Mexico, as well as the cold, hard positivism of secular Porfirian society. Although the Chuch appears in the novella as an anachronism in modernity, the narrative also suggests that positivism is not a viable alternative. Octavio Paz identified Latin American positivism, not so much as a scientific method, but rather as an ideology, a new belief system that replaced faith in the Christian Trinity with faith in science. *Modernismo*, in his view, constituted a response to the ideology of positivism (*Hijos del limo* 105-106). In "Pascual Aguilera" Nervo seeks a third way, an alternative to these two extremes, one that allows for the subjectivity of the individual freed from the intellectual restraints of the neocolonial ideologies, both religious and secular. The narrative suggests that this divergent path can be found outside of the traditional social structures of *criollo* society, embodied in two secondary characters, the *campesinos* Refugio and Santiago.

EROTICISM AND THE DIVINE

In contrast to the pathological sexuality of the two main characters, Refugio and Santiago are not burdened by the rhetoric of the Church's moral code. This couple personifies a more balanced manifestation of sexuality, unencumbered by the restrictive religious precepts that plague the *criollo* characters. As *campesinos*, the lives of Refugio and Santiago are more closely linked to the rhythms of nature, not in the sense of a utopian, pastoral setting, but rather a

recognition of and respect for the unseen forces of nature that are both creative and destructive, forces that bring forth life, but also doom all living creatures to die, in the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Although Santiago's role in the narrative is limited, when he does appear, he presents a more vigorous image of masculinity in contrast to the weak-willed Pascual, the very heartiness that the elder don Pascual had hoped to instill in his son. There is even a contrast in physical appearance between Santiago and the title character. While the young hacendado is fair-skinned and unattractive, "pelirrubio, colorado y pecoso, cascorvo y desgarbado" (159), his rival for Refugio's affection is a handsome mestizo, "muy mozo, alto, de fisonomía morena, de rasgos altaneros, retostada por el sol y el viento; de ojos negros y vivos, melena alborotada y labios gruesos y lampiños" (160). Santiago is a skilled ranchero, who is adored by Refugio and respected by the other *campesinos*: "Vaquero de oficio, se pintaba solo para amansar a una potranca o para jinetear un toro cerril" (170). A man of dignity and integrity, Santiago resents Pascul's advances toward Refugio and is determined to defend her honor against the libertine.

When Refugio first appears in the narrative, she is in a tree gathering orange blossoms (159), thus linking her to nature as well. Although she is described as beautiful, hers is not a demure beauty such as one would find among women in the *criollo* class. Instead, the text portrays her as a woman with sufficient physical stamina to climb a tree. Another passage, which describes Refugio when she is dressed up to go to mass on Sundays, emphasizes the sensuality of this character. She is handsome and graceful, and she strides provocatively: "contoneando con desenfado el palmito de avispa, haciendo crujir las limpísimas enaguas interiores almidonadas hasta azulear" (169). The narator highlights her rhythmic movements, including her braided hair which undulates down her back "como víbora de azabache" (169). This association with the serpent again links her to the material world and the biblical image of the snake as the embodiment of temptation. We have seen this earthiness in association with the female gender in Gamboa's narratives. We saw the negative connotation of this aspect in Amparo in *Metamorfosis*;

and a more positive variant in the title character of *Santa*, during her idyllic childhood in Chimalistac, that is, until her sexuality emerged leading to her banishment from the primordial paradise. While the sensuality of Gamboa's female characters was marked by sinfulness and depravity, Nervo's text does not attribute negative qualities to Refugio.

The text doesn't offer very much information about the religious practices of the *campesinos*. Perceiving the hypocrisy of the *criollo* moral code, Santiago mocks the fact that while doña Francisca practices her works of charity, she turns a blind eye to her stepson's licentious behavior. There is the reference to Refugio's attendance at Church on Sundays, although the text qualifies this by stating that she goes "con su pergeño de cristianar" (169), suggesting that she is just going through the motions. The narrator also indicates that both Refugio and Santiago comply with Church doctrine in the sense that they refrain from having sexual relations prior to their wedding and their marriage is sanctioned by the Church. In terms of the syncretism of Christian and indigenous beliefs that inform the religious practices of *campesinos* in rural Mexico, the pre-Colombian cultures exhibit a similar world view in regard to the unity of spirit and matter as the Neolithic Mediterranean world. The elements of nature have a profound religious connotation to the Cora people of Nayarit. They regard the Earth as a living entity, the divine Mother that nourishes humankind, and the Sun as the divine Father. They conceive of the rain as a type of semen that the Sun sends down to fertilize the Earth and produce the maize that is their primary food source (Amaro 149; Dahlgren 67-68). In this way, the Cora people perceive the interrelationship between the forces of nature, sexuality, and religious practices. The text does not make specific references to these concepts, and Nervo himself was writing from a *criollo* Eurocentric perspective. I only mention this to indicate that some of these concepts may have filtered into the Catholicism of rural Mexico. This would account for Refugio's relaxed attitude toward sexuality and religiosity in contrast to the austerity of doña Francisca.

Refugio expresses a sensuality that is pleasurable, and unencumbered by religious constraints. This characteristic is revealed in two passages where Pascual spies on her as she is undressing. In these scenes Refugio appears as both subject and object. The subjectivity from which she experiences her own eroticism is evident in the depiction of her movements as she undresses: "Refugio pareció vacilar; sus manos tornaron a atarse sobre la nuca…; entornó lánguidamente los ojos… ¿Qué espejismo erótico pasaba por aquellas pupilas negras, como pasa la imagen de una nube arrebolada por la luna sobre un lago dormido?" (173). At this moment she is not 'performing' for anyone else. Rather, it is an expression of her own erotic nature. And yet, simultaneously, she is also the object of Pascual's gaze, the male gaze that desires to possess and control her body; a gaze that perceives her as an object, a statue in true Parnassian style. "Faltaba la última prenda, el último velo de aquella virginidad, el postrer cortinaje que encubría la divina estatua, como esos paños con que los escultores cubren sus moldeajes ya concluidos, y que dejan presentir la amplitud ideal de las líneas al ajustarse blandamente a la arcilla húmeda" (173). Again we see the statue as an image of the feminine gender, an image that is fixed and unchanging. However, the narrator also refers to this figure as clay that is still malleable, in contrast to the perpetually frozen statue of the Virgen de la Soledad. The reference to clay also has an earthy connotation which again links Refugio to the physical world. In addition to this, she is described as a divine statue, which suggests a correlation between her physical beauty and the sacredness of erotic pleasure.

The second time that Pascual spies on Refugio, his desire for the *campesina* overwhelms him and compels him to burst into her room. She, however, further subverts the static notion of the feminine by maintaining agency over her body, and successfully throwing Pascual out. After he leaves, however, Refugio's eroticism surfaces again. Free from the actual threat of being violated, she becomes aroused by the memory of this bold gesture. The passage describes her conflicting emotions, describing the event as "un excitante poderoso" (174). She experiences the

repulsion of the taboo, while simultaneously becoming aroused by the sublime fascination with the transgression of the interdiction. Even though she is aroused by the memory of Pascual's actions, she still maintains her subjectivity over her sexuality. Here we see the other side of Irigaray's analysis of sexual relations in Western culture, as Refugio personifies the concept of a female-centered sexuality (24). She feels desire, touches herself, and explores her own body: "paseando por su cuerpo las manos temblorosas con suaves e inconscientes caricias. Y aquella noche Refugio tuvo la primera revelación del amor…" (174). By bringing herself to climax, Refugio essentially subverts the interdiction on female sexuality. Although she doesn't transgress the taboo through sexual relations with a man outside of marriage, Church doctrine declares that any sexual activity that contradicts the objective of procreation, including masturbation, is sinful, and therefore forbidden (Seper).

In regard to the pathological sexuality of doña Francisca and Pascual, Nervo's prose shows characteristics of decadence in its emphasis on sexual perversion, and of literary naturalism in its depiction of the unpleasant aspects of reality, as well as the biological determinism that explains Pascual's weak character. In contrast to this, the *modernista* aesthetic emerges in Nervo's description of Refugio's eroticism. There is the Parnassian emphasis on the perfect form of her beauty, as well as the transcendental mood of symbolism in the depiction of her inner experience of eroticism. Thus, in this novella, Nervo associates the Church with the decadent social order, rather than with spirituality. Here we see a parallel between Pascual and Rafael Bello in *Metamorfosis*. While Gamboa's text associates his protagonist with the decline of the ruling class in the urban center, Pascual Aguilera represents the degenerate end to his family lineage in rural Mexico. Adding another layer to this depiction of the deterioration of the ruling class, Nervo's text also reveals the hollowness of the Church's moral code as personified by doña Francisca. Refugio, who is not encumbered by that restrictive morality, is able to access the divine realm, and thus restores the unity of the sacred and the profane. However, this unity occurs

outside of the Occidental religious tradition that continues to enforce the polarization of the two realms. The agancy that Santiago exhibits over his life, including his relationship with Refugio, subverts the traditional social order of the hacienda. That is, he does not appear as a humble serf, forced to endure the abuses of the hacendado/feudal lord.

The depiction of Refugio's sexuality distances her from Christian morality. However, she does not take on a typical role for the female gender in *modernista* literature. Refugio is not the femme fatale, a villainess who would use her beauty or sexuality to manipulate Pascual, in order to achieve some hidden objective. She does not lie to him or coerce him, but instead really just wants him to leave her alone. Nor is she the pale, ethereal, waif-like woman of the European ideal, as personified by Helena in José Asunción Silva's *De sobremesa*, but a dark-skinned *mestiza*. Although from Pascual's point of view, she takes on characteristics of the precious object of a *modernista* poet, the agency that she maintains over her body and her sexuality breaks that mold. It is the very subjectivity that she exercises over her life that makes her modern. This is related to what Nestor García Canclini calls the project of emancipation, one of the basic movements that he identifies as hallmarks of modernity. This is the secularization of creative expression, and the construction of "espacios en que el saber y la creación puedan desplegarse con autonomía" (García Canclini 31). Nervo's text also presents Santiago as a more vigorous manifestation of masculinity in contrast to the decadent hacendado. Although he doesn't delve into their specific religious practices, he does offer the *campesinos* as a healthier foundation for Mexican culture than the troubled and decadent ruling class.

In "Pascual Aguilera," Nervo shows the presence of the Church in the provinces, where it is linked to the *criollo* class. Although Refugio and Santiago do abide by Church precepts, they do not exhibit a strong attachment to religious values. Yet they have more integrity and have a more balanced character than the *criollos*. Santiago even expresses skepticism toward what he sees as the pretentiousness of doña Francisca's extreme piety. The narrative suggests that this

institution not only is a remnant of the old colonial social order, but the values that it represents are based on a morality that turns out to be hollow. In light of the salaciousness of Pascual, especially the transgression with doña Francisca, the Church's division between the sacred and the profane is its own inherent contradiction, its own destabilizing force. The criollos themselves are not able to live up to the moral standard that is established by the discourse of the Church. The *campesinos*, on the other hand, are represented as a sound alternative for a more balanced culture.

MYSTICISM AND EROTICISM IN "EL BACHILLER"

In an autobiographical note, Nervo acknowledged the stir that his first published novella, "El Bachiller" (1895), caused in Porfirian society due to its shocking dénouement (*Obras completas* 2: 1065). Like "Pascual Aguilera," this story takes place in rural Mexico, where a medieval-like ambience forms the cultural context for the tale. It offers yet another perspective on the role of the Church in a provincial context, and underscores the tension between religion and sexuality. However, the gender roles of the characters caught in this dichotomy are reversed; it is a male protagonist, the seminary student Felipe, who strives to preserve his virtue and repress the erotic impulse, while his childhood friend Asunción tries to persuade him to abandon his plans for the priesthood in order to marry her instead. In contrast to the austere doña Francisca, the protagonist of this novella is a sensitive and passionate young man. In accordance with his religious tradition, he strives to cultivate a spiritual devotion, while repressing the physical urges of his body. The tension caused by the opposition of body and soul ends up grossly distorting the eroticism that Felipe experiences, and leads him to a tragic outcome.

The narrative evokes the mood of a remote past, similar to that of the medieval legends by the Spanish romantic poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. But unlike Bécquer, who looks to Spain's medieval period as a source of cultural tradition, Nervo's description of the town of Pradela

depicts a place that is rooted in the past, but exists as an anomaly in the present. It is a somber provincial town, isolated from the modernization of the urban centers: "Era aquella ciudad, llamada Pradela, una de las pocas de su género que existen aún en México. De fisonomía medioeval, de costumbres patriarcales y, sobre todo, de ferviente religiosidad" (185-86). This fervent religiosity is the most pervasive characteristic of Pradela. The presence of the Church manifests itself physically, in the numerous temples constructed throughout the town, and audibly, in the ringing of the Church bells at the prescribed times to recite the prayer of Angelus, and to signal the evening curfew. The graceless architectural style of the temples, with "sus campanarios cúbicos, rematados por gruesas cruces de piedra," contributes to the air of piety in Pradela (186). And the sound of the bells, "cuyas tristes inflexiones llevaban a todos los hogares una sensación indefinible de melancolía y de temor," also accentuates the somber mood. The Jesuit seminary in Pradela plays a significant role in local activities and serves as the center for the preparatory studies of the youth throughout the region, many of whom will go on to study for the priesthood.

The text alludes to the tension between religiosity and eroticism in Pradela in the depiction of the Church's influence over romantic relationships, further empahasizing the oppressive and restrictive ambience of the town.

> ¿Amores? También florecían en aquella atmósfera pesada; mas, como la Reina de la noche, abrían su cáliz en el misterio, sin dejar por esto, semejantes a ella, de ser puros y sencillos. Vivían en silencio por breve tiempo y morían, por fin, bajo el yugo matrimonial, dirigidos, desde su alfa hasta su omega, por el prudente director spiritual de la doncella (187).

Here the narrator compares love in Pradela to a type of cactus flower, "la Reina de la Noche," which only blooms at night, and withers after a few hours. In a similar fashion, when passionate love emerges, the clergy works toward the objective of stifling the erotic impulse, particularly that of the young women, and channeling female sexuality into the institution of marriage. Amid

this somber cultural context, the introspective Felipe will attempt to develop his spiritual inclination.

The spiritual experience of this protagonist is distinct from that of other religious characters that we have examined. Unlike female characters, such as doña Francisca or Gamboa's Sor Noeline, who were socialized to comply with the precepts of Church doctrine, Felipe is intuitively drawn to the metaphysical realm. In contrast to male characters, such as the chaplain don Jacinto in "Pascual Aguilera" and Fray Paulino in Metamórfosis, Felipe's mystic yearning is a more subjective experience. This is due in part to his young age, and his status as an acolyte in the seminary. As he is still in the early stages of his religious training, he has not yet acquired the priestly role, along with its attendant responsibility to monitor the behavior of the faithful. However, the text reveals that adherence to the Christian moral code is not what motivates this character. He is not the religious zealout, like don Jacinto, who revels in the concept of the inherent depravity of humankind. Nor is he like Fray Paulino, the man of God who seeks to cure the ills of the modern era through the teaching of Church doctrine. In this sense he is more like a secular intellectual who seeks to transcend the banality of material existence and escape to a spiritual plane of imagination and dreams. The narrative opens with a description of Felipe as a melancholy young man with delicate faculties who is easily moved by sights and sounds.

> Una de esas augustas puestas de sol del otoño le ponía triste, silencioso y le inspiraba anhelos difíciles de explicar: algo así como el deseo de ser nube, celaje, lampo, y fundirse en el piélago escarlata del ocaso.
>
> Las solemnes vibraciones del Angelus llenábanle de místico pavor; la vista de una ruina argentada por la luna o de un sepulcro olvidado, cubría de lágrimas sus ojos (185).

He experiences an unnamed sadness, which intensifies after the death of his mother. It is a mysterious desire for something intangible that leads him to the spiritual path. He is seeking a means to connect with the divine, to achieve a sense of oneness with all that is.

In describing Felipe's excessive sensitivity, the narrator compares him to two other nineteenth-century literary characters: Manrique, the protagonist of the medieval legend "El rayo de luna" (1861) by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, and the title character of George Sand's novel Lélia (1833/1839). In Bécquer's tale, Manrique is a young introspective nobleman who catches a glimpse of an ethereal woman, and falls in love with that image, believing that she is the companion for whom he yearns: "–¡Es ella, es ella, que lleva alas en los pies y huye como una sombra!" (179). Although this depiction of the woman already indicates that she is probably not of the physical plane, Manrique becomes obsessed with finding her. When he realizes that the fleeting image had been an illusion, a ray of moonlight, Manrique renounces romantic idealism and retreats from society to the solitude of his imagination and poetic dreams. In a similar manner, Felipe's nebulous yearning often manifests itself as fleeting romantic attractions to melancholy women, infatuations that ultimately leave him feeling disillusioned. Nervo's text makes a direct reference to Bécquer's legend when describing Felipe's frustrated desire: "con el misterio huía la ilusión y nuestro héroe murmuraba como el poeta: ¡No era ella! Y Ella no llegaba nunca: era el rayo de luna eternamente perseguido por un Manrique de catorce años" (187). Like Manrique, Felipe comes to understand that the object of his desire cannot be found in the physical realm. For this reason, when it comes time to choose a career path, he decides to study theology and devote himself to the spiritual life.

At this point the narrator draws a parallel between Felipe and Sand's protagonist, Lelia, indicating that neither character enters the monastic life convinced of the validity of the Church's teachings.

> Aquel espíritu, sediento de ideal, desilusionable, tornadizo en extremo, había acabado por comprender que jamás saciaría su ansia de afectos en las criaturas, y como Lelia, la de Jorge Sand, sin estar muy convencido que digamos de las católicas verdades, buscaba refugio en el claustro. En el claustro, sí, porque no era el ministerio secular el que le atraía. El Seminario debía ser solo pasajera égida para que no se enfriasen sus buenos propósitos (188).

