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¿“Mujeres al borde de un naufragio” or Female Redeemers?:

The Representation and Role of Women in Galdós’s Torquemada Novels (1889-95)

Abstract

Considered superficially, the women in the Torquemada novels conform to the negative gender stereotypes imposed upon them by their male counterparts. On further examination, however, we discover that the male viewpoints are both undermined and questioned, and a number of female characters are used to pose questions that are even more ambitious than those raised in Galdosian novels where the eponymous characters are women. Aiming to enhance our understanding of the significance of the female characters in Galdós’s novels, as well as unearthing their complexity, this article highlights the presence of ambiguity in the Torquemada novels and argues that these works question traditional perceptions of women. Boundaries are revealed to be hazy and the male characters (who sometimes have effeminate qualities) are essentially puppets or “fronts” in what is effectively a domain controlled by the women. Displaying a level of resourcefulness, creativity and resilience that surpasses that of their male counterparts, the female characters (particularly Cruz) are sometimes influential catalysts for change. Hence, rather than being misconstrued as “a problem” or “al borde de un naufragio”, they could be regarded as potential redeemers in a Spain that was in need of regeneration.

Key words

Galdós, Torquemada, women, men, redeemer, naufragio

Revised main text = 10,902 words

Galdós's Torquemada novels focus on the exploits of the moneylender, Don Francisco Torquemada, and are often regarded as having a strong masculine spirit. The works bear particular relevance to themes such as the rise of the self-made man and enterprise in the public sphere as our attention is centred upon the moneylender's trajectory through the echelons of society.¹ Although a number of Galdós's female characters have been the subject of valuable critical studies, sometimes yielding radically different, even extreme opinions,² the women in the Torquemada series have received relatively little critical attention to date, perhaps because they might initially be perceived to be of secondary importance. As we will see, however, these novels provides readers with a close insight into the situation of women in nineteenth-century Spain and, through the use of ambiguity and hazy boundaries, the female characters, who are frequently juxtaposed with weak, sometimes effeminate male counterparts, pose questions that were more ambitious than those raised in earlier novels when the eponymous protagonists were female (notably *La de Bringas* [1884] and *Tristana* [1892]).

The Torquemada novels were written at a time when the role of women was hotly debated. In the words of Emilia Pardo Bazán (1892, 72), “Es la llamada cuestión de la mujer acaso la más seria entre las que hoy se agitan”, and the situation of the female sex preoccupied many, especially the Krausistas. However, the latter's attention was focussed primarily upon attaining harmony within the family institution and their reforms were less concerned with women as individuals than with the manner in which they could guarantee this harmony, support their husbands and improve their children's future. As Jagoe (1992, 44) has noted,

The Krausists' belief that men were called to be the redeemers of society led to a contradiction in the movement's position on gender; despite Krause's

affirmation of the equality of the sexes [...], the Spanish Krausists of the 1860s and 1870s, by stressing the husband's role as teacher and shaper of his wife, in fact drew on the traditional, hierarchical model of gender difference, originating in Aristotle and still firmly rooted in the nineteenth-century European imagination, in which the female decidedly occupies the inferior role.

Galdós's awareness of the debates surrounding "lo femenino" was heightened due to the influence of a number of key women, notably Pardo Bazán. She described Tristana as "embrionaria y confusa, al través de una niebla, como si el novelista no se diese cuenta clara de la gran fuerza dramática que puede encerrar [el tema de la independencia de la mujer]" (1893, cited in Anderson 1985, 61) and it is possible that Galdós was responding to this when writing the later Torquemada novels. As we will see, the Águila sisters, Cruz and Fidela, afforded the author the opportunity to explore the significance of "lo femenino" in greater depth, but this time dispensing with the extravagant claims of an extreme character like Tristana, whose aspirations could not be accommodated by nineteenth-century society as she desperately craved positions held by men and sometimes even dismissed the value of her own desires, proclaiming, "estoy loca".

Conventional Behaviour and Traditional Perceptions of Women

As Charnon-Deutsch (1990, xii) has noted, "The nineteenth century is one of the favored test periods feminism uses to confront patriarchal values because the ideologies of gender are so heavily inscribed in its discourses." The Torquemada novels are no exception and, in superficial terms, the female characters reflect conventional roles, together with both positive and negative perceptions of women at a time when the Spanish woman was, for many,

destined to be “el ángel del hogar doméstico, la guardadora del sagrado fuego del amor conyugal, [...] la base segura y fundamental de la familia” (Tartilán 1877, 232).