Like Felipe, Lelia expresses angst in regard to her existence in the material world, describing herself as "un cœur malheureux, égaré par une vaine richesse de facultés, flétri avant d'avoir vécu, usé par l'espérance et rendu impuissant par trop de puissance peut-être" (163). [a joyless heart led astray by a futile wealth of faculties, withered before its time, worn out by hope, and rendered powerless, perhaps by too much power.] In addition to being disillusioned by love, Lelia is ill at ease with the limited role that her society allows to women. She wants to retreat from the world, but hesitates as she considers the restrictions that the Church places on spiritual development: "J'ai une trop grande idée de Dieu et du culte qu'on lui doit pour le servir machinalement, pour le prier avec des mots arrangés d'avance et appris par cœur. Ma religion trop passionnée serait une hérésie et, si on m'ôtait l'exaltation, il ne me resterait plus rien" (208). [My idea of God and of religious worship exceeds that which is necessary to serve him mechanically, with pre-composed prayers learned by rote.] Notwithstanding these reservations, Lelia decides to enter a Camaldolese convent to find solace from her suffering, and eventually takes vows to become a nun. In a similar vein, Felipe regards the seminary as a refuge from his own anxieties in the physical world. This again highlights the unique perspective that he brings to the spiritual life, a subjectivity that does not necessarily comply with Church doctrine to the letter. In addition to this, the comparison between Felipe and Lelia alludes to the fluid gender identity of the seminarian. Part of this ambiguity emerges from his inherent sensitivity. But the troubled perspective that Christian theology brings to sexuality also contributes to destabilizing Western notions of masculinity in men who devote themselves to the Church.

Men of the Church were expected to reject many characteristics that the secular realm in western culture associates with masculinity, such as anger, strength, forcefulness, ambition, pride, and the drive to dominate and conquer. By adopting the traits of virtue, chastity, humility, and obedience, the identity of the religious man is constructed by some of the characteristics that are generally associated with the female gender. Practitioners of both sexes who are devoted to the

monastic life live in a homosocial community, –Lelia with her sisters in the convent, for example, Felipe with his fellow acolytes in the seminary– where they worship a male deity. In this cultural context, men adopt a feminized role in their relationship to the divine, even to the point of wearing robes that are similar to a female style of dress. These conditions along with the sensual undertones that are often present in ecstatic religious experiences all contribute to the malleable construction of gender in Nervo's protagonist. This ambiguous gender identity and the eroticism that emerges from Felipe's sensitive nature are qualities that infuse his religious practice with passion. In this protagonist we will see the most profound, yet tragic, manifestation of the intersection of religion and sexuality, when he has a transcendent experience in the sacred space of a chapel, an experience that is simultaneously spiritual and sensual.

In my analysis of Gamboa's *Metamorfosis* I noted how the text hints at the erotic component of mystic experience in the portrayal of Fray Paulino's relationship with the divine. In a limited way the friar achieves Schopenhauer's state of contemplation of the Platonic Idea, in the sense that his religious devotion allows him let go of attachments in the physical realm. But his asexuality and his misogyny cut him off from the divine forces of the metaphysical realm, while his emphasis on the religious moral code links him to the rationality of Church doctrine. This latent sensuality in a religious context coincides with the Christian interpretation of Solomon's "Canticles," also known as the "Song of Songs," a poetic narration in the Bible that recounts a courtship between two lovers. Some scholars regard the eroticism expressed in these verses as out of place in the Bible (Bloch and Bloch 27). The founding fathers of Christianity in particular, were faced with "the acute embarrassment of having to explain a book that seemed to praise passionate sexual activity" (W. Phipps 10). Early Christian interpretations of the text transformed the lovers of the narrative into an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the Church. However, as some contemporary scholars identify the female protagonist in the verses as the Semitic goddess Astarte, and the male figure as her consort Tammuz (Meek 70-79; Kramer 89-

92), this biblical text links the Judeo-Christian tradition to the pre-Hebraic fertility cults in the eastern Mediterranean region.

The "Canticles" are particularly woven into the Hispanic literary tradition by means of sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism. The Augustinian friar Luis de León (1527-1591) translated the verses into Spanish, and wrote a commentary in which he expanded on the accepted allegorical interpretation, transforming the two lovers into a representation of the human longing for union with God. The Carmelite mystic, San Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), was inspired by the translation to compose his own "Cántico espiritual" (*Poesía* 249-58). In this version of the narrative, the verses depict a sensual union between a Bride and her Husband. Even though the author defends the sensuality of the imagery by insisting that the marriage of the two protagonists represents the mystic union between the human soul and God, what is significant here is the eroticism that Juan de la Cruz associates with the divine. Even if it is just an allegory he is still expressing erotic sentiments within the context of religious experience. As the writings of Juan de la Cruz form part of the literary canon from Spain's *Siglo de oro*, the eroticism of the "Cántico spiritual" represents a link between the Catholicism in modern Hispanic culture, on both sides of the Atlantic, and the pre-Christian unity of the sacred and the profane. While Gamboa's depiction of Fray Paulino's religious transcendence remains within the limits of this allegory, Nervo's account of Felipe's mysticism highlights the sensuality of his experience and takes it to its logical conclusion.

In keeping with the Christian interpretation of the "Canticles" and the homoerotic undertones in Juan de la Cruz's "Cántico espiritual," Felipe's religious training follows the typical stages of a romantic relationship. When he decides to enter the seminary, the protagonist frames his objective in terms of a desire that one might have for a lover: "Yo tengo un deseo inmenso de ser amado, amado de una manera exclusiva, absoluta, sin solución de continuidad, sin sombra de engaño, y necesito asimismo amar" (188). In this way he begins his spiritual courtship

with God. However, within this allegory, the Christian disdain for the body distorts Felipe's innate sensitivity and transforms his desires into a type of masochism, as exemplified by his fervor for ascetic practices of self-mortification. We saw earlier that in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman world abstention from bodily pleasures did not have a connotation of morality, but was instead a means for the practitioner to gain mastery over the instinctual impulses of his or her own body. As Christianity developed, abstaining from all forms of pleasure came to signify the highest form of virtue. Some mystics used ascetic methods in imitation of the suffering that Christ endured, and as a means to release the soul from the body in order to achieve the desired union with God. Teresa de Avila and Juan de la Cruz believed that the methods of pain brought a mystical understanding of God, and that the body could be used as an instrument to achieve union with God (Flynn 259-60). Although some scholars see a resemblance between ascetic practices and athletic training, noting that both require "the manly virtues of discipline, physical control, and endurance" (Glucklich 23-24), the perception of self-torture in these practices is unavoidable. In order to sustain their vow of chastity, ascetic monks and nuns would use various instruments to inflict physical pain on their bodies in an attempt to subjugate their desires and attain a state of pure spirituality (Qualls-Corbett 45).

As Felipe begins his seminary studies, he devotes himself completely to these practices, as he believes that they will lead to the transcendental state that he seeks. He is convinced that "a Cristo solo se va por la inocencia o la penitencia," and that the second of these two paths is the only one available to him, as he falls short of the ideal for the first. The narrator describes the horror of the cloister when the acolytes are taking part in these exercises, and chanting the psalm *Miserere*: "El predicador, […] iniciaba el doloroso salmo del Rey profeta, que con voz monótona cantaban los monacillos; y haciendo coro a los sollozos de compunción de los ejercitantes, oíase el chasquido de los azotes que, con fervor, descargaban ellos sobre sus carnes más o menos pecadoras" (189). This passage portrays a distortion of the interrelationship between the sacred

and the profane. The sacred is present in the chanting of the psalm. The profane is present, not in the erotic sense, but in the enactment of the violent impulses. The very traits that the acolytes are expected to reject, emerge in the context of the religious ritual. However, they channel that aggressive energy toward their own bodies. In Felipe's case, his sensitivity also surfaces during this sublime scene, as he willingly beats his body into submission, revealing the distortion of both his eroticism and his religiosity.

> ¡Oh!, y cómo recordaba Felipe aquellas solemnes escenas en que, presa el alma de una exaltación extraña, murmuraba: "Sáciate ahora, carne", y en que, con esfuerzo que subía de punto, sus manos agitaban sin compasión el flagelo, y éste, al chocar contra el muro, dejaba ahí pintadas cárdenas e irregulares líneas, salpicando la parte superior de la pared de innumerables puntos rojos (189-90).

In contrast to the sacred marriage rite of the Bronze Age era fertility cults (Qualls-Corbett 24), here we see a deliberately brutal treatment of the body in a religious context. This depiction of the Christian polarization between spirit and matter exaggerates the denial of eroticism to include the infliction of physical trauma on the body, and transforms Felipe's spiritual courtship into one that is fraught with masochism. Yet he abandons himself to these mortifications, willingly, and with much passion, eventually achieving the desired exalted state of the mystics.

The narrator then describes the ecstacy that Felipe experiences in contemplative prayer, using highly provocative language.

> No quedaba sin recompensa por cierto devoción tan sincera: Felipe gustaba al pie del altar esa miel que los neófitos encuentran siempre en el primer período de su conversión, miel tan deliciosa que, paladeada una vez, quita el gusto por las otras dulzuras de la vida. El alma, con absoluto abandono de sí misma, reposa en los brazos de Dios, con la tranquila confianza del niño que duerme en el maternal regazo, y Dios le manda suavísimos consuelos. […] Felipe empezaba apenas a cruzar las floridas laderas del fervor, y pareciéndole que su unión con Dios era íntima y absoluta, anhelaba solo que una sotana, negra como el desencanto de lo creado, y un claustro, fuerte como la fe, le velasen para siempre las pálidas perspectivas de un mundo odiado y miserable (190).

There is a romantic mood to the passage, which depicts emotions not unlike those of an adolescent who has fallen in love for the first time. The erotic connotation of the experience is expressed by the use of the word honey, "miel," a euphemism for sexual bodily fluids (Cohen).

There is also a reference to God as a mother figure in the passage, not a reference to the Virgin Mary, but to the Supreme Being as the Great Mother. This fluidity of gender in regard to the divine again recalls the pre-Christian religions of the Mediterranean world. We saw that Gamboa alluded to this aspect of the feminine divine in Metamorfosis when he referred to sor Noeline as Lover and Mother. The maternal qualities of God that Felipe senses correspond to the state of calm that he achieves after the exercises of mortification. He experiences the desired union with God and the end of individual isolation, even if only temporarily. In Schopenhauer's terms, Felipe has escaped from the suffering that one encounters in the world of Will.

The next stage of the courtship is marriage, in this case the marriage between the acolyte and Christ which again underscores the homoerotic element for men in the Christian religion, destabilizing not only gender identity, but also the sexuality of the protagonist. The ritual in which Felipe receives the clerical cassock resembles a wedding in the sense that Felipe is formally 'given' to God/Christ (the words are used interchangeably) the way a bride is 'given' to her husband, evoking again the imagery in Juan de la Cruz's "Cántico espiritual." During the ceremony, the prelate murmurs some mysterious words, and shaves the acolyte's head, which marks him as one of the slaves of Christ: "la afilada navaja del barbero dejó en su occiput la huella de los esclavos de Cristo" (190). In Felipe's perception, he is now free from the confines of the rational world and belongs completely to God. Again noting the feminized role that he has adopted, Felipe compares himself to Mary Magdalene, saying that he, like her, can now sit at the Master's feet.

The culminating phase of this process is the consummation of the marriage, that is, the conjugal union between the soul and God. As Felipe throws himself all the more fervently into his ascetic religious practices, there comes a moment, during a period of intense contemplation, when he experiences the erotic ecstasy of the mystic union. The descriptive language used to portray this scene creates an ambience of intimacy. Felipe is alone in the dark chapel, kneeling

close to the altar, near the tabernacle that holds the Eucharist. The focus of his contemplation is the Passion, the physical and emotional suffering that Christ endures in the hours leading up to the crucifixion. The use of that particular word, capitalized as it is, heightens the erotic sensibility of the scene. Felipe is meditating on the Passion of Christ, concentrating on 'the painful scenes that are immortalized in the Gospels' and simultaneously feeling passion for Christ, when the ecstasy of the moment brings him to a climax.

> Largo rato llevaba ya en la misma postura y entregado a la contemplación, cuando un fluido frío empezó a recorrer sus miembros, haciéndolos estremecer, y un sudor abundoso cubrió su frente. Apoderóse de su espíritu un terror espantoso, ese terror pánico que paraliza el movimiento y casi casi los latidos del corazón. Quiso gritar y no pudo, quiso levantarse y permaneció clavado al granito de la grada (192).

Literature of many mystic saints indicates that Felipe's experience is not unusual in contemplative devotion. In one of his essays, Juan de la Cruz acknowledges that this bodily response to spiritual ecstacy often occurs, and he characterizes the tendency as a spiritual form of lust, which results from the innate imperfection of humankind. He goes on to explain that these events tend to happen to acolytes who are new to the mystic path, and that they decrease as the practitioner acquires more experience (*Noche oscura* 436). Other mystics who have written on this subject likewise concede that such an event is not uncommon, but when it happens they regard it without fear, with an attitude of detachment (Beirnaert 386). However, Felipe, like doña Francisca, is naïve about sexuality and is acutely distressed by the occurrence. Most disturbing for him is that, at the moment of climax he has a vision, but not of Christ, "no era la radiante epifanía del Cristo con su amplia túnica púrpura, su corona de espinas, su rostro nobilísimo ensangrentado y sus manos heridas por los clavos" (192). It was instead the image of his childhood companion Asunción. In this sense, the religious and the erotic are so closely linked in Felipe's psyche that the feeling that is aroused in him by the figure of the woman is the same feeling he experiences when contemplating the passion of Christ.

The image of Asunción in the temple, in the context of Felipe's erotic experience again reminds us of the sacred prostitute of fertility cults. For the protagonist however, the religious and the sexual are two domains that must remain separate from each other. The apparition therefore, sends him into a panic. In his religious life he is devoted to Christ/God, to this religious icon. If, in accord with the allegory of the mystics, his relationship with the divine is like a marriage in the patriarchal sense, then his attraction to a beautiful woman brings with it the temptation of infidelity to God, his 'husband.' He turns to the image of the Virgin Mary, as doña Francisca had done, as the ultimate model of purity, and implores her to help him remain faithful to his vows: "–¡Madre mía, socórreme! ¡No quiero, no quiero ser malo! ¡Por tu Concepción Inmaculada, defiéndeme! […] ¡Te juro por tu divino Hijo, que está presente, conservarme limpio o morir!" (192). Here again is the Christian denial of female sexuality in the image of the virgin mother. The impossible ideal of purity that is expected of women is also expected of the religious men who have adopted a role that is feminized in many aspects. In accordance with the division of body and soul, Felipe believes that he must give up his bodily desires in order to devote himself to the spiritual realm.

The presence of the mystic yearning together with the erotic impulse within Felipe destabilizes the Church's binary opposition between religion and sexuality, but also proves to be a source of inner conflict for the protagonist. The text expresses Felipe's anxiety in regard to "las fuerzas de la creación," forces that he fears he will be unable to resist. Caught in this dichotomy, he manifests similarities with characters on both sides of the split between spirit and matter. His erotic attraction to Asunción will come to dominate him and torment him to the same degree as Pascual Aguilera's obsession with Refugio, and Rafael Bello's infatuation with sor Noeline. But also, like the young nun, Felipe implores the divine to remove the erotic desire from him. And ultimately, like doña Francisca, he will be brought to a crisis by his inability to integrate erotic desire with his religious calling.

The struggle to repress the erotic impulse takes a toll on Felipe physically and he becomes gravely ill. He returns to his uncle's hacienda to convalesce, and it is during this visit that he has his fateful encounter with Asunción. At this point the typical gender roles in romantic relationships are reversed. The young woman becomes the assertive one who tries to seduce Felipe, while he tries to defend his virtue. Although her passion overrides the rational construct of the virtuous woman, Asunción maintains her objectives within the limits of the religious moral code by framing her desire within the rhetoric of marriage, the only legitimate place she can express her sexuality. She even uses the rhetoric of the Church to try to persuade Felipe to abandon his studies for the priesthood, arguing that he can be married and still be devoted to God, that the two are not mutually exclusive. In limiting her objective to marriage, Asunción disguises her erotic desire as a legitimate transaction within the rational social order. Even though her proposal complies perfectly with Church doctrine, it is ironically the very antithesis of Felipe's spiritual yearning. He is seeking to transcend the rational realm, not be tied to it. But marriage is the only place for both of these characters to express their sexuality. Then of course, he is already married… to God. Nevertheless, Felipe is at first tempted by her words, but continues to resist giving in to her seduction. He has already committed himself to the spiritual path, in a religious tradition that demands virtue from the men of the Church as it does from unmarried women. He becomes increasingly desperate to maintain his chastity and implores her to leave.

> Felipe había tenido un momento para reflexionar. Se veía al borde del abismo, y todos sus tremendos temores místicos se levantaban, ahogando los contrarios pensamientos. Hizo un supremo esfuerzo, y clavando con angustia sus ojos en los azules de Asunción: '–¡Vete! –le dijo–. ¡Vete, por piedad! Lo que pides es imposible. ¡Vete, por la salvación de mi alma!' (199).