Within the private sphere, Galdós’s female characters often appear to comply with conventional behaviour. They are portrayed as natural housewives and carers. Torquemada’s first wife, Doña Silvia, runs the household expertly, and later her daughter Rufina takes on the reins, caring for her younger brother, Valentín, in much the same way as the Águila sisters, Cruz and Fidela, care for their blind brother, Rafael. We also see evidence of self-sacrifice and subordination to the male sex as the sisters pretend to eat imaginary meals so that the little food that they have can nourish their brother. As was the norm during this period, the women are depicted as being profoundly religious. It is, we suspect, largely as a result of Doña Silvia’s influence that Torquemada goes to Church “por rutina” (TH 32), whilst the Águila sisters are evidently influenced by the Church’s rigid views and avid promoters of its principles.³

Some of the traditionally negative perceptions of women are also articulated. For instance, the reference to the servant Tía Roma as “bruja” (TH 103 and 111)⁴ conveys a familiar stock image, expressing the commonly suspicious attitude towards women and the apprehensions surrounding the manner in which they were able to cast incomprehensible spells over their male counterparts.⁵ In a more scientific vein, the Torquemada novels draw upon the belief that women were the weaker sex, a “special medical problem” (Labanyi 2000, 67), prone to extreme passions, lying, excessive spending, and profoundly influenced by their reading. Women’s inferiority is implied in statements such as Bailón’s pronouncement, “Déjese para las mujeres la cobardía” (TH 64), and references to their physical ailments. Donoso’s wife, Justa, is a hypochondriac with umpteen chronic complaints and Fidela falls gravely ill, suffering, in the doctors’ opinions, from “anemia, y un poco de histerismo” (TSP 96). These were medical problems commonly associated with the female sex at a time when

the research conducted by the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot on hysteria was attracting considerable interest.

Women's inferiority is also highlighted through allusions to their detrimental impact upon the household finances, firstly through the minor character, Don Juan's wife:

Después le cayó [a Don Juan] la herencia de un tío; pero como la señora tenía unos condenados jueves para reunir y agasajar á la mejor sociedad, los cuartos de la herencia se escurrían de lo lindo, y sin saber cómo ni cuándo, fueron á parar al bolsón de Torquemada. (TH 70).

The use of "condenados" (which, like many other adjectives and adverbs in the novels, is emotionally charged) and the phrase "sin saber cómo ni cuándo" reflect the exasperation of Don Juan and the narrator, which match Torquemada's sentiments. This is paralleled later when Torquemada complains about Cruz and Fidela: "Pero con esta casa, y estas señoras mías, mis arcas son un cesto" (TP 113). This, then, expresses "The spendthrift image", which had been explored in *La de Bringas*, and "dramatizes the fear that masculine capitalist society, which defined bourgeois women as consumers and displayers of wealth produced by men, felt at the power it had thus placed in feminine hands" (Jago 1994: 90). It is notable that many of the negative impressions of the female sex are expressed from the perspective of the male characters and this, in itself, is worthy of attention, since, as we will see, questioning what we read can often yield a converse view.

The Validity of Male Viewpoints

Our impressions of the female characters are influenced by Torquemada's perspective on numerous occasions. The suggestion that women are duplicitous, self-seeking and sly, for

example, is conveyed through his suspicions, which extend to his daughter Rufina as he attributes her negativity towards Valentín II to her belief that before he re-married she was going to inherit everything. He also alludes to female pretentiousness through his derisory description of Doña Lupe's futile attempts to appear respectable: "Aunque se pusiera encima manteletas traídas de París, resultaba tan dama como mi abuela..." (TC 25).

The priest Gamborena also influences the reader, expressing a more sinister, negative attitude as he disregards a commonly accepted belief that women were deeply religious. He pronounces that they are superficial, telling Fidela and Augusta:

[...] no os vale tanta religiosidad de aparato; no se os acepta el homenaje externo si no lo acompañáis del rendimiento de los corazones, y de la sumisión de la inteligencia. (TSP 86-87)⁶

Rafael's friend, Pepe Serrano Morentín, is the most scathing critic of the female sex, conveying a derogatory male perspective as he speaks of their "pasiones" and hankers after an affair with a married woman. He believes that women's main purpose is to serve as his subordinates and act as beautiful dolls:⁷

Creo como Zárate, que [Fidela] tiene atrofiado el lóbulo cerebral de las pasiones. ¡Ah, las pasiones! Lo que pierde á las criaturas; pero también lo que las ennoblece y ensalza. Mujer sin pasiones puede ser una hermosa muñeca, ó una gallina utilísima, si es madre... (TP 251-52)

The use of exclamation marks communicates the character's impatience and arrogance, whilst the active reader will read between the lines and appreciate the subtext of such

allusions. The reference to dolls, for example, not only draws upon references made in *Tristana*, where Don Lope describes the protagonist as “pobre muñeca con alas”, but links directly to works such as Ibsen’s impactful *Doll’s House* (“Casa de muñecas”), which focussed on women’s emancipation and had been published for the first time in Spanish in *La España Moderna* in 1892.⁸ The term “gallina” also devalues women’s significance, debasing them to the level of animals and recalling the references to birds in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887).⁹ However, when such comments are presented from the mouth of a despicable character like Morentín, one more worthy of contempt than admiration, the active reader might well be led to question the validity of such a viewpoint. Furthermore, many of the negative opinions of women expressed by male characters are later disproved.