But Asunción begins making overt gestures to seduce the seminarian. At that moment, Felipe had been reading a text by the third century Christian scholar, Origen Adamantius (c. 184-254), one of the Church's founding fathers, notorious for resorting to the extreme act of self-castration in order to preserve his chastity. In the words of Ariel and Chana Bloch, it seems that

"Origen took Christ literally—not allegorically, alas!—and made himself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (30-31). Inspired by this level of devotion, Felipe follows Origen's lead, in an effort to extricate himself from his predicament. This extreme example of asceticism, the denial of the body's desires taken to its logical conclusion, is the tragic outcome of Felipe's struggle to repress the powerful force at the heart of the erotic impulse. In this disturbing way, religion and sexuality intersect in the life of this protagonist, in spite of his efforts to remain chaste. Although he embodies the possibility of restoring the unity of the sacred and the profane, Felipe ultimately pays a high price to uphold the Church's polarization of the two realms.

Although the provincial ambience that serves as the backdrop for Felipe's story distances him from a typical *modernista* protagonist, this novella, like "Pascual Aguilera," exhibits characteristics of naturalism in the portrayal of the interrelationship between Felipe and his social context. There is also an element of decadent literature in the depiction of the character's pathological sexuality, which surfaces in spite of his efforts to repress the erotic impulse. Felipe's introspective and taciturn nature links him to another literary character of the era: the aesthete Jean des Esseintes in J-K Huysmans' (1848-1907) *À Rebours* (1884), the novel that articulates *fin de siècle* decadence in France. It is in this sense that Felipe, as a literary character, moves toward modernity, even if he is caught in a medieval-like social order, and notwithstanding the mysticism that links him to a pre-Christian past.

There are several parallels between the seminarian Felipe, and the aristocratic des Esseintes, beginning with the fact that both protagonists are sickly and reclusive. Des Esseintes is described as: "un grêle jeune homme de trente ans, anémique et nerveux. […] Son enfance avait été funèbre [et] menacée de scrofules, accablée par d'opiniâtres fièvres" (78). Later the text adds that he is: "énervé, mal à l'aise, indigné par l'insignifiance des idées échangées et reçues, il devenait comme ces gens dont a parlé Nicole, qui sont douloureux partout" (84). For his part, Felipe is described as a young man who was born sick: "nació enfermo, enfermo de esa

sensibilidad excesiva y hereditaria que amargó los días de su madre" (185). Des Esseintes is the eccentric dandy who retreats from Parisian society to his estate in Fontenay, where he surrounds himself with luxury, indulging his senses with fine art and furnishings. Felipe, on the other hand, retreats to the seminary, where he must give up all worldly desires and comforts. While the one immerses himself in earthly pleasures, and the other adopts an ascetic existence, both are escaping from the uninspiring monotony of the rational realm. Each one, in his respective milieu, cultivates a meditative state, similar to Schopenhauer's proposal of artistic contemplation as a means for circumventing the forces of Will.

In his solitude, des Esseintes meditates on intellectual and aesthetic concepts as he admires his artistic objects and peruses some of the important texts of the Occidental literary heritage. His vast library includes works from classical times to the contemporary period, texts which treat a wide range of topics, secular as well as religious. In one passage, des Esseintes reviews some of the texts by the founding fathers of Christianity, although he critiques these from a literary, rather than doctrinal, perspective. He considers these authors to be the guardians of the tradition of Latin letters, philosophy, and art during the early centuries of the current era (118-20). A passage similar to this in "El bachiller" portrays Felipe passing time in the seminary library where he too peruses Christianity's foundational texts and expresses a similar reverence for these documents and their authors:

> El pergamino mostraba a cada paso su tez amarillenta, bajo la cual hallábanse, en el latín de la decadencia y la Edad Media, las extensas lucubraciones de los Santos Padres: el elocuente Crisóstomo, el profundo Agustino, el tierno Bernardo, el delicado Ambrosio, y los teólogos más modernos, descollando en parte principal, la Summa del Sol de Aquino. También había clásicos latinos y españoles del Siglo de Oro (190).

Like the secular des Esseintes, Felipe in this passage appears introspective and absorbed in the contemplation of these textual artifacts. But whereas the dandy evaluates these documents on the basis of their literary style, the religious acolyte, is more closely bound to the precepts they dictate. In this sense, the narrator critiques their relevance to the modern era, even as the

protagonist is in awe of them. The narrator describes the documents in terms that emphasize the age of the texts, such as "tez amarillenta" as a descriptor of the parchment, or "momias de antiguas creencias y de muertos ideales" (191), a phrase that reinforces the notion of death and decay. These negative connotations correspond to a closed worldview, one established by the institutional Church, a view that is static, restricted from evolving or growing in any significant way. Within that religious tradition, Felipe is not free to evaluate what he reads from his own individual perspective, but is instead expected to accept the Church's official interpretations. This creates a tension between the subjectivity of the protagonist's spiritual quest and the restraints imposed on that experience by the Church hierarchy.

There is a distinction in the representation of decadence in these two narratives. In Huysmans' novel, this characteristic refers to the aging European culture, and the decline of an aristocratic lineage at the end of the century. Some critics of Spanish American literature often refrain from attributing the adjective "decadent" to *modernista* texts, as these were produced during a period of cultural ascendency in the newly formed republics in the western hemisphere (González 90). However, I believe that the term is an appropriate descriptor of not only "El bachiller," but also "Pascual Aguilera." In these two novellas, Nervo depicts the decadence of the colonial social order in the provinces. It is that feudal-like system that is in decline in these narratives, while the processes of modernization are taking place in the cities. Although Felipe, himself, may not be the embodiment of modernity, "El bachiller" critiques the Church as an outdated ruling institution in the provinces. While the protagonist is caught up in the rhetoric of the Church, his yearning for transcendence is subjective. In addition to associating Felipe with the decadence of Jean des Esseintes, the individual perspective that he brings to his spiritual quest also links him to the modern aesthetic of the Symbolists, who resist the rational structuring of Western culture, and instead seek a sense of mystery in the metaphysical realm. Felipe's erotic experience in the chapel, as well as the extreme action he takes to maintain his chastity, shows

that even his body rebels against the repressive dictates of his religious tradition. The non-rational physical impulses, override the institutional attempts to maintain those drives within a rational framework.

The disturbing manifestations of sexuality in both of Nervo's novellas and the ambiguous gender identity of Felipe raise questions among critics. Robert McKee Irwin, in his interpretation of the passage in which Asunción attempts to seduce Felipe, makes light of the protagonist, stating that he is "frightened out of his wits by this heterosexual display," but that "no one is there to save him from her" (100). This reading of the passage negates the internal struggle that takes place within Felipe's own body and psyche. It is not Asunción that he is frightened of, nor her heterosexual display. He senses the powerlessness of his will to resist the non-rational creative forces that are at the heart of his own erotic impulse. This is what frightens him and makes him feel vulnerable. In regard to Nervo's writing in general, other critics have observed an expression of the feminine principal in his works. Sylvia Molloy identifies his ability to express a perspective that is based on the social construction of the feminine in Western culture (296). José María Martínez highlights the dialogue that Nervo sustains with a feminine reading public ("Público feminino" 392). Both of these critics also note his capacity to speak from spaces that are the domain of the feminine, such as the domestic sphere or the convent (Martínez 393; Molloy 298). I believe that these observations are more useful to arrive at an understanding of Nervo's depictions of religion and sexuality in these narratives, as the issues of gender identity and sexuality that arise in his texts stem from this feminine perspective. This ability to see the world from a female point of view accounts for his portrayal of female sexuality in "Pascual Aguilera" without resorting to stereotypes of either virgins or whores, as well as his depiction of the troubled sexuality of a male protagonist in "El bachiller" who speaks from the feminine space of the cloister and from a feminized point of view in his religious role as the 'bride' of Christ.

There is also the relationship between spirituality and passion that Nervo highlights in these two novellas. Although doña Francisca had internalized the religious discourse of her culture, the austerity of her religious practices and her meticulous compliance with Church dictates keep her rooted in the rational order. Devoid of passion, both spiritual and romantic, she is virtually asexual, until her fateful encounter with her step-son. In contrast to the matron, the *campesina* Refugio embodies a more sound expression of female sexuality, but her expression is not constrained by religious precepts. Felipe's mystic nature, on the other hand, has both spiritual and erotic elements. His mystic yearning transcends the rationally constructed discourse of the Church. And yet he is still controlled by this discourse in the same way as doña Francisca. He does have an erotic experience in a state of contemplation, which illustrates the interrelationship between the sacred and the profane. However, due to the restrictions that religious doctrine places on him, this event proves to be a source of anxiety for him. Unlike the matron, he does not transgress the interdiction on sexuality, but he has to resort to self-mutilation in order to prevent the erotic impulse from asserting itself. The fact that he has to take such an extreme action exposes the vulnerability of the split between body and soul in the face of such powerful instinct.

What is revealed in these novellas is that the institutional Church proved to be an obstacle to Nervo's mystical inclination, rather than a means to go beyond the limits of the rational order. After these early works, Nervo does not return to the use of specifically Catholic content in his fictional narratives, although he does comment on Catholic rites in Porfiran Mexico in some of his chronicles. After leaving the seminary, Nervo embarked on his career as a journalist, immersing himself in secular urban culture. In the next chapter we will examine some of his writings from his first period in Mexico City (1894-1900). His mystic tendency will be present throughout his work in some form or another. His articles and narratives from this period show that he often went beyond the limits of Church doctrine to explore other spiritualist beliefs and religious traditions with which he came into contact in the cosmopolitan ambience of the capital.

The tension between body and soul that he portrayed in the characters of doña Francisca and Felipe transforms into a different kind of binary in these later works: the polarization between the scientific positivism and bourgeois materialism of the rational order, on the one hand, and a yearning for a more aesthetic and spiritual way of relating to the world on the other.

Chapter 7: The Mystic Nervo in the Urban Center

Nervo arrived in Mexico City in the summer of 1894 and soon came into contact with the circle of *modernista* intellectuals in the capital. One of the first acquaintances he made was the poet Luis Gonzaga Urbina (1864-1934). By his style of dress and his accent, Urbina immediately identified the newcomer as "un seminarista, un provinciano, [y] un poeta" (13). In his prologue to the second volume of *Obras completas de Amado Nervo* (1915), Urbina recalls his first impression of the young poet in a literary portrait that brings to mind one of the ascetic, elongated, otherworldy figures in the canvases of the Spanish baroque painter El Greco (1541-1614):

> Cierro los ojos y contemplo la figura escuálida del joven: el cuerpo de estatura mediana, que parecían alargar lo enjuto de las carnes, lo largo de las piernas, lo huesudo del busto, y un levitón negro, de corte clerical, que imprimía carácter al personaje; la cabeza, de rostro terso, palidez amarillenta y aguileñas facciones marcadamente españolas; angulosa la nariz, delgados los labios y un bigotillo recién salido […] Coronaba el conjunto una melena obsucra y lacia sobre la cual un cansado sombrero de seda lanzaba, de mala gana, sus opacos reflejos, […] (11-12).

Many of the descriptive terms that Urbina uses in this literary sketch of Nervo can apply to El Greco's portrait of San Bernardino, for example (Figure 7.1). With the exception of the style of dress, the monk's robe in place of the frock coat, we see a similar image of a man that is long and gaunt, with a pallid complexion. Urbina's essay goes on to describe Nervo as having "un temperamento místico, […] una voluntad muy firme, una fe muy profunda, un ideal muy alto" (15), characteristics that likewise emanate from the figure in El Greco's painting. Another image of Nervo's ethereal nature comes from the symbolist artist Julio Ruelas in a 1902 watercolor portrait that portrays the poet in a monk's robe, against a backdrop that resembles a mystical swirling space (Figure 7.2). Notwithstanding these characterizations of Nervo, Urbina also perceives in him a grounded quality which calms the flighty or escapist tendency that might emerge from such a transcendent inclination, a duality that the elder poet compares with the

temperament of the mystic saint Teresa de Avila: "Más no por eso dejó nunca de ver la realidad y de compenetrarse con ella. En este contemplativo con ensimismamientos de éxtasis, vigiló de continuo un reflexivo con atenciones de observador. Y esta dualidad, esta mezcla de tan diversas actividades, no es extraordinario: recordemos al arquetipo, a la Doctora de Avila" (16). With this duality of transcendence and pragmatism, Nervo embarks on this next phase of his journalistic career.

Urbina soon introduced Nervo to Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera at the editorial offices of *El Partido Liberal*, and before long Nervo was contributing to many of the publications in the metropolitan center, including *El Partido Liberal*, *El Nacional*, *El Mundo*, and *El Imparcial* (López Ordaz 62-69). In this chapter we will examine some of the prose works –chronicles, articles, short stories, and his third novella, "El donador de almas"–, that Nervo produced during this first period in Mexico City (1894-1900). We will see how his mystic inclination manifests in this urban setting and amid the secular ambience of Porfirian society. Although Nervo never fully renounced Catholicism, at this stage in his career he moves beyond the limits of Church doctrine to explore metaphysical questions in a broader context. *Modernismo*, as a secularization of the divine, manifests itself in his prose as a spirituality that goes beyond the Christian worldview, one that opens up a path toward a

FIGURE 7.1
San Bernardino de Siena (detail) (c. 1604)
El Greco (1541-1614)
Oil on canvas, 9 ft. x 4 ft., 9 in.
Museo de El Greco, Toledo

subjective experience of transcendence.

The first general characteristic that stands out in these texts is that they tend to express a lighter tone, one that is unburdened by the pathos that we saw in the previous two novellas. Nervo made some social commentary in his journalistic production, but not to the extent that we saw in Nájera and Gamboa. He did not pay as much attention to political issues, focusing instead on cultural topics, such as music, literature, and the arts, within Mexico and internationally. In terms of urban social problems, many of Nervo's articles take note of the conditions around him. However, he does not express the kind of sentimental narratives on the plight of the underclass that appear in the writings of the other two authors in this study. Nervo's depiction of Catholicism in these works also differs significantly from theirs. He is not so much critiquing the Church as an institution, but rather what he perceives to be the superficial religious practices of the bourgeoisie in Porfirian society. Nervo also writes about the multiplicity of alternative metaphysical doctrines and practices that are part of modern urban culture in the capital: the transcendent experience of the marginalized bohemian artist/poet, spiritualist activities, and occultist experimentation. He explores these topics in chronicles and short stories, with the same critical perspective that he brings to Catholic themes, often with a sly ironic humor that breaks the solemnity of the subject matter. He continues to delve into these cosmopolitan

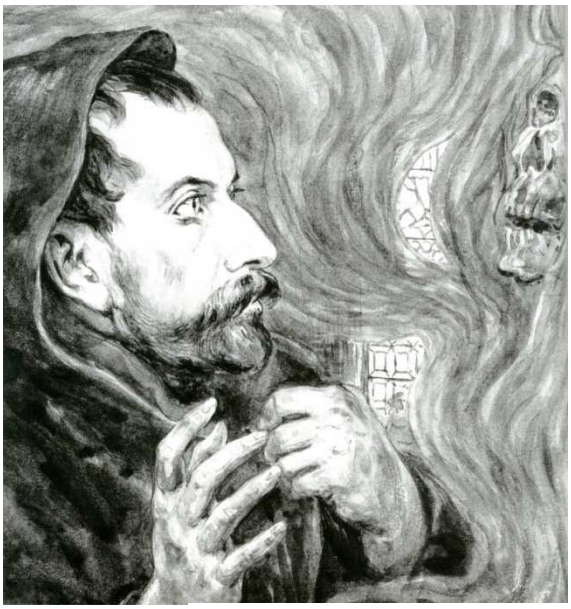

FIGURE 7.2
Portrait of Amado Nervo (1902)
Julio Ruelas
Watercolor on paper
Padilla Nervo Collection

esoteric trends in his third novella "El donador de almas" (1899). Although this farcical narrative is very distinct in tone and content from the first two novellas, Nervo returns to some of the motifs that we saw in "El bachiller": the existential angst and spiritual yearning of the protagonist and questions related to fluid gender identities.

THE CHURCH IN PORFIRIAN SOCIETY

In terms of social urban problems, Nervo commented on the widespread poverty he encountered in the city soon after his arrival, in an article entitled "Para mi panecito" (1895), and the alarming crime rate in "El aumento de la criminalidad" (1896). He also wrote several articles on the problem of the low literacy rate among the masses. The topic emerged from an exchange that took place between the journalist and a disgruntled reader, identified only as el doctor P.P. In two articles, "Nuestra literatura" (1896) and "La literatura y el pueblo" (1896), Nervo defends the aestheticism of *modernista* literature, explaining that Mexico's lettered class functions as the audience for the literature they produce precisely because the masses are unable to read (616). There is an elitist tone to Nervo's comments, in which he seems to be dismissive of the uneducated people. In a third article, "Los poetas mexicanos y el pueblo" (1896), he softens his stance, somewhat, expressing sympathy for their uncultured state, but then uses harsh words to characterize them: "Duélome, sí, y no culpo a las masas de su estulticia e ignorancia. No, no tiene la culpa el pueblo de su ignorancia; mas ¿acaso por eso su ignorancia es menos real?" (621). He redeems himself in the second half of the article when he proposes that the solution to the problem is not for the literati to simplify their writing down to the level of the masses, but to educate the latter and raise them to a higher standard of literacy: "no se trata de reducir a la vida política y civil a los hombres, sino de educar su gusto por lo bueno y por lo bello, y esto presupone cierta dosis de educación" (622). The rhetoric of this passage is similar to that of Gamboa's protagonist, Salvador Arteaga, in *Reconquista*. The fictional *modernista* was also

acutely aware of the social ills facing his countrymen, and sought to direct his art toward the renovation of society. However, Nervo's article doesn't express the same level of sympathy for the masses as Gamboa's novel. It conveys instead the transgressive spirit of Baudelaire, as in the prose poem "Assomons les pauvres" [Let's Beat up the Poor] (1869). In this text, rather than showing pity to an impoverished man asking for charity, the narrator assaults the beggar. When, to his surprise, the old man fights back, the passer-by finds that he has restored a sense of pride to the mendicant. This man's willingness to fight to defend himself raises him up to a level of equality with the narrator: "Monsier, vous êtes mon égal!" (*Spleen de Paris* 182), he tells the vagabond, and willingly shares his money with him. In a similar way, even though Nervo uses terms such as stupidity and ignorance to characterize the masses, he ultimately proposes raising them up to the level of the intellectual class as the solution to their uncultured state.

These are some of the observations that Nervo made in his writings on the social conditions that he witnessed around him in the capital. However, his mystic tendency is one of the primary characteristics of his work even in this urban setting. Turning my attention to another series of articles by Nervo, I will show how his perspective on the role of the Church in modernity differs from that of both Nájera and Gamboa. Nervo did not regard the Church simply as an institution integral to the maintenance of the social order, nor did he feel compelled to accept orthodox Catholicism in its totality, to the neglect of his own subjective experience of the spiritual realm. In his writings on religious topics, Nervo expresses a disdain for the superficiality of religious practices among the upper classes in Porfirian society. He also shows that the *modernista* aesthetic of the era, the concept that art is divine, approaches a more profound spiritual sentiment than a strict obedience to Church precepts. His own innate religiosity is drawn to this second paradigm. In his articles on these topics we see more clearly the spiritual yearning that is at the heart of the *mal del siglo*. Although the loss of belief in the existence of God was a certainly major factor in the cultural mood of the era, Nervo shows this to be something more

profound. It is the yearning for an experience of the sacred realm in an industrialized society constructed on the basis of rationalism and scientific knowledge.

In his weekly column "La Semana" in *El Mundo Ilustrado*, Nervo comments on the topic of suicide several times in 1898 and 1899. This is another symptom of the cultural malaise that we have seen previously in Nájera's "Carta de un suicida" (1880) and Darío's "El pájaro azul" (1888). In a chronicle from 17 April, 1898 Nervo examines the correlation between suicide and modernity's loss of religious faith, and concludes that the rationalism of modernity is the root cause of these tragic deaths. He describes his era as "un siglo que ha apagado todos los cirios de todos los altares" (787). New philosophical theories and religions, he says, attempt to fill the spiritual void, but ultimately none of these satisfies the longing of the soul. "Las almas abnegadas y viriles, celosas y bravas al propio tiempo, piden un poco de fe para redimir las desgracias de las generaciones y nadie puede dárselas" (787). This spiritual yearning is characteristic of Nervo's perspective on religion and religious issues. For him it is not merely a political or intellectual debate over the existence of God, or over the role and function of the institutional Church in modern society. He brings a different nuance to the questions regarding religion in modernity. He brings a more profound understanding of the sacredness of the spiritual realm, and of the need for the divine in human experience that modern society neglects.

Nervo's chronicles in "La Semana" often comment on the public observances of religious feast days in Porfirian society, and the changes taking place in these celebrations. His articles from the spring of 1898 provide an overview of his observations of these events, from Carnaval, which precedes the period of fasting known as Cuaresma (Lent), to Pascua Florida (Easter Sunday), one of the central religious celebrations on the Christian calendar. Like Nájera's chronicle on the procession of the Feast Day of Corpus Christi, Nervo notes the loss of fervor and pageantry in many of these traditions. As the upper classes increasingly strive to project an identity of sophistication and elegance, Nervo finds that their religious practices become more

superficial. However, unlike Nájera, he doesn't regard religious topics as wistful childhood memories of events that belong in the past. He is conscious of their sacred significance, which is eternal, and therefore relevant in the present. And it is the waning of this very sacredness amid the rationalism and materialism of modernity that Nervo regrets.

Nervo's depiction of the changing practices of the Carnaval celebration sheds light on the class distinctions in Porfirian society in regard to public events and entertainment. Although it is not an official holiday on the Catholic calendar, Carnaval is related to religious observances in the sense that the debauchery of the celebration immediately precedes the Christian season of Lent, the forty day period of fasting and penance leading up to Easter Sunday. The Church may not officially condone the profane practices of this festival, but ecclesiastical authorities have historically tolerated the celebration as it affords the people an opportunity to indulge in a relaxed moral standard before the period of abstention from worldly pleasures that will follow. This celebration, which has roots in the pagan cultures of pre-Christian Europe and flourished in the medieval period, is characterized by the inversion of social hierarchies that takes place. During Carnaval, the fool becomes king, the popular classes mock traditional authorities, and the profane takes precedence over the sacred. However, as Nervo anticipates the arrival of Carnaval in 1898, he comments on how the festival in Porfirian society, is losing this popular spirit, and becoming instead a polite and cultured occasion: "Ha mucho que las alegrías locas han muerto en esta tierra. La metrópoli ya no sabe divertirse, y en las grandes fiestas no vemos sino ese nutrido desfile que invade el boulevard y que carece de encantos para el que ha cotizado ya todas las bellezas que se exhiben" (761). The festival, in other words, has been appropriated by the upper classes, who have suppressed the subversive nature of Carnaval.

The relationship that Nervo identifies between the true spirit of Carnaval and the popular classes anticipates the development of this same correlation by the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bahktin (1895-1975), in his dissertation on the French Renaissance writer

François Rebelais (1494-1553), *Rebelais and His World* (1965). Nervo notes that, as the lives of the lower classes are not as strictly regulated by social conventions, they are more spontaneous in their celebrations. But the bourgeoisie and the aristocratic class, in their efforts to be modern, attempt to distance themselves from these traditional celebrations, which they now consider to be backward. They seek to cultivate instead a more sophisticated, elegant image (Beezley 107). As a result, they transform the exuberance and debauchery of Carnaval into a monotonous parade of carriages.

After lamenting the loss of the popular spirit of Carnaval, Nervo's chronicle leads directly into the religious significance of Ash Wednesday, the day after Carnaval which opens the Lenten season. He quotes the biblical verse cited by priests during the religious observance of this day: "¡Acuérdate de que eres polvo y te has de convertir en polvo!" (763). Nervo's thoughts on the significance of this day reveal a characteristic that is constant throughout his literary œuvre. When he writes about religious themes, he does not present intellectual arguments for or against any particular religious doctrine. Nor does he debate the issue of the Church's place in modern society. Instead he comes to these themes from a more intuitive perspective. He goes beyond the rational realm, and beyond the rationalism of Western culture, which forms the framework of Porfirian society. When he meditates on the phrase, "eres polvo y te has de convertir en polvo," he does not think of the political implications of the phrase, how ruling institutions use this kind of rhetoric to command adherence to the social order. He is considering instead the much wider implication of that statement: the transitory and ephemeral nature of life, and the inevitability of death. In contrast to the loss of fervor in religious observances in modern Mexico, Nervo himself is always conscious of the profound significance of these holy days, and the relationship between humanity, here in the physical world, and the non-rational realm that exists beyond our consciousness.

After this exposé on the nature of life and death, Nervo then surprises the reader by seamlessly transitioning from a religious topic back to chronicles of life in the secular and material world: "Mas aunque la Iglesia, con el simbolismo de su ceniza rememoradora [sic], nos hable de ese fin necesario de toda vida animada en el planeta, la sociedad, más exorable que ella, se viste de fiesta, y la semana ha sido fecunda en reuniones" (764). He goes on to present accounts of the fashionable parties of the week, mentioning by name the hosts of these parties, as well as the guests in attendance. This is another characteristic of Nervo's perspective on religion that distinguishes his writings from those of Nájera or Gamboa. As we have seen that he did not view these topics as merely sentimental nostalgia, neither did he relegate his religiosity to a separate, private cultural sphere. But beyond that, the fact that he could juxtapose such profound meditations with a secular item as trivial as the week's social calendar shows that he had a sense of humor in regard to the role of religion in modern society.

During the holy days of Semana Santa, Nervo again comments on the weakening of traditional religious observances. He describes the festivals as being in a state of decadence: "parécenme antiguas cosas que solo sacamos al sol por un resto de culto a los recuerdos, antiguos monarcas que ya no tienen súbditos" (787). As with Carnaval, the upper classes go through the motions of practicing these observances, but they have lost sight of the sacred significance of the rites. In contrast to the mundane religious observances of the upper classes, Nervo's mystic nature surfaces when he writes about the significance of Pascua Florida. In this article we see Nervo the *modernista*, as he transforms the biblical story of the resurrection of Christ from a hegemonic discourse to a poetic drama, linking its aesthetic elements to divinity. In his view, Christ is divine, not simply because religious precepts declare this to be true, but because of the poetic choreography of all the elements of the drama.

> Morir cuando el sol resplandece, como regio ephod en la magnificencia azul de un cielo oriental; resucitar cuando el alba expande en un orto gris perla sus corimbos de rosas; ser glorificado por amantes corazones femeninos; ser ungido con perfumes por manos de

> alabastro; ser enjugado por cabellos de oro rizados y floridos… ¡Si Cristo no fuese Dios, ante mis fueros de poeta bastaría eso solo para divinizarlo! (783).

Here Nervo makes the connection between artistic creativity and the sacred. Art is divine. Poetry is divine. This is one of the tenets of the literary aesthetic of the era. As one of Nervo's biographers, Manuel Durán, stated, the *modernista* poet is religious even when he declares himself to be atheist (Durán 31). What this means is that the *modernista* is aware of the sacredness of the artistic process, and understands that this sacredness is not dependent on religious dogma. This is what Nervo expresses in this passage on the poetry of the resurrection. He is not merely reciting doctrinal precepts. Instead he brings an intuitive, transcendental interpretation to the biblical passage. This sets him apart from Gamboa and Nájera when addressing religious topics. There is the institution of the Church that functions as part of the rational social structure, and contributes to the maintenance of the hierarchized order. But Nervo's religiosity goes beyond that rational framework and brings a perspective to this theme that is more in tune with the artistic aesthetic.

Some of Nervo's writings indicate that the Church is out of place and out of time in the urban center. But this is not for political reasons. He does not argue that the Church is a colonial institution, one that is antithetical to modernity. Nor does he suggest that the Church, with its medieval legacy, needs to be modernized. Instead, it is the sacredness of religiosity that is out of place in the rationally constructed, increasingly mechanized modern city. This spirit also comes into conflict with political modernity when the government decides to enforce the anti-clerical Reform Laws. In one article from 1898 he writes about the closure of a convent: "Las buenas madres habían olvidado por completo las Leyes de Reforma, pero las Leyes de Reforma se acordaron de ellas" (781). He describes the effects of this action on the nuns who are suddenly expelled from the seclusion of the cloister and immersed into the modern city. He imagines the culture shock they must have experienced after living many years within the confines of the convent, sheltered from the temptations of the secular world. "Cátalas medrosas y estremecidas

ante el hormigueo de las muchedumbres de esta metrópoli, que constituye para ellas el mundo a cuyas pompas y vanidades renunciaron, y que fue el eterno objeto de sus iras" (781). Unlike Gamboa's Fray Paulino, these women are not enchanted by the sights and sounds of the city. They are out of place and out of time in modernity. This scene is a product of that tendency to compartmentalize religion that we have seen in Nájera and Gamboa. In their seclusion, the lives of theses nuns unfold in the feminine space of the convent, a space that exists completely separate from the modernization taking place in the city. Then they are suddenly thrust into the public arena, into the masculine and secular space of the modern city. Whereas Gamboa's character suggests the possibility of modernizing the Church and integrating it into urban life, Nervo's commentary on the dilemma of these nuns presents it as an anachronism; not because it is a relic from the past, but because the contemplative lifestyle of the nuns does not have a place in the modern city.

In another article from the same year, he describes an unusual occurrence in the city: the sound of organ music emanating from a temple late at night. He describes the mystery and the etherealness of this sacred sound, the transcendental mood that it evokes. He associates the temple with mystery and shadow. The language that he uses to describe the image of the musician, as he imagines him to be, again blends religious sentiment with the *modernista* aesthetic. In his poetic prose Nervo imagines this organist as "un alma creyente entre las sombras, una de esas almas que para orar se envuelven en silencio, se embozan en quietud" (766). This reflects the Symbolist current of *modernismo*, the subjective desire of the individual to find refuge in art from the physical world of rational perception. Nervo shows how these poetic souls are out of place in the rationally structured modern city by contrasting them with two social groups: the bourgeoisie who attend mass during the day, and the secular, licentious pleasure-seekers who fill the cantinas at night. The bourgeoisie attend the Church service merely to fulfill a social obligation, absent of any sacred significance: "de día invade las iglesias esa multitud

insignificante adoradora del icono…" In contrast to these, the poetic souls like the anonymous musician that Nervo describes in this article prefer a more profound religious practice. If they could, they would enter the temples at night in order to worship and commune with the divine in the mystery of the darkness. "De noche invadirían el templo las almas esas que aman al Padre en espíritu y en verdad, esas que juzgan que la letra mata y el espíritu vivifica; esas que acompañarían al buen Jesús en su retiro y velarían con El; las almas sedientas de arte religioso y de amor cristiano… Pero no pueden…" (766). Instead it is the cantinas that are open at night, secular places of boisterous activity. Here Nervo contrasts the ethereal mood and mystic yearning of these poetic souls with the sounds, the conversation and laughter emanating from the secular nocturnal gathering places. "Pero el noctámbulo, en lucha con la obsesión, encuentra sólo a su paso rumores de crápula, vociferaciones de cantina, y ruido de aplausos en la tanda… Jesús lo espera en vano en su prisión de oro, y para aquella alma estremecida por la pena no hay un rinconcito de paz donde llorar" (766). As in the case of the homeless nuns, these modern mystics are not enchanted by the frenetic activity of urban life, which only serves to break the sacred silence of the night. In this article it is the mystic yearning of the soul that is out of place in modernity. Again we see that for Nervo, religiosity was not limited to nostalgic childhood memories. Nor was it a sentimental practice to be kept hidden from public view. It was instead a spiritual longing to connect with something intangible, beyond the physical world. In this sense Nervo's religiosity is related to the symbolists' dissatisfaction with the pragmatic, materialistic bourgeois society, and their desire to transcend the rational realm by means of metaphor and imagination. For the modern mystics in Nervo's article, the absence of this profound and vital spirituality in modernity, rather than the waning influence of the institutional Church, was at the heart of the *mal del siglo*.

Nervo explores this same opposition of spiritual yearning and modernity in a short story called "La plegaria" (1896). The narrator of the story, identified only as Juan, is again a sensitive

soul who stumbles upon a mystic chapel in the heart of the city, which becomes his refuge from noise and frenetic energy of the urban center. Nervo's poetic prose again uses metaphor and suggestion to convey the ethereal mood of the chapel. "…aquella capilla donde reinaba casi siempre el silencio, un silencio de cripta, turbado apenas, de cuando en cuando, por el chisporroteo de la lamparilla de aceite que ardía de continuo ante el tabernáculo del Divinísimo lanzando su luz anémica y dudosa a través del globo de porcelana suspendido del techo por tres cadenas de metal dorado" (140). Here the narrator juxtaposes darkness and light, death and the divine, suggesting the supernatural ambience of this alternate space that exists somewhere beyond the logical order of Porfirian society just outside the chapel doors. As the narrator continues describing the significance of that temple, we see that the peace he finds there is the antidote to the *mal del siglo*, to his dissatisfaction with modern life. "Bastábame entrar a él para levantar un inmenso muro ante mis desfallecimientos de espíritu, ante la inquietud de mis anhelos irrealizables, ante mis fatigosos esfuerzos de Sísifo, y para disfrutar de esa consoladora paz del alma…" (140-41). The cure for the illness of the soul can be found neither in the science of modern medicine, nor in treatises on Church doctrine. It is in the quiet solitude and the shadows of the chapel, where Juan senses the presence of the divine, a presence which is lost in the constant noise and activity of the modern city. In the temple he finds the remedy for what ails his soul. Notwithstanding this mystic inclination, Juan is not a social recluse or a hermit. As he narrates this story he reveals himself to be an urban gentleman who moves back and forth between the sacred space of the chapel and the secular world of Porfirian society. And when he leaves the chapel, he takes on the role of the *flâneur*, as Gamboa's character fray Paulino had also done, wandering through the city and observing the people he encounters, while remaining hidden from them in the crowd. This narrator then presents a dichotomy: he is an urban intellectual, immersed in the activity of the city, and at the same time he has the spiritual longing

of the modern mystics Nervo described in his article. In this way he is more like the *modernista* poet who is intuitively drawn to the realm beyond the rational.

The story that Juan narrates tells of an unnamed couple who personify a different aspect of the division between eroticism and religious devotion, in this case, its manifestation in marriage. He encounters a melancholy woman in the chapel described in the introduction. He has seen her before, during his strolls around town. From her appearance, her dress and her mode of transportation Juan identifies her as an aristocratic woman. "Cuántas veces, entre la multitud de vistosos trenes que pueblan las calles de Plateros y San Francisco, al anochecer, vi su elegante landau, y a ella, pálida siempre, siempre triste, reclinada con aristocrático abandono en los blandos cojines, con la mirada perdida en no sé qué mar de melancolías…" (141). Because of the sadness that emanates from her, Juan dubs this woman "la mujer enlutada." Although he identifies her by her social class, the narrative does not comment on class issues. Instead it allows the reader a glimpse of this social stratum from a woman's perspective, from a personal and subjective point of view. As we have seen previously, Nájera tended to associate religion in Porfirian society with the domestic lives of women and children. Gamboa also indirectly made that association by suggesting that secular men, if they had religious inclinations, kept these beliefs hidden in private. By telling this woman's story, Nervo opens up this private sector to the reader and allows us to see a feminine perspective on life in Porfirian society.