Torquemada is the character who wavers most frequently in his judgements of the female sex and he often contradicts himself. For instance, he revises his aforementioned condemnation of Rufina, declaring,

«Hija querida, tú eres la única persona que me quiere de veras. ¿Quién se interesa por mí más que tú?... Por eso ¡malditas Biblias! yo te quiero á ti más que á nadie. [...] Tú eres el dechado de las buenas hijas, y un ángel, como quien dice, si bien yo, seamos justos, no creo que haya ángeles ni serafines...»

(TSP 185)

One cannot fail to note the loaded significance of the term “ángel” here. Its presence suggests that Torquemada feels most secure when he is able to pigeon-hole his daughter in a conventional, pre-established category, in this case that of the angelic, dutiful daughter. However, even Torquemada recognises that his use of this term is effectively meaningless to him personally, since it carries religious overtones, yet he is essentially irreligious, does not

believe in angels and thus regularly blasphemes (using the term “¡malditas Biblias!” in this instance). Furthermore, his reference to his daughter as “el dechado de las buenas hijas” has a humorous effect, rendering futile his attempts to appear eloquent. It is possible to contend, then, that the reader is not encouraged to endorse, or even accept his viewpoint but, rather, is invited to note the inappropriate and superficial nature of such categories that were so frequently employed at a time when the ideology of domesticity advanced the basic and frequently unquestioned precept that woman was “el ángel del hogar”.

The active reader will also detect and question the level of exaggeration in Torquemada’s outbursts. He frequently rants against the female sex, sometimes going to the extreme of portraying women as torturers. Of Tía Roma he pronounces,

Eres una embustera, una diabla, con todo el cuerpo lleno de mentiras y enredos. [...] El demonio está contigo, y maldita tú eres entre todas las brujas y esperpentos que hay en el cielo..... digo, en el infierno. (TH 103).

Once more the validity of his reference to devils, Heaven and Hell is counteracted by the reader’s knowledge that he does not have a religious outlook. The rhythm of his rant is not dissimilar to some kind of religious chant, perhaps even *The Lord’s Prayer*, which further heightens the irony and succeeds in embroiling the speech in humour, particularly as he later engages in a similar rant against Cruz. Moreover, if we return to a previous quotation where Torquemada bemoans the fact that, thanks to the women, “mis arcas son un cesto”, it is possible to contend that, contrary to his viewpoint, Cruz’s spending should not be regarded as madness and a waste of money (as was arguably the case with Rosalía Bringas’s spending), but rather as a shrewd investment, especially since we later discover that Cruz equipped Torquemada with material possessions that enhanced his social status.

Furthermore, Gamborena later informs Torquemada that he is wrong to feel “el odio, sí, contra esa santa mujer, que ningún daño le ha hecho... al contrario, ha sido para usted un ángel benéfico.” (TSP 153).¹⁰ Once again the references to “ángel”, along with the adjective “santa”, are significant. He reminds Torquemada that Cruz is superior and without her he would be nothing:

La causa de la aversión diabólica que usted profesa á su hermana es la superioridad de ella, la excelsitud de su inteligencia. En ella todo es grande, en usted todo es pequeño, y su habilidad para ganar dinero, arte secundario y de menudencias, se siente humillada ante la grandeza de los pensamientos de Cruz. [...] Sin Cruz, no sería usted más que un desdichado prestamista, que se pasaría la vida amasando un menguado capital con la sangre del pobre. (TSP 156).

His attribution of the term “aversión diabólica”, contrasting sharply with his description of Cruz as “ángel benéfico”, ostensibly establishes who is in the wrong. Thus, whilst Torquemada’s claims might, initially and superficially, imply masculine dominance and power “rightly” protesting against the evil female on the one hand, upon re-reading the text, they also suggest unfounded criticism, particularly if the reader has evidence (at that point or later) to believe that Torquemada’s claims are exaggerated, prejudiced and narrow.