Like doña Francisca in "Pascual Aguilera," la mujer enlutada is a religious woman. However her religiosity resembles more closely the passionate yearning of Felipe, the protagonist of "El Bachiller." She is associated with the chapel, which is described as a sacred space in the midst of the frenetic activity of the city. This space is associated with mysticism, silence, and shadow; it is imbued with "un silencio de cripta", into which the noise of the city does not penetrate, which links it to death and the non-rational realm. All of these qualities recall the introspective characteristics that we saw in Felipe. La mujer enlutada prays out loud, to a hidden

God. But unlike Felipe, she is not imploring God to guard her chastity; on the contrary, she is asking him to bring her husband back to her marriage bed. She is not asexual like doña Francisca, but rather, feels passion for her husband and yearns to have intimacy with him. She mourns the absence of eroticism from their relationship, and suffers because of his infidelities. Her yearning for intimacy with her husband once again links religious devotion to eroticism.

After hearing this prayer, Juan leaves the solemnity of the chapel and once again enters into the frenetic activity of the city: "en el boulevard, inundado de luz, paseaba en coche o a pie la gárrula multitud" (142). As he strolls through the streets, he decides to stop at a cantina for a drink, where he runs into the unfaithful husband of the grieving woman in the chapel: "ahí cerca, en rededor de otra mesa, varios jóvenes charlaban y bebían, y entre ellos distinguí al elegante esposo de la enlutada" (142). Aside from the coincidence that our narrator happened upon the same cantina where "el esposo elegante" was drinking, this scene brings into focus some aspects of the religious/secular dichotomy in Porfirian society, as well as Nervo's perspective on the polarization of these two social spheres. One correlation that emerges is the significance of gender roles in the separation between the religious and the secular. We have seen allusions to this dynamic in writings by Nájera and Gamboa. What we see in Nervo's story now is a couple that personifies that same dichotomy, and takes it to its logical conclusion. "La mujer enlutada" enters into the sacred space of the chapel, an ambience of silence, darkness, and sorrow. "El esposo elegante," on the other hand prefers the courtesan's chamber to the chaste mystery of the marriage bed. He enters into the profane space of the cantina, in a public arena of secular activity. He is associated with licentiousness, the mundane, boisterousness, light, and amusement. This relationship recalls the description of marriage in Pradela in "El bachiller." Perhaps there had been passion between them, at one time, during their courtship, maybe even during the first years of marriage, which could not survive 'under the yoke of matrimony,' burdened by the restrictions of the rational order. The narrator notes the painful contrast between the darkness and silence of

the chapel where an unconsoled wife weeps, and the light and boisterousness of the cantina where a libertine husband brags about his latest conquest, illustrating again the binary opposition between virtue and sin. The two together are unable to integrate eroticism into their marriage, into the context that the Church allows.

These two realms of experience, which exist in separate spheres in Porfirian society, are polarized even within the relationship of this couple. We have seen this dynamic before, in Gamboa's novels. This couple could be the libertine Rafael Bello and his virtuous wife Lupe in *Metamorfosis*. Or it could be el señor Rubio and his wife in Santa. The male figure in each of these relationships is unable to perceive both virtue and sexuality within the same woman. The grieving woman in the chapel wants to be able to integrate passion into her earthly relationship with her husband, but feels unable to do so. In contrast to these characters, however, is the *flâneur* Juan in "La plegaria," who is able to move from the sacred space of the chapel to the profane, secular Porfirian society and feel at ease in either arena. He represents the possibility of achieving an integration of the two realms of experience. Nervo's story then does not relegate the religious to sentimental nostalgia as we have seen in Nájera's chronicles, but rather highlights the space of the chapel, with its mystical ambience, as a legitimate and necessary realm in its own right. It is a space into which the noise of the city does not penetrate, where the alienated individual in the urban center can find a refuge from the pressures of modernity. The narrative doesn't so much advocate integrating the institutional Church into modern society, as Gamboa's character Fray Paulino contemplated, but rather of bridging the gap between religious and secular experience.

As Church doctrine consists of a rationally constructed set of precepts, the very nature of institutional religion conflicts with the yearning for transcendence that Nervo expresses in these chronicles. While the bourgeoisie are content to nominally abide by the dictates of the institution, the modern mystics that Nervo depicts in his texts often transgress these limits, in their pursuit of a supersensory experience. In some of his chronicles and short stories, Nervo steps outside of the

framework of Christianity to examine some of the alternative spiritual trends that were prevalent in secular Porfirian society. This is not to say that he formally renounced Catholicism. He merely did not feel compelled to maintain his metaphysical investigations within the parameters of Church doctrine.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE METAPHYSICAL REALM

George Umphrey (1878-1950), characterized this phase of Nervo's spiritual evolution as a period of "agitated religious skepticism" ("Mysticism" 132). One could say that he was skeptic in the sense that he was questioning Catholic dogma, while investigating other philosophies and belief systems that might lead toward a transcendent experience. However, his texts don't suggest that he had become a non-believer embracing scientific empiricism in place of religion, in the vein of Gamboa's protagonist, Salvador Arteaga in *Reconquista*. That is, I don't think that Nervo experienced a crisis of faith in which he doubted the existence of God. On the contrary, the mystical inclination that he expresses in his articles on Catholic topics continues to be present, in varying degrees, throughout his literary œuvre. He was simply looking beyond Christianity, for alternative ways of perceiving the divine. In addition to this, he brings a critical perspective to his examination of the various currents that he explores, a characteristic that aligns him with modernity.

One of the cultural responses to the materialism of Porfirian society was the unconventional bohemian lifestyle of marginalized artists and writers. Like Gamboa in *Reconquista*, Nervo critiques this aspect of intellectual culture in some of his articles and short stories. In a short story, entitled "La Navidad de un bohemio" (1895), Nervo portrays this transgressive and transcendent figure as another modern mystic who feels out of place in a rationally structured society. The text begins with two introductory paragraphs, which read like two stanzas of a prose poem, in the vein of Nájera's chronicles and short stories. Here Nervo

anthropomorphizes Mother Nature and addresses her directly, in a manner that recalls Nájera's introduction to "La mañana de San Juan." In this instance, however, Nervo's text has a humorous tone. He subverts the Parnassian prose style, with its emphasis on artifice and precious metals, by portraying Mother Nature as a distracted scientist in a laboratory, absent-mindedly mixing up ingredients and creating abominations. An example of her confused results is the bohemian, a sensitive soul who exists in the wrong century. Like the anonymous musician, depicted above, who wants to commune with the divine in the silence and darkness of night, the bohemian is out of place in an era of reason and analysis. He belongs instead to an earlier time when dreams, imagination, and idealistic illusions prevailed. After these two paragraphs, the text shifts to a narrative of an encounter that takes place in the city.

It is near midnight on Christmas Eve, and the clamor of church bells is calling the citizens to the "misa de gallo." On his way to the Cathedral, the narrator is accosted by an acquaintance that he identifies only as El bohemio. Rather than attend mass, the latter invites the former to have a drink with him in honor of the birth of Christ: "hoy nace Cristo, hoy se aparecen los ángeles a los pastores, lo cual quiere decir que andan sueltos. Acaso pues, los veamos a través de una copa. Yo espero su epifanía radiosa. Ven conmigo" (139). In this context, the bohemian is not interested in the obligatory attendance at mass, but instead wants to experience the spiritual realm as depicted in this biblical story. He wants to witness the presence of ethereal beings, by means of a transcendent state of intoxication, in the spirit of Baudelaire's exhortation in "Enivrez-vous." At the cantina, the bohemian orders a mint liqueur, which he characterizes as "esmeralda líquida," a variation of the more potent absinthe. He meditates on the dark green color of the beverage, refracted in the art nouveau style glass, "una copa elegante, con estrías ojivales" (139). Lost in reverie, he addresses the translucent liquid directly: "Eres un mar ideal, sin tempestades, sin rumor, sin olas. ¡En ti navega la esperanza!" (139). The narrator responds by telling his friend that he is mad. The latter agrees with this assessment, and continues his monologue, stating that

he is a product of Mother Nature: "la naturaleza ha hecho muchos locos: los redentores y los capitanes; los artistas y los poetas" (139). Anyone who is moved by a deep passion to accomplish great things is mad, he says, and was created that way by Mother Nature, a reference to the same chastisement of the feminine divine that the narrator had made in the first paragraph.

> –De cada uno de esos organismos quedó un residuo en la marmita donde sufren la última cocción, y una noche de sonambulismo, la Madre de la humanidad me formó, como los angelitos traviesos, según Bécquer, formaron el mundo. Sí, yo tengo en mi ser una partícula de cada uno de los dementes que han pisado este inmenso manicomio que se llama tierra… Yo tengo todas las locuras; en mi masa encefálica no hay dos celdillas homogéneas; pero todas son locas… (140).

In this paragraph, the bohemian again depicts the distorted alchemy of Mother Nature, and associates himself with the demented minds she has created throughout the ages. The emphasis in the bohemian's monologue is on the correlation between creativity, genius, and madness. The life force functions beyond reason, and cannot be restrained with rational limits.

The bohemian ultimately drinks the entire bottle of crème de menthe and collapses in a drunken stupor, at which point the narrator leaves to return to the cathedral. He is in that transcendent, intoxicated state in which: "todo en mi rededor daba vueltas: un torbellino semejante al de la trilogía dantesca" (140). He perceives an ethereal being, but not the angels of the Bible. It is a vision of the feminine divine that he witnesses, and calls her by one of her names from the pre-classical Mediterranean world. "Y allá arriba, serena y melancólica, Astharté navegaba en el mar lapislázuli de la noche" (140).

Although this story affirms the otherworldly objectives of the bohemian, there is also a veiled criticism of the character's excessive intoxication. This is a point of view that Nervo expressed various times in his chronicles, in which he discourages the use of drugs and alcohol as an ideal means for transcending the rational realm. In fact, he points out the fallacy of the myth of the bohemian as the quintessential artist, and he cautions young intellectuals in the urban center against the excesses of alcohol and drug use. In the chronicle "El agotamiento intelectual" (1895),

he characterizes the mind as a limitless source of creativity. The habitual use of intoxicants, such as "morfina, éter, café, ajenjo" (433), however, does not allow the individual to tap into that source. On the contrary, this lifestyle only serves to block the channel between the mind and the vast reservoir of the universal unconscious, and ultimately leads to intellectual exhaustion. In another article, entitled "Bohemios" (1895), Nervo makes a distinction between a poet who actively practices his craft, and the bohemian poser. The main critique that Nervo makes of this modern figure is that he expresses lofty artistic ideals, but doesn't actually manifest his ideas in a concrete form: "algunas veces escribe; otras, ni aun sabe escribir" (539). This is related to one of the definitions of art that Nájera made in "El arte y el materialismo" (1876): that the artistic process consists of representing the infinite in a finite form. The bohemian, in Nervo's view, talks about his creativity, but doesn't actually produce anything. Nervo's comment also recalls the unproductive lifestyle of the fictional Salvador Arteaga, when he is frequenting the taverns and drinking excessively, essentially abandoning the actual practice of his craft. Nervo directs his critique toward this type of figure, one who: "trasnocha sin objeto, vive con el día y lo caracteriza la falta absoluta de aspiraciones" (539). A third article that addresses this theme is "La Bohemia" (1896), in which Nervo again advises young artists and writers that the bohemian lifestyle is not synonymous with creativity. He highlights the fallacy of this myth by noting examples among the prominent French writers of the day, and linking their prolific literary output to a disciplined practice of their craft. In addition, Nervo also points out that the maintenance of material needs provides them with the necessary means, by which they can dedicate themselves to that task.

> Burgués fue Víctor Hugo, y vean ustedes lo que dejó. Burgués ha sido Zola, y su obra es inmensa; burgués Bourget, y no por eso su análisis es menos fino y sus procedimientos menos elegantes. […]
>
> Muy artística es, por último, la vida independiente…, mas con medios de sostener esa autonomía…
>
> En suma, el confort es un venero de poesía. Al abrigo de una habitación decente, aseada, […] se trabaja mejor. De ahí salen las obras de arte, créanlo ustedes… (572-73).

In addition to these observations, there is also the question of the actual impoverished condition of the lower classes in porfirian Mexico City, which renders the romantic image of the marginalized artist all the more ironic, a topic to which Nervo alluded in "Un mendigo de amor." We might be tempted to regard Nervo's arguments in favor of material comforts as contradicting the yearning for transcendence that we have identified in other narratives and articles. What we see instead is that Nervo's writings disrupt the opposition between spirit and matter, and attempts to restore the duality of these two domains. Rather than an "either/or" proposition, he seeks transcendence as the source of creativity, but a creativity that functions in the material realm. He wants to balance the ethereal and the concrete, and restore the spiritual to the secular, integrate the sacred and the profane.

In our study of Nájera's prose works, we saw that various spiritualist trends were part of the fin de siglo culture in Mexico City. As Nervo becomes familiar with many of the philosophical, religious, and/or esoteric movements in the capital, he comments on their prevalence, and examines some of practices associated with such belief systems. In an article entitled "La cuestion religiosa" (11 agosto, 1896), he notes that many of these movements emerge from the spiritual vacuum in secular society left by the positivist philosophy of the Porfirian régime. He calls this modern cultural mood a type of "jacobinismo espiritualista" (642). Nervo's use of this term to characterize these movements suggests that they promote extremist, or radical views, but also that they are egalitarian in nature. They are radical in the sense that they challenge Christian doctrine, and egalitarian in the sense that their activities subvert the role of the clergy in the practice of rituals. The article also makes "spiritual" class distinctions among practitioners, who, according to their level of spiritual development, are drawn to distinct activities. "Los espíritus medianos consultan las mesas de pino" (642), he writes, in reference to the phenomenon of the tables tournantes during séances. "Los espíritus superiores se emboscan en la teosofía" (642), that is, they study the doctrines of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), one of the

principal founders of the Theosophical Society, who sought to unite Eastern and Western religious traditions, with occult philosophy, to create a "divine wisdom" for the modern age (Monroe 235-36). "Sabios hay," Nervo continues, "que se queman las pestañas intentando sorprender el secreto de la Kábbala, en la cual está la solución de esta gran ecuación de tercer grado de la vida" (642). Here Nervo makes a reference to secret hermetic societies, such as the Rosicrucians, who looked to the Hebrew Kabbalah, as well as the Bible and writings by Christian mystics in their pursuit of esoteric knowledge. He also alludes to the Third Degree of Freemasonry, the third and highest stage of development in the study of masonic craft. Near the end of the article the author also notes the recent interest in satanic rituals in Western culture: "en los centros más civilizados del globo, el satanismo torna a estar de moda" (642). In enumerating these various spiritual trends, Nervo observes the correlation between the emergence of these movements and the empirical methods of positivism. Indeed positivism was integral to Kardec's brand of spiritism, in which practitioners sought to prove empirically the continued existence of the soul after death. The article thus underscores the irony that positivism, rather than eliminating ancient superstitions, resurrected these belief systems. Nervo recounts all of this in a humorous vein, along with an undertone of skepticism. This reveals a lack of capriciousness on his part in regard to his yearning for transcendence from the material realm. As in his commentaries on bohemianism, he regards these trends from a critical perspective.

In two of his chronicles, Nervo offers amusing observations of spiritualist activity in Mexico City. In "Fotografía espirita" (2 spetiembre, 1895) he turns his attention to the practice of documenting in photographs the existence of ethereal beings. According to the spiritists, a photographer with mediumistic capabilities could, by means of prayer or mental invocations, harness the unseen forces of the metaphysical realm, condense them from a fluid to a gaseous state, and thus produce ghostly images on film (Monroe 162-72). In his article, Nervo writes of an acquaintance who carries out this type of investigation, describing him as "un buen fotógrafo,

artista macabro que fija en su cámara obscura fisonomías ultraterrestres" (495). He recounts in a humorous tone some of the results in the young man's work, and critiques the poor quality of the images. However, he qualifies this criticism by reminding the reader that the objective of the spirit photographer, "mi hermanito en Allan Kardek" (495), is not to create Fine Art, but to capture the images of disembodied souls on film. Another one of Nervo's chronicles, "Noches macabras" (7 diciembre, 1896), gives a detailed account of a séance he attended. The narrative is infused with an air of mystery, as Nervo takes the reader to a decrepit neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, then down a long, narrow passageway that leads to an apartment at the back of a housing complex, to a door opening onto a spacious hall. He then gives a detailed description of the décor in the room.

> …en el fondo se levantaba una sencilla plataforma que sostenía un sillón (para el médium) y una mesita: ¡la clásica mesa! A la derecha de la plataforma, amplio tinaco lleno de agua 'magnetizada', abastecía a los fieles, que antes y después de la sesión acudían al misterioso líquido: panacea universal.
> […]
> Recuerdo […] una mesa pegada a uno de los muros laterales, encima de la cual hacía muecas una calavera, y se estiraba un termómetro destinado a medir la caliginosa temperatura de tantos organismos consumidos por el amor a lo maravilloso (447).

He also describes the people in attendance, representative of a variety of backgrounds, but primarily from the lower rungs of the social hierarchy: "La gran mayoría de los asistentes estaba integrada por la clase humilde de nuestra capital" (447). The médium is "un niño de ocho años, de mirada bobalicona […] sumido en un sueño sonambúlico" (448). The adjective that Nervo uses to describe the child's expression could be translated as silly or simple at best, but is closer to stupid or idiotic. The depiction thus makes a veiled correlation between the child's lack of reasoning faculties, and his sensitivity to the immaterial realm, which he accesses by means of the dream state. As the narrator continues his chronicle of the evening's activities, he informs that once the room is darkened, a strange sulfuric light appears in the air. The medium, in his trance-like state wanders around the room, while the mysterious light hovers over him. All of this the

narrator recounts with an air of reverence for this communication with the spirit realm. As he leaves the gathering, the narrator turns to his companion to inquire about the latter's assessment of the evening's proceedings. His friend confesses: "–Vengo muy desconsolado. Porque al pasar la luz cerca de mí le metí zancadilla… Y tropezó la Facultad" (448). Thus Nervo breaks the mood of this macabre ambience with a joke. As he inserts humor into an otherwise eerie narration, Nervo exposes the séance as a hoax, by indicating that the cryptic light in the room was not the manifestation of invisible, fluid forces, but rather a very tangible, physical being.

Nervo's reference in "La cuestión religiosa" to the 'fashion' for satanic activities in Western culture concerns the nefarious side of spiritualism. The interest in magic and the pursuit of esoteric knowledge were key elements of the Decadent sensibility in fin du siècle France. (Monroe 234). Amid this cultural ambience, rumors circulated in Paris about the existence of clandestine meetings of Satanists. The emergence of these strange rituals should come as no surprise, given the Church's long history of regarding any spiritual, mystical, esoteric movement that deviated even slightly from canonical doctrine as heretical, and therefore associated with the Devil. Ecclesiastical authorities particularly regarded secret societies with suspicion. Masons were often erroneously accused of practicing satanic rites, and Rosicrucians dabbled in magic, reviving the hermetic tradition in Western culture going back to the alchemists of the middle ages and the renaissance. However, the so called Black Masses, the ritual worship of Satan, were allegedly performed by defrocked priests with unorthodox ideas, "who found an extra spice in eroticism when it was accompanied by the profanation of holy things" (Laver 146). A notorious example of this is Joseph-Antoine Boullan (1824-1893), an ex-abbot and alleged satanist and practitioner of sacrilegious rites, including ritual murder. On the other hand, Boullan also published essays on esoteric Christianity, and had a reputation as an exorcist (Monroe 225, 243; Hale xv-xvi). It is likely that these accounts of satanic rituals were exaggerated. Nevertheless, rumors of their existence persisted to the extent that Satanism seemed to be a manifestation of

Catholicism's monstrous doppelgänger. Some literary figures, such as Huysmans, Villiers de l'Isle Adam (1838-1889), and Remy de Gourmont (1858-1915), were interested in, and often investigated these underground practices (Hale xiii-xv; Rudorff 195). Huysmans, in particular, rendered a detailed account of a Black Mass in his novel *Là-bas* (1891). Although there is no evidence to suggest that these rituals took place in Mexico, Nervo indicates in his article that he was aware of their existence "en los centros más civilizados del globo," by means of European magazines that were available in Mexico City (642).

Nervo addresses the vogue for Satanism in western culture in a story entitled "La diablesa" (1895). This brief narrative is a variation on the German legend of Johann Faust, the sixteenth-century alchemist/astrologer who sells his soul to the devil, a tale that was popularized in the nineteenth century by Goethe's two-part tragedy, *Faust* (1808, 1832). The protagonist of Nervo's story is don Jaime Alvarez de la Rosa, a rich, intelligent, and artistic young man of the world who has known many pleasures. Bored and daydreaming on a winter afternoon, Jaime contemplates the tediousness of his life, and the nature of eternity. These ruminations lead him to wonder about the existence of the Devil. If indeed there were such a creature, Jaime considers what he would ask of this being. He decides on the archetypal beautiful woman as embodied in Helen of Troy from Greek mythology, the same woman that Faust had requested: "Yo, en presencia del Diablo le pediría algo bueno, algo mejor que la juventud eterna; lo que Fausto pidió cuando Fausto tuvo más seso: a Elena" (130). Absorbed in these thoughts, Jaime receives an unexpected visit from Mefistófeles himself. Like the mysterious visitor in Nájera's "El desertor del cementerio," Nervo's text describes Mefistófeles as a handsome, elegantly dressed gentleman. Although there is an undertone of "maligna astucia" in the expression of this figure, he exudes a friendly air, reassuring Jaime that he has only come to grant him his wish for the ideal woman (131). There is a hint of the macabre in this character, a tension between malevolent and benevolent traits. The only stipulation Mefisto makes to Jaime's request is that he not expect the

beautiful woman to be faithful. “el día que ella lo engañe, la haré desaparecer de su presencia para siempre” (132).

The text describes the temple where Mefisto performs his alchemy as a strange, exotic, but sacred space, with “columnas esbeltas de mármol negro, coronadas por caprichosos capiteles [que] se encorvaban graciosamente como la rejilla de la visera de un casco y lucían en el remate monumental cimera de granito rojo y pulido,” “un patio arábigo, de arcos calados como filigrana,” and “[una] regia sala maravillosamente tapizada y alumbrada, ostentando en las paredes panoplias y trofeos” (132). After crossing through this ornate vestibule, Mefisto enters a laboratory, takes off his hat and coat and puts on a flaming red tunic. “Entonces se transfiguró, apareciendo en toda su fantástica belleza” (132). Mefisto addresses God directly, establishing himself as a rival deity. He possesses a comparable metaphysical power and the ability to create a woman, as God had created Eve: “le infundiré mi espíritu lleno de sabiduría, de fuerza y de sensibilidad. Será tan hermosa como Venus, tan augusta como Juno; será mi hija…, será la Diablesa” (132-33). Notwithstanding Mefisto’s defiant attitude toward God, this passage is closer in spirit to the esoteric practices of the Rosicrucians than to the grotesque profanations that Huysmans depicted in his portrayal of the Black Mass in *Là-bas* (245-46). Nervo depicts Mefisto as a type of mad scientist mixing substances and heterogeneous elements, until the beautiful Elena appears.

The narrator describes the romance between Jaime and Elena in language that emphasizes the religious connotations of erotic love and ecstacy. The majestic contours of Elena’s body are animated by a divine light. Jamie feels mad with desire, “flotando en el ensueño” and “[vagando] por espacios salpicados de puntos de oro” (134). He kneels before her as if he were worshipping a religious idol. When they consummate their relationship, the narrator specifically identifies Elena as a goddess, which recalls the sacred marriage ritual in which the priestess enacts the role of the feminine divine: “¡Luego posee a la mujer diosa; luego el ideal de todos los pueblos cultos,

artistas, soñadores, ha encarnado para él!" (134). The enchantment of the romance is broken when Elena betrays Jaime with his best friend. At that point she disappears, in accordance with Mefisto's promise to the protagonist. When Jaime laments the loss of this woman, Mefisto reminds him that love is ephemeral. Love cannot be grasped, restrained, or controlled: "–Te he dado lo inmortal en lo efímero; el amor, que es infinito, en el tiempo… Te ha engañado y ya no la verás… Cumplo, pues, mi promesa… De otra suerte hubiera llegado el hastío… Así conservarás, junto al recuerdo de la traición, el recuerdo de un bien perdido" (135).

At the end of the text, the chiming of the clock startles Jaime. He looks around and sees that Mefisto is no longer there. "Murmuró: –¡Cuántas necedades piensa uno cuando no tiene en qué pensar!" (135), suggesting that the whole narrative had been an imaginative reverie. In this way, Nervo leaves open the question at the beginning of the narrative, regarding whether or not the Devil actually exists. Rather than an exposé of macabre satanic practices, the narration examines the dark side of spiritualism as another potential means for accessing invisible metaphysical forces. Rather than a manifestation of evil, or something to be feared, Nervo's portrayal of Satanism in this tale merely shows it to be ineffective for alleviating the ennui of the secular intellectual. Even if Jaime were to have his earthly desires satisfied, he concludes that the sense of fulfillment these might bring would be temporary. At the heart of Nervo's exploration of spiritualism and occultism is the same existential angst that we saw in the protagonist of "El bachiller." The difference is that in his later narratives, the author approaches the subject with an ironic tone and a sense of humor. He continues investigating these themes in his third novella, "El donador de almas" (1899), in which he again links the desire for transcendence to the spleen of modernity.

SPIRITUALISM AND THE URBAN INTELLECTUAL IN "EL DONADOR DE ALMAS"

The protagonist of "El donador de almas" is Rafael Antiga, a medical doctor who experiences a desire for something intangible, something beyond the material realm. Although his melancholy and his nebulous yearning are characteristics reminiscent of Felipe in El bachiller, the humorous tone of this narrative minimizes the intensity of the pathos that Nervo had expressed in the previous novella. Also setting Rafael apart from Felipe is the fact that he is a product of the urban center, associated with science and positivism. Like Jaime in "La diablesa," Rafael is a wealthy bachelor who has known many pleasures, but is bored with his life. He feels empty and longs for affection: "un afecto diverso del de mi gato" (200). He longs for, not a lover or a companion, but a soul: "un alma diversa de la de mi cocinera, un alma que me quiera, un alma en la cual pueda imprimir mi sello, con la cual pueda dividir la enorme pesadumbre de mi yo inquieto" (200). On this note enters his friend, the *modernista* poet and novelist Andrés Esteves, bursting with affection for Rafael, and bearing a gift: a disembodied soul. As the poet feels indebted to the doctor for the latter's support of his literary career, he brings this unique gift to his benefactor as a gesture of gratitude.

This ethereal entity that Andrés grants to Rafael, called Alda in her disembodied state, is actually the soul of a nun in a convent, sor Teresa, who lapses into mysterious trances whenever her spirit leaves her body. After receiving this gift, Rafael gains access to a higher plane of knowledge, and thus acquires miraculous healing powers, which in turn brings him international renown. Trouble arises, however, when Rafael keeps Alda away from her body for too long; when she tries to return, she finds that her physical body has died. Having nowhere else to go, she settles into the left hemisphere of Rafael's brain. In this state, the two souls fall in love. Rafael, in particular, experiences a sensation of godliness in this state of oneness with his beloved. Unfortunately, after the honeymoon phase passes, the two souls begin to quarrel. Rafael decides he has had enough of Alda residing in his brain. "They" seek out Andrés for his help to resolve

the situation, and find him in Jerusalem where he has gone to consult with a kabbalistic high priest, Josefo. Although Andrés successfully transfers the extraneuous soul to the body of Rafael's servant, the elderly doña Corpus, the matron dies in the process, leaving Alda once again in an incorporeal form. After much discussion, and in spite of the reluctance of Rafael, Andrés releases Alda to the metaphysical realm as per her request.

This narrative presents the polarization of spirit and matter as it manifests in the secular rather than religious realm of Western culture. Rafael, the man of science, and Andrés, the poet, personify the binary opposition of science and spirituality. However, we also see that this secular polarity is not as rigidly demarcated as we have seen it presented in the religious context of Nervo's previous novellas. The flexibility of this opposition is evident in the definition that each man offers as to what constitutes a soul. Andrés describes the human soul as "una entidad espiritual, substantiva, indivisa, consciente e inmortal" (201), emphasizing the ethereal and immaterial characteristics of this entity. Rafael, on the other hand, gives a typically positivist definition of the soul, characterizing it as the result of "las fuerzas que actúan en nuestro organismo" (201). This definition reflects the Kardequian Spiritist concept of bringing an empirical perspective to the study of the metaphysical realm, in order to prove the continued existence of the soul after death (Sharp 59). In this way, even though Rafael personifies the scientific basis for understanding reality, he also represents the possibility of integrating spirit and matter in Western culture.

Cosmopolitan Esoteric Trends

Notwithstanding Rafael's acknowledgment of the existence of the soul, Andrés is the character who is unequivocally drawn to the immaterial realm, which he investigates through his alchemistic experiments. He claims to have a psychic power, which ultimately enables him to extract sor Teresa's soul from her body, a variation of the occultist practice of astral projection,

that is, the separation of the astral from the physical body (Laver 130). In the passage where Andrés attempts to transfer Alda into the body of doña Corpus, the text describes his hands as "cargadas de flúido" (222), a reference to the mesmerist conception of the invisible, metaphysical forces as an electromagnetic fluid. Rafael compares his poet friend to a hierophant, a priest of the Eleusinian Mysteries of Ancient Greece: "Tiene actitudes de hierofante, se torna a las veces sacerdotal" (202). The doctor also depicts Andrés as either crazy, or a genius ahead of his time: "o está loco o es un capullo de maravilla futura ese poeta" (202). Like Nervo's chronicle on the bohemian, this characterization of Andrés's interest in the occult again underscores the correlation between transcendence and madness.

The narrator compares Andrés to some of the French literati who likewise dabbled in the occult: "Andrés vivía dedicado a la literatura y al ocultismo –había nacido para el ocultismo como Huysmans, como Jules Bois…, ¿como Peladan? ¡No, como Peladan, no!" (212). As mentioned previously, Huysmans had investigated satanic practices in Paris as part of his research for *Là-bas*. The journalist Jules Bois (1869-1943), another chronicler of occultist activities, published a volume entitled *Le Satanisme et la magie* (1895), which details black magical practices in France (Rudorff 198). The most flamboyant of the three authors mentioned in Nervo's text is Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918), author of a scandalous, best-selling novel, *Le Vice suprême* (1884), and co-founder of the Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose-Croix, a revival of the German mystical tradition of the Rosicrucians (Monroe 239; Rudorff 187). Nervo's text associates Andrés with the first two writers, but emphatically distances him from the third. As the narrator doesn't provide any further information on this point, we can only speculate as to why. Some accounts of Péladan depict him as a bizarre man, who claimed to be the descendent of an ancient Babylonian king. He displayed an affinity for dressing in flowing costumes, trimmed his beard in an Assyrian style, and adopted the ancient royal title of "Sâr" (Rudorff 188). Péladan's eccentricities eventually provoked a rupture among the rosicrucians, leading him to break away

from the group, at which time he founded yet another secret society, the Ordre de la Rose Croix Catholique. Huysmans' *Là-bas* alludes to Péladan's unfavorable reputation in occultist circles, when the protagonist Durtal denounces him as a charlatan: "Qui ne connaît ce mage de camelote, ce Bilboquet du Midi!" [Who hasn't heard of that fraudulent magician, that trickster from Lyons!] (143). Given these depictions, we can interpret Nervo's statement distinguishing Andrés from Péladan as an assurance to the reader that the character is not a poser or a fraud, but rather, has genuine psychic abilities.

The study of the Hebrew Kabbalah, a form of Jewish mysticism based on a set of esoteric scriptures, was central to many occultist groups, including the Rosicrucians. In one of the chapters of "El donador de almas," Andrés summarizes a teaching by another major occultist figure in France, Gérard Encausse (1865-1916), also known as Papus. Andrés paraphrases a passage from Papus' *La Cabbale: Tradition secrète de l'Occident* (89-95), a text that explains the significance of a sacred kabbalistic word, which Nervo transcribes into Spanish as *iod hé vo hé* (220). In addition to being an ancient Hebrew name for God, which has morphed throughout the ages into variations such as Yaweh or Jehovah, this word signifies universal spirit, and represents the key to creation. Andrés' monologue here is faithful to Papus' text, including the French occultist's assertion that the correct pronunciation of the word grants the practitioner access to "la clave de todas las ciencias divinas y humanas" (219). This word, which Andrés had used previously to separate Alda from the body of sor Teresa, is the same key that will enable the poet to remove the extraneous entity from Rafael's psyche. The dilemma for the characters is that he has forgotten how to pronounce the word, a humorous detail that breaks the solemnity of Andrés' mystical rhetoric.

The theosophists were also interested in the Kabbala, but they were much more eclectic in their pursuit of esoteric knowledge. Helena Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosopical Society, promoted a synthesis of spiritual principles from Eastern and Western philosophical and religious

traditions, although she considered the religions of the 'Orient' to be "a wellspring of spiritual knowledge" (Monroe 235). At first glance, one could interpret this particular aspect of *fin de siècle* Western culture as an extension of the European exoticizing gaze toward the East that Edward Said (1935-2003) articulated in *Orientalism* (1978). And it is true that Madame Blavatsky played a significant role in popularizing Asian religions in the West. She had traveled extensively in both the Near and Far East, and had studied the ancient texts of Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the modern interest in the Vedic scriptures (c. 5000 BCE – 2500 BCE), the sacred texts of ancient India, did not originate in Europe, but rather from within India herself. This was part of a broader Hindu cultural renaissance that emerged in the early nineteenth century in response to British colonialism (Balasubramanian 156-58). In addition to studying these texts under the guidance of Indian sages, Madame Blavatsky also supported the nationalist objectives of India's religious and political leaders.

Nervo includes the Western interest in the religions of the East among the mélange of spiritual tendencies in "El donador de almas." We see this in Andrés' definition of the soul as "una entidad espiritual, substantiva, indivisa, consciente e inmortal," which corresponds to the Hindu conception of Ātman or Self, which the Vedas define as "eternal and immutable, one and indivisible" (Balasubramanian 15). However, it is the high priest Josefo who embodies the theosophist reverence for the sacred texts of Asia. Notwithstanding his brief role in the narrative, –he appears just long enough to refresh Andrés' memory as to the correct pronunciation of the magic word, *iod hé vo hé*–, Josefo manages to recite a lengthy list of all the religious books he has studied.