The validity of male viewpoints and pre-established categories (such as “ángel”) is also questioned in cases when the information regarding the female characters is either ambiguous or contradictory. For example, on the very same occasion when Doña Lupe is suffering from “la crisis nerviosa” (implying that she was in a weak, emotional state), she urges Torquemada to pay heed to “la santa palabra de su amiga” (TC 8), as though she were

some kind of prophet possessing superior insight. Since Doña Lupe is on her deathbed, the reader might feel that this claim is outlandish and should thus be disregarded. Nonetheless, there are other occasions in the novels when the (male) narrator's viewpoint and the information presented regarding women as "facts" are questionable. For example, the notion that women were indiscriminate, impressionable readers was widely circulated and communicated in works such as Clarín's *La Regenta* (1884-85) through the character of Ana Ozores. In the Torquemada novels this idea is expressed through Fidela.¹¹ Linking physical and mental indulgence, her reading is associated with a decadent love of sweets:

En efecto, su ingénita afición á las golosinas tomaba en el orden espiritual la forma de gusto de las novelas. Después de casada, sin tener ninguna ocupación en el hogar doméstico, pues su hermana y esposo la querían absolutamente holgazana, se redobló su antigua querencia de la lectura narrativa. Leía todo, lo bueno y lo malo, sin hacer distinciones muy radicales [...]. Comúnmente se enteraba del desenlace antes de llegar al fin, y si esto no le ofrecía en su tramitación alguna novedad, no terminaba el libro. Lo más extraño de su ardiente afición era que dividía en dos campos absolutamente distintos la vida real y la novela [...]. Entre las novelas que más tiraban á lo verdadero, y la verdad de la vida, veía siempre Fidela un abismo. (TP 66-67).

Fidela's rejection of the practical concerns of her role as housewife, deemed to be of the utmost significance during this period (hence the term "ángel del hogar"), suggest that, unlike Doña Silvia and Rufina, she is shallow, self-engrossed and frivolous, worthy of the reader's criticism. Interestingly, however, the statement "su hermana y esposo la querían absolutamente holganza" ("holganza" being a highly derogatory term that was sometimes

regarded, along with “pereza”, as one of Spain’s defective national characteristics) suggests that this behaviour is, perhaps surprisingly, encouraged by her sister (although she, as we will see later, is often presented as undertaking roles usually reserved for men) and her male partner. This would seem to confirm feminists’ claims that women had been conditioned to behave in a particular manner by the male sex. Pardo Bazán, for example, maintained that “los defectos de la mujer española, dado su estado social, en gran parte deben achacarse al hombre, que es, por decirlo así, quien modela y esculpe al alma femenina” (1890a, 102); and of the aristocratic woman, she declared, “La mujer, al ser frívola, al vivir entre el modisto y el peluquero, no hace sino permanecer en el terreno á que la tiene relegada el hombre, y sostener su papel de mueble de lujo” (1890b, 8-9), a view not dissimilar to that expressed by Morentín.

The final statement in the aforementioned quotation also suggests that Fidela is able to appreciate the distinction between fiction and reality and this, coupled with the information that she can predict novels’ endings, questions whether she really is as indiscriminate or naïve as readers were initially led to believe. The literal and stylistic combination of dichotomies, of “black” and “white” divisions within this extract (Fidela reads “lo bueno y lo malo” and a clear line is drawn here between fiction and reality, between her physical comforts [satisfied by sweets], on the one hand, and her spiritual comforts [satisfied by reading], on the other), together with the fact that readers ultimately discover that such processes of categorization are regularly simplistic and thus arguably invalid, support the argument that the narrator’s voice is ambiguous and, furthermore, that nothing is as straightforward or clear-cut as might first appear.

Putting together all of the above, then, it could be suggested that firstly, women are moulded, defined and dominated by their male counterparts, something which is reinforced through the fact that, in narrative terms, they are presented to us through the construction of

male perspectives. Secondly, we see that the female characters are often subject to particular preconceived categories, as was the case at the time, and this led to double standards, highlighted by Adolfo Posada (1898, 106): “Á nadie sorprende la mujer reina; pero sería cosa que levantaría quizá la más ruidosa de las protestas [...] una mujer alcalde ó una mujer gobernador de provincia.”

The negative opinions expressed by the male characters and narrator regarding their female counterparts are counterbalanced by evidence that the women are not passive and weak, but resourceful and influential catalysts for change. This is apparent from the first novel. Whilst it could be argued that Doña Silvia and Rufina assume the conventional roles of wife and daughter, it is also clear that they are both strong-minded, forward-thinking characters and their influence, which significantly benefits their male counterparts, extends beyond the private sphere. Doña Silvia not only runs the household efficiently, but undertakes an active role, helping her husband with his moneylending activities. Consequently, he is devastated by her death:

Esta pérdida fué un golpe cruel para Don Francisco, pues habiendo vivido el matrimonio en santa y laboriosa paz durante más de cuatro lustros, los caracteres de ambos cónyuges se habían compenetrado de un modo perfecto, llegando á ser ella otro él, y él como cifra y refundición de ambos. Doña Silvia no sólo gobernaba la casa con magistral economía, sino que asesoraba á su pariente en los negocios difíciles, auxiliándole con sus luces y su experiencia para el préstamo. Ella defendiendo el céntimo en casa para que no se fuera á la calle, y él barriendo para adentro á fin