> –Hijo mío, yo sé todas las ciencias divinas y humanas. He leído y meditado todos los libros santos del Oriente. Los de China, que son: el *Y King*, libro de los Kuas de Fohi, el *Chi-King*, libro de los himnos; el *Chu-King*, libro de la Historia; el *Ly-Ky*, libro de los Ritos; el *Chum-Tsieu*, o historia de los doce principados, por Confucio; el *S S E-Chu*, o sean los cuatro libros morales de Confucio y de Mencio; el *Tao-Te King*, libro de la razón, y el *Kaning-Pien*, o libro de las recompensas y de las penas. He leído los libros sagrados de Persia: el *Zend-Avesta* y el *Boun-Dehechs*; los libros sagrados de la India, o

> sean los *Vedas*: el *Rigveda*, libro de la ciencia de los himnos, o Elogios de los Dioses, que se compone de unos diez mil dísticos; el *Yadjurveda*, libro de la ciencia de las ofrendas, que se compone de ochenta y seis capítulos en prosa, sobre el ritual de los sacrificios; el *Samaveda*, libro de la ciencia de las plegarias líricas, el más sagrado de todos, y que tiene los himnos que se cantan, esto es los salmos de los indios; la *Atharvaveda*, o el libro de la ciencia del Sacerdote, que contiene setecientos himnos; los *Upanishads*, o teología de los vedas, y las *Leyes de Manú*. Yo he leído el código del mahometismo, o El *Corán*, y he penetrado todos los misterios de la *Biblia*; ¿cómo no había de saber pronunciar esa palabra? Deja que me ponga mis vestiduras sacerdotales, que el racional arda con toda la divina igniscencia de sus gemas en mi pecho y te la diré (220-21).

Nervo's intent in this passage is somewhat ambivalent. While it is an impressive list of important spiritual texts, Josefo appears as rather self-satisfied and pedantic while delivering this monologue. The narrator even indicates that the high priest wants to impress his visitor "con su erudición oriental" (220). In keeping with the humorous tone of the novella, the passage portrays him as a caricature of an erudite esotericist. In addition, the narrative doesn't delve any further into the contents of these books. What is significant about the monologue in regard to Nervo's interest in the metaphysical realm is the fact that he was aware of the existence of all of these texts, and he knew enough about them to be able to give a brief descriptive phrase summarizing each one. At this point in his career, he may or may not have studied them to the same degree of intellectual depth as the fictional Josefo. Nervo's poetry at this time contains scattered references to Hindu and Buddhist concepts, but he had not yet undertaken a systematic study of these religions. These are topics that will surface more prominently in later writings (Umphrey, "Hinduism" 133-36). For the purpose of this novella, the author includes this Orientialist trend as another facet of the pluralistic perspective on the metaphysical in Western culture.

Catholic Millenarianism and Mexican Spiritualism

Adding to this eclectic mélange of esoteric currents, Nervo's novella includes references to two tangents of Mexican Catholicism that were prevalent during the Porfiriato: a millenarian fervor among devout Catholic women, and a spiritualist movement that developed around an adolescent medium known as la Santa de Cabora. The first of these is personified by Rafael's

servant, the devoutly religious doña Corpus. In this character, Catholicism is associated with an elderly woman, a correlation that Nájera had made in his chronicles. In this text, doña Corpus, scandalized by the secularization of society, anxiously awaits judgment day, when the pious will be delivered from the evils of modernity. "Noche a noche, después del Rosario, [doña Corpus] rezaba tres Padrenuestros y tres Avemarías por que llegara cuanto antes el juicio final" (203). Later, when Rafael finds himself in the predicament of having two souls, doña Corpus hears him in his study talking to himself, and in different voices. She also spies on him through the keyhole and becomes alarmed when she notes physical changes in his facial features. Fearing that his loss of reason might be another symptom of the breakdown of a society that has turned away from the Church, the matron yearns for judgment day all the more vehemently.

> ¡Ah, la apocalíptica doña Corpus nunca como entonces deseando el Juicio Final!
>
> ¿Pues no se le había vuelto loco de remate ese lurio del doctor? […] Pasábase todo el día de Dios encerrado bajo siete llaves en el consultorio, hablando solo, gesticulando y midiendo la pieza a grandes zancadas. […]
>
> ¡Los masones de México tenían la culpa de todo! El doctor acabaría en San Hipólito. Valía más que se acabara el mundo (217).

In this last statement, doña Corpus links the ills of modernity to the participation of the Masons in the Liberal Reform, most notably represented by Benito Juárez and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, both of whom were initiates of the National Mexican Rite of Freemasonry. The foreboding that doña Corpus expresses, reflects a millenarian religious sentiment, emanating from popular devotional practices in Porfirian Mexico, particularly among women. At the heart of this emotional zeal was a set of visions and prophecies, allegedly made by an eighteenth-century seer, la madre Matiana.

According to legend, Matiana was a late colonial mystic who foresaw many of the social and political upheavals that would take place in Mexico throughout the nineteenth century, including the Wars of Independence, foreign invasions, the anticlerical measures of the Reform period, and the triumph of secular liberalism. In addition to these historical events, Matiana also predicted another great conflict, in which pious women would play a significant role, culminating

in the triumph of the Church and the restoration of the colonial social order (Wright-Rios 244). The late publication dates of the existing Matiana texts, –1858, 1861, and 1867– cast doubt on the authenticity of the legend, making it highly probable that Matiana and her prophecies were simply inventions of conservative propaganda (Wright-Rios 245). Matiana often appeared in the liberal press as a caricature of pious religiosity and the reactionary political and social stance of devout Catholics (Wright-Rios 241-42). Matiana as the personification of religious zeal underscores the association between Catholicsm and the female gender that we saw in the writings of Nájera and Gamboa. In "El donador de almas," doña Corpus personifies the millenarian fervor that Matiana's prophecies inspired among the faithful, who believed that restoring the preeminence of the Church would alleviate the social ills caused by secularization. However, unlike Gamboa, who ultimately embraced the teaching of the Church even as he gendered religiosity as female, Nervo's doña Corpus parallels the caricature of the religious zealout in modernity.

The reference to Mexican spiritualism in "El donador de almas" appears in the depiction of the corporeal source of Alda, called sor Teresa in her bodily form. In the passage that recounts her story, Nervo makes a reference to the Reform Law ordering the dissolution of religious orders, when he describes the convent where sor Teresa resides as "desmantelada" (207), closed down or in ruins. Here again, we see the association of Catholicism with women, in this case a group of upper-class women who essentially become the guardians of the Church in the face of secularization: "[una] media docena de damas distinguidas de México […] habían tomado bajo su protección a las ovejitas de Dios, poniendo entre ellas y las leyes de Reforma un misericordioso valladar de silencio y de disimulo" (207). Thanks to the intervention of these women, the convent can continue to function, albeit clandestinely, and in defiance of the Reform Laws.

To the other nuns in the convent, Teresa is a mystery, a young girl who appeared one day without any indication as to her origins. Andrés later informs that he had found her living in

poverty on the streets of Mexico City, and it was he who dropped her off at the convent (220). Although the young girl has impaired mental faculties, to the extent that she can barely speak, she also exhibits some kind of otherworldly intelligence: "sus inmensos ojos obscuros hablaban por ella con miradas de una dulzura y de una extrañeza infinitas, [miradas que] no eran de este mundo: venían de una patria lejana" (207). In addition to this, she spends many hours in a hypnotic state: "dormía luengas horas un sueño misterioso que en el convento se llama éxtasis" (207). In this sense, Nervo again equates the lack of rational intellectual capacities with madness and the transcendent state. Worried that these trances might be of a diabolical nature, the nuns consult a Dominican theologian, "experimentado en los secretos de la mística" (208), who reassures them that the girl's ecstatic states are indeed divine. For this reason, the good sisters decide to call her sor Teresa, after the sixteenth-century mystic: "la maravillosa iluminada de Ávila –docta y alta mujer que floreció en un docto y alto siglo…" (207).

Although the text explicitly links sor Teresa to the Baroque saint, she could also be a veiled reference to another figure in popular religious and spiritualist practices in Mexico: Teresa Urrea (1873-1906), also known as la Santa de Cabora, a young mestiza from Sonora who, according to folklore, had acquired mystical healing powers from the Virgin Mary (Vanderwoood 161-62). Teresa was raised in an ambience of syncretic religiosity in the northwestern region of the republic, where rituals had developed from a mélange of Catholic and native beliefs. She learned healing practices based on the use of herbs and other natural substances from an elder curandera (166). In October 1889, she began to experience convulsive seizures which would send her into a trance state, an occurrence that continued intermittently over several days. After the attacks ceased, she remained in a daze, floating in and out of trances, for three months (167-68). While in these states, Teresa communicated with the Virgin Mary and other Christian divinities. But she also received messages from spirits not just the Holy Spirit of the Catholic trinity, but "those spirits that were an integral part of local belief, spirits that influenced people to do both

good and evil things" (173). In January of 1890 she began to dedicate herself to the development of her ministry. "Word of her healings and other mystical proclivities" spread throughout the region, and subsequently, throughout the Americas and to Europe (169). Spiritist groups in Mexico, as well as Spain, France, Colombia and Puerto Rico, took an interest in her. Teresa felt an affinity for the Spiritists and adopted some of their precepts, including their emphasis on direct communication with the divine. However, she still maintained belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, the concept of the Trinity, the mystery of the saints, the cult of images and other elements of Roman Catholicism, even if she did not accept all of the doctrinal teachings and official trappings of the Church (179-81). In terms of her relationship to the institution, Teresa Urrea did not fare as well as Nervo's sor Teresa. That is, ecclesiastical authorities did not uphold her spirit communications as divine, but instead regarded her activities with suspicion, and even threatened to excommunicate her. This was a more typical response to this type of phenomenon, from Church authorities, who often labeled local religion as primitive and pagan (175-76).

It is likely that Nervo knew of Teresa Urrea, first of all because they shared a geographic proximity in the early 1890's. At the time that she was building her ministry in Sonora, he was working as a journalist in the port city of Mazatlán in nearby Sinaloa. But even if she had escaped his attention during that period, by the time he was writing "El donador de almas," la Santa de Cabora had already acquired international renown. The association between Teresa Urrea and Nervo's novella is twofold. On the one hand, the mystic visionary from Sonora corresponds to the fictional sor Teresa in the sense that both fall into trances, a state which allows them to communicate with ethereal beings in the metaphysical realm. On the other hand, her healing capacity is embodied by the medical doctor, Rafael. Whereas the Santa de Cabora maintains agency over her spirit communications, that is, she goes into trances, receives knowledge from beyond, and then channels that knowledge into action in the physical realm, Nervo's sor Teresa becomes essentially immobile in her trances. Her soul, Alda, falls under the control of the

hermetic experiments of Andrés. Disembodied from her physical form, Alda receives knowledge from beyond, and then passes it on to Rafael, who takes on the role of the medium. The text describes how, before he makes a diagnosis, he goes into a meditative state, "como si dentro de sí mismo consultase a alguien, y por sus hermosos ojos negros pasan infinitas vaguedades. "Parece un fakir en éxtasis" (206). Alda's presence allows Rafael an indirect access to the metaphysical realm, which in turn brings him unprecedented success in his medical practice. As a result, he ultimately achieves international renown for his healing capacity. In this way, the role of the feminine principle in the metaphysical communications is minimized. It is the interventions of the female entity Alda that make the doctor's accomplishments possible. Yet she remains invisible to the society at large while Rafael receives credit and acclaim for what appear to be his miraculous powers.

Rafael thus disrupts the opposition between the material and the spiritual in Western culture. Although he is a man of science, he acquires a mediumistic capability, thanks to the occultist experiments of Andrés. Here again we see Nervo advocating the integration of the two realms. In this character he seeks to restore the balance between spirit and matter. In addition to this, the narrative also disrupts Western categories of gender identity. Not only does Rafael take on the role of the female médium/healer, once Alda lodges herself into his psyche, he then exhibits characteristics that are both masculine and femine. We saw this topic previously in "El Bachiller," in which Nervo depicts the fluid gender identity of the clergy in a religious tradition that attempts to deny sexuality. In "El donador de almas" we see multiple facets and complexities of gender identity in the secular realm.

Fluid Categories of Gender and Sexuality

Various critics highlight the homosocial bond between Rafael and Andrés (Irwin 105; Conway 472; Chaves 280). Irwin in particular finds that this relationship "clearly verges on the

homosexual," taking note of the passage in which Andrés vehemently professes his love for Rafael: "¿crees que yo te quiero? […] ¿que te quiero con un cariño excepcional, exclusivo? […] ¿que a nadie en el mundo quiero como a ti?" (200-01). In the face of the poet's exuberant display of emotion, the doctor dryly responds to these questions in the affirmative. The narrator later presents a comparative description of the two men, highlighting their opposing characteristics, "Andrés era pobre, poeta y rubio; Rafael era rico, filósofo y Moreno," and then asks the question "¿Sorprenderá a alguien que se hayan amado?" (212). Although it is possible that the Porfirian reader of the day could have interpreted these expressions as an exaggerated form of brotherly love in the context of a humorous story, the exhuberance of Andrés expressions of love and his assertion that "todo hombre necesita un hombre" (201), underscore the homoerotic connotation of the passage. In addition, the narrator's insistence on the physical attractiveness of both men reinforces this interpretation. The text poetically depicts Andrés as "alto él, rubio él, pálido él, con veinticinco años a cuestas y a guisa de adornos dos hermosos ojos pardos, dos ojos de niebla de Londres estriados a las veces de sol tropical" (200). Later, a newspaper article detailing Rafael's successful medical treatments portrays him as "un hombre de treinta años, alto, ligeramente moreno, [con] la barba a lo Príncipe de Gales, [vestido] con suma elegancia, [y con] dos hermosos ojos negros" (206). The description of Andrés as young, blond, and pale recalls the waiflike images of women in pre-Raphaelite paintings, the idealized, but ethereal woman of the *modernista* aesthetic. Here Nervo projects these physical traits onto a male character, which is suggestive of the effeminate persona of the aesthete, an image that both Nájera and Gamboa sought to minimize. However, Andrés does not exhibit a fragile or delicate effeminacy. In his role as the occultist he is active and dynamic. Here Nervo constructs a character that blurs the boundaries between masculine and feminine, ascribing to him traits that Western culture has historically limited to one gender or the other.

Nervo destabilizes this opposition even further in the character of Rafael. When Alda first comes to him as a disembodied soul, Rafael is suffering from the nebulous yearning that we saw previously in the protagonist of "El bachiller." It is not precisely a woman that he desires, but an abstract notion of affection. He asks Alda if she will love him, but she explains that she lacks the agency to make that choice: "el amor radica en la voluntad y yo no tengo voluntad propia" (205). Despite the fame and prestige that he acquires in his medical career, thanks to her interventions, Rafael still feels a void in his life, which he believes the love of Alda can fill. For her part, Alda as an incorporeal soul is another manifestation of the beautiful, but ethereal woman, the *modernista* protagonist's unattainable object of desire in the vein of Helena in *De sobremesa*.

After Alda settles into Rafael's brain, the text goes even further in erasing the boundary between the two genders, as the protagonist now embodies both. Doña Corpus is alarmed by the personality changes that she perceives in Rafael, and even notices that he begins to exhibit facial expressions that are alternately feminine and masculine. In keeping with the gendered Christian constructions of virtue and sin that we have seen previously, the matron associates the feminine with the angelic, and the masculine with the demonic: "A veces su rostro parecía el de un ángel, según la expresión celeste que en él se advertía. […] Pero, a veces, parecía rostro de demonio pisoteado por San Miguel" (217). While Rafael characterizes their dilemma as a case of "hermafroditismo intelectual" (211), Alda explains to him that "todos los dioses antiguos […] han comprendido el principio masculine y el femenino" (211). She does not specify to which gods or to whose antiquity she is referring. However, given the fact that her statement immediately follows Rafael's reference to Hermaphroditus suggests that she might be considering the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon of western antiquity. As she continues her reasoning, she points out how poets more than anyone else, personify the integration of the two genders: "Por su parte, los poetas, que son los seres más semejantes a los dioses, tienen en sí ambos principios. La virilidad y la delicadeza se alternan y se hermanan en su espíritu" (211). Rafael also senses the unity

between his own soul and that of Alda as a god-like state. He has achieved the romantic ideal of two lovers merging into one being, suspending the state of individual isolation in the physical realm, a sensation which the narrator compares to the Asian concept of nirvana: "¡Se amaba de amor a sí mismo! Con la placidez nipona con que Budha contempla su abdomen rotundo…" (212-13).

The duality of Rafael/Alda corresponds to Nietzsche's depiction of the interrelationship between art and science in *Human, All Too Human* (1878). The German philosopher specifically visualizes the ideal integration of both fields as the combination of two brains: "A higher culture must give to man a double-brain, one to experience science, and one to experience non-science. […] In the one domain lies the source of strength, in the other the regulator" (153-54). In "El donador de almas," Nervo again genders the two fields. Alda, in the left hemisphere, personifies intuitiveness and creativity, as exemplified by her affinity for music and literature, particularly the fantastic novels of Hoffman, Poe or Villiers. Rafael's 'side' of the brain, on the other hand, is dedicated to rationality and the scientific worldview.

In terms of the desire to merge with the beloved, Nervo's novella asks the question, what if someone could actually achieve that state? He then goes on to indicate the comical results of this type of folly. Rafael does not achieve the mystic union with the divine in this situation. He and Alda are still two separate beings, two separate egos, even though they inhabit the same body. The narrator even describes Alda's presence in Rafael's psyche in terms that portray him as a man suffering from a dissociative personality disorder: "ese alter ego que forma con nuestro yo una dualidad extraña, que pugna con él a las vegadas y a las vegadas a él se une en maridaje íntimo; que ama con más frecuencia el debate que la armonía, y que parece usufructuar alternativamente con la individualidad primitiva, las células del cerebro" (210). As in any relationship, the passion between Rafael and Alda wanes after a time and the two egos come into conflict with each other over competing needs and desires. As they begin to quarrel, the narrator

notes the thin line that separates love and hate: "el amor no es acaso más que una encantadora forma del odio entre los sexos" (217), and alludes to the violence of the erotic impulse: "El amor, en sus impulsos, tiene ferocidades inauditas" (217). After Andrés extricates Alda from Rafael's psyche, she pleads with both men to allow her to ascend to the celestial realm, rather than reincarnate her into another body.

Metaphysical Philosophy

Like the short story, "La diablesa," Nervo does not present occultism in "El donador de almas" as a macabre exploration of the supernatural. Nor does he depict esoteric practices as the profanation of Christian rituals, as Huysmans had done. Instead the novella expresses the same yearning for transcendence that Nervo articulated in narratives such as "El bachiller," "La plegaria," and "La Navidad de un bohemio." Rafael wants to alleviate an existential angst, not unlike that of the seminarian Felipe. While the latter turns to God as a source of comfort, the former believes that Alda has that healing capacity: "–Alda, necesito un ideal para mi vida; yo estoy hecho de tal suerte, que no puedo vivir sin un ideal… Mi existencia sin un fin, sin un afecto, bogaría con la dolorosa indecisión de un pájaro ciego, de una nave desgobernada" (223). In this context, Alda is another manifestation of the unattainable, ethereal woman of the *modernista* ideal. Rafael's longing for her, his attachment to an egoistic desire that cannot be fulfilled, only serves to intensify his suffering.

Both Andrés and Alda try to convince Rafael to let her go, and in doing so, they articulate the metaphysical philosophy of the novella, which consists of a synthesis of Western and Eastern concepts in the manner of the theosophists. For his part, Andrés turns to Roman stoicism to reason with his friend. He cites the first-century philosopher, Epictetus (c. 55-135), who taught that, although external events are determined by fate, the individual has the ability to accept these events calmly and dispassionately: "–Haz de tu mal un fin– dijo filosóficamente–. Epicteto afirma

que en nuestro poder está aceptar el mal como un bien, o más aún, recibir con indiferencia todos s los males" (223). Continuing in this tone of resignation, Andrés later he adds "–ennoblece tu amor con el martirio. La vida es breve… La muerte habrá de redimirte de tu soledad y de tu angustia" (225). In this statement, the poet alludes to the return to the state of continuity in death, when the soul is freed from the burden of attachments in the physical realm. It is precisely this state of release that Alda desires. In her argument to Rafael she specifically contrasts the spiritual and the material realms.

> –¡Ah, tú no puedes comprender la delicia de abejear por el espacio sin limites, de ser una perenne libélula de esos grandes corimbos de flores pálidas que se llaman constelaciones; de escuchar el salmo de los mundos que ruedan, de fundirse en la crin fosforescente de los cometas, de visitar orbe tras orbe y hallar con pasmo que la creación siempre comienza, que siempre estamos en el umbral del universo y que tenemos para recorrerlo la rapidez de la luz, la sutileza del éter y la tenuidad del perfume!... ¡Y quieres que torne a animar una pobre masa encefálica, a unirme a un cuerpo encadenado por la gravedad, enervado por quince mil quinientos kilogramos de presión atmosférica, sujeto a la enfermedad, a la vejez y a la muerte!... (223).

Although the dualism of spirit and matter that Alda presents here is central to the Christian worldview, her depiction of the metaphysical realm does not correspond to the Christian conception of Heaven. There is no mention of the medieval-like social order that one typically finds in Western religious images. Nor does she mention God, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary or any of the saints. Alda's use of the verb "abejear" connotes a lightness of being which allows her to move effortlessly in a limitless space. There is an element of Pythagoreanism, another Western philosophical tradition that was influential to many esoteric groups, in her depiction of the universe as a harmonious and ordered domain. Her reference to animating a body alludes to the transmigration of the soul, another Pythagorean concept that is also integral to Eastern religions. Her depiction of the physical body, chained as it is to the material world and susceptible to disease, old age, and death, reveals the Christian disdain for the corporeal state. Absent from this passage is the ironic tone that has been consistent throughout the novella. Here the author

presents his own synthesis of the various esoteric trends that he has incorporated into this narrative.

Continuing her monologue, Alda addresses the dilemma of Rafael's intangible yearning. She highlights the selfishness of his insistence that she stay in the physical realm and points out the flaw of the human condition, the desire of men to possess what is an illusion, which only leaves them wanting more, perpetually unfulfilled.

> Eres como todos los hombres: cuando poseen en sí a la ilusión, hija del cielo, la amargan con sus mezquindades y con sus egoísmos, la empequeñecen y la alejan, y cuando miran perderse a distancia sus alas de luz, la llaman y sollozan por ella. ¡Insensato! ¡Qué importaba sacrificar un poco de tu orgullo ante la ineffable dicha de tenerme contigo, ante la fusión mirífica de tu espíritu y el mío!... ¡Loco! Habías realizado el connubio sublime por excelencia y tú mismo has roto el conjuro (224).

As Mefisto had pointed out to Jaime in "La diablesa," Alda explains how the fulfillment of one's longings only brings temporary satisfaction. She's also indignant with Rafael because he had actually achieved the desired union with her, but then soon became exasperated with her constant presence. And now that she wants to be set free, he pleads with her to stay. This again recalls Felipe's realization, and even that of Becquer's Manrique: the object of desire is an illusion. Once the protagonist attains the ethereal woman for whom he yearns, the enchantment is broken.

As Alda lacks a physical body, Rafael's desire for her is purely spiritual, which parallels Felipe's mystic yearning, but eliminates altogether the erotic component that so arduously troubled the seminarinan. This coincides with Irwin's assessment that Nervo "prefers to obliterate sexual difference in any way posible" (100). And yet, whatever the source of Nervo's troubled sexuality, it is not resolved in this narrative. Rafael does not struggle against the erotic impulse, as Felipe had done, but he still suffers because of his impossible desire. Once he agrees to release Alda, she achieves the illusive transcendent state, while he must be content with a stoic acceptance of his agonizing existence in the material world. A happier ending to the story might be that Rafael ascertain the folly of his idealistic desire for Alda, and realize that there is someone

right in front of him who loves him profoundly –Andrés– and develop a real-world relationship with him. However, in the same way that Nervo dared not risk expressing direct criticism of the Porfirian régime when writing about political issues, this dénouement for Rafael and Andrés would have been scandalous in his cultural context. This accounts for the ambivalence that Irwin identifies in Nervo's literary constructions of gender identity and sexuality: that he "seems comfortable with neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality," that he "seems to advocate not so much bisexuality as asexuality," and that his ideal is neither bisexual nor asexual, but "a sexuality based on reproduction by masturbation" (100-01). While refraining from making speculations about Nervo's personal life, we can tentatively conclude that he probably did not conform to the virile image of masculinity that was central to the construction of national identity in post-independence Mexico. In light of this, I propose that, precisely because Nervo defies an easy categorization in terms of sexuality and gender identity, that he is the quintessential queer; that is, his texts communicate "from and to the differences and silences that have been suppressed by the homo-hetero binary" (Hennessy, cited in Jagose, 99). As we saw in the previous chapter, he speaks for the repressed feminine principle, whether it manifests itself in a biologically female or a male body.

I have addressed at length these questions, not only because they are prominent in Nervo's texts, but because they are closely linked to his spiritual yearning. His representations of gender reveal the fluid nature of these categories, in the same way that the metaphysical realm itself is fluid. Whatever it was about Nervo's sexuality that was difficult for him would have also been problematic to his spiritual yearning, due to his religious cultural context with its inherent denial of sexual expression. The link between sexuality and spirituality could very well have been a contributing factor to Nervo's interest in Hinduism and Buddhism, which he would begin to study in depth in the coming years. This is not to suggest that these religions are somehow more

accepting of sexuality; but that they are focused on an experience of the super-sensory realm rather than on a moral code or a dualism of virtue and sin (Zaehner 1-2).

Nervo refrained from directly addressing political topics in his journalistic production, although he did comment on social conditions in the urban center. While focusing instead on cultural topics, he continued to explore the yearning for transcendence that he expressed in "El bachiller." His depiction of Catholicism in the urban center presents an ethereal, otherworldly experience of these rites, in contrast to the bourgeois nominal adherence to doctrinal tenets. In addition, he was aware of the plurality of metaphysical tendencies circulating in Porfirian Mexico, and frequently commented on these trends, often with a sense of humor. The bohemian marginalized artist, adherents of spiritualist practices, the esoteric dabblings of occultists, all of these he regarded with the same critical perspective that he brought to his writings on Christian themes. His examination of these topics culminates in his third novella "El donador de almas."

Nervo's disruption of the binary opposition between feminine and masculine in his narratives extends to the disruption of a whole series of binaries in Porfirian society: religion and secularization, religion and science, art and science, *modernista* spirituality and bourgeois materialism. A chronicle that he wrote in Paris, "El enlutado que reza" (c. 1908), exemplifies Nervo's ability to synthesize the transcendant and the pragmatic, the dualism that Urbina had identified in him years before. In this text the author describes seeing a man on a crowded street, reading a book of hours and absorbed in a mystical state of prayer. Nervo then looks up and sees a plane flying overhead. In the first man he sees the human will to transcend the physical world. The man in the plane exhibits another type of human will, the will that stems from a curiosity about the physical world, which leads to discovery, inventions, and the ability to achieve what was previously thought impossible.

> ¡Dos locos!
> El de arriba, con su locura impía de las alas que enoja a los dioses; el de abajo, con su locura de amor, locura mística que San Lorenzo Justiniano atribuye a Dios mismo.
> –Vimos –dice– a la Sabiduría, por la magnitud de su amor a los hombres, vuelta loca.
> ¿Y cuál de estas dos voluntades es superior, mis amigos?
> "La del vuelo", diréis.
> ¡Es que las dos vuelan!
> ¡No valoréis la voluntad por los resultados prácticos, sino por la excelencia de la voluntad misma! […]
> Lo esencial es tener voluntad.
> En este siglo de abúlicos, yo admiro al hombre que sabe querer.
> ¿Querer qué?
> Cualquier cosa, pero querer algo. (696)

Two madmen, Nervo calls them both, returning to the correlation between madness, transcendence, and creativity that he observed in his earlier chronicle "La Navidad de un bohemio." In Nervo's view, both of these men are flying. The religious man is, like the mystic Felipe in "El bachiller," pushing the limits of human knowledge in an inner subjective way. The man in the plane, on the other hand, is pushing the limits of human knowledge in the physical objective reality. Nervo admires both of these men. He doesn't value one more or less than the other. Concha Meléndez, one of the earliest scholars of Nervo's work, noted this dual characteristic of his worldview: "el deseo de saber en Nervo se componía extrañamente de ciencia y misterio" (11), as exemplified by his interests in both astronomy and psychology. Unlike Gamboa, whose return to Catholicism implied the return to religious orthodoxy and the abandonment of modern values of intellectual inquiry, Nervo is able to quote a fifteenth century Venetian bishop, San Lorenzo Justiniano (1381-1456), and simultaneously hail a twentieth century invention. Unlike Salvador Arteaga, the protagonist in *Reconquista*, who believed that secular education destroyed a student's previous belief system without creating something new to replace it, Nervo acknowledges the creative spirit that is also a part of science and modernity.

Conclusions

Taking on the priestly role Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera articulates a secular expression of the divine. He layers and juxtaposes sometimes contradictory intellectual trends in his texts, in order to construct narratives that reflect the objective world around him, as well as his experiences of subjective states, all in an effort to address matters of the spirit in modernity. He utilizes his literary aesthetic as an instrument to access the metaphysical realm, the source of artistic creation, in order to give a tangible, finite form to that which is immaterial and infinite. In regard to the Church as an institution, Nájera's political writings identify the role it plays in maintaining the traditional social order. This is in accord with the neocolonial perspective of the Porfiran ruling class. However, his literary representations of Catholicism do not consist of theological explications of Church doctrine. These are instead subjective and personal expressions of religiosity as a cultural artifact. His narratives often associate religious practices with the domestic sphere and with women in particular as the guardians of these traditions. In this regard he portrays nostalgic memories of Church ceremonies and rites that he experienced in his youth. Nájera's texts also suggest that the loss of a religious belief system contributes to the prevailing social anxiety in modernity, as science invalidates the traditional religious worldview. Despite his unequivocal support of scientific knowledge as the foundation for progress and modernity, his narratives still affirm the validity of such a system for the comfort that it provides to people. The most subjective manifestation of Catholicism in Nájera's texts derives from the baroque Spanish mystic tradition. These representations of religiosity are part of a broader, pluralistic view of the metaphysical realm, a view that stems from the symbolist desire to transcend the material world, or restore a sense of enchantment to an industrialized society.

Moving beyond Catholicism, Nájera's narratives manage to portray transcendent states of being. But even in these, an undertone of his religious tradition continues to be present in varying

degrees. He was familiar with the spiritualist movements that were in vogue throughout western culture during the nineteenth century, and made references to these concepts. However, his perspective on the metaphysical realm tended to not stray too far from a Christian cosmology. His depiction of spiritualism includes the Catholic tradition of intercession, spirits that speak to God on behalf of the living. His writings on the ethereal nature of music are his most transcendent pieces, where he relies on characteristics of nuance and ambiguity to express the ethereal pleasure of music. In short, the *modernista* intellectual takes on the priestly role that Angel Rama has identified in that generation. What manifests in Nájera's work is an aesthetic intervention in the religious belief system of his formative years. The autonomous intellectual reinterprets these cultural artifacts and transforms them into expressions of a subjective experience of the divine.

As the most orthodox of the three authors in this study, Gamboa's portrayal of Catholicism and religious values in his novels reflects his ambivalence toward the role of the Church in modernity. This is most apparaent in *Metamorfosis* where he highlights the restrictive nature of the institutional Church in tension with the autonomy of the modern subject. The narrative portrays the intersection between religion and eroticism and reveals an unconscious presence of the ancient unity of spirit and matter. However the facile conclusion of the novel leaves open the question as to whether or not Rafael and Noeline will be able to sustain that unity. Gamboa's next two novels show him becoming increasingly more conservative in his portrayal of Catholicism. In *Santa* the unity of the sacred and the profane is restored in the title character's relationship with El Jarameño, but only for a brief time. After much suffering Santa eventually repents for her sinful lifestyle. Her mystic experience with Hipólito at the end of the novel is contingent on the renunciation of her sexuality, leaving body and soul polarized.

The narrative of *Reconquista* not only affirms Catholic values, but also parallels the author's own reconversion. When the protagonist returns to the religion of his youth, he abandons many of the tenets of modernity: secularization, scientific inquiry, and the autonomy of

the artist. In this regard I identify in Gamboa's work the inverse of the dynamic that emerges in Nájera's œuvre. That is, there is a theological intervention in Gamboa's creative process. The autobiographical story of Salvador Arteaga indicates that the author returned to the religion of his youth to alleviate the angst of modernity. This concurs with Nájera's affirmation regarding the value of a religious belief system. In Gamboa's novel however, and by extension in his own life, the return to the Church entails the adoption of the institution's worldview and doctrinal precepts without question, thus renouncing the agency of the modern subject.

Concerning the role of religion in modernity, all three authors acknowledge the capacity of the Church to provide for the spiritual needs of citizens. Nevertheless, it is still a colonial institution that maintains a conservative political stance and functions as an instrument of social control. This characteristic is evident in the reactionary perspective of Gamboa in the face of the coming revolution. His formal return to Catholicism served to solidify the already conservative political views he held. It is in this regard that Amado Nervo's religiosity departs from that of the other two authors in the sense that his yearning for spiritual transcendence goes beyond the political nature of institutional religion.

Nervo was the most spiritually experimental of the three authors. In this regard, the Church appears in his texts as more of an obstacle than a vehicle to move toward an otherworldly experience in modernity. Like Gamboa's *Metamorfosis*, Nervo's early novellas portray the intersection of religion and sexuality, but they go further in exposing the destructive consequences of the division between these two realms of human conciousness. The texts that he produced in Mexico City follow Nájera's lead in constructing a secular form of spirituality. He portrays the modern mystics in the urban center who seek transcendence from the materialism of bourgeois values. His depiction of Catholicism in these later chronicles and short stories presents an ethereal, otherworldly experience of religiosity, which contrasts markedly with Porfirian society's nominal adherence to doctrinal tenets. Nervo's texts explore spiritualism, esoteric

practices, and other religious traditions as alternative avenues to access the metaphysical realm, while maintaining the same critical perspective toward these currents that he brings to his critique of the Catholic Church. He continues to explore the yearning for spiritual transcendence that he expressed in "El bachiller," a topic that he revisits in "El donador de almas." In contrast to Gamboa's narratives, Nervo's prose works reflect the ability to synthesize religious and secular discourses, to see the value that each of these fields brings to humanity.

In terms of the cosmopolitan traits of these texts, I would not characterize this tendency as mimicry of European cultures, but rather as the active engagement of the authors with a plurality of literary and artistic sources. The problem with this Eurocentric perspective has more to do with demographics. As the texts are representative of the ruling class, they reflect the culture of a mere twenty percent of Mexico's population at the time, while dismissing, minimizing, or ignoring altogether the presence of indigenous and mestizo elements within the nation at large. This is not to negate the contributions of the *modernistas* to Mexico's intellectual development. The point is that this unbalanced state state of affairs, culturally, socially, and politically, made the coming revolution inevitable. However, Nervo's point of view on this question departs from that of the other two authors. While the texts of Nájera and Gamboa tend to uphold the western values of the ruling class, Nervo's writing allows for the possibility that indigenous voices be heard. This is evident in "Pascual Aguilera" where he renders the *campesino* characters Refugio and Santiago in a positive light, suggesting that they represent a sounder alternative than the decadent *criollo* class for the construction of a national identity. The next generation of intellectuals, *el Ateneo de la Juventud*, will expand on this notion of *mestizaje* as a core component of Mexican culture. Utilizing the literary/artistic foundation that the *modernistas* established, they will turn their gaze away from Europe and toward their own milieu, acknowledging the significance of the autochthonous peoples of Mexcio.

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This dissertation was typed by Elizabeth García Guajardo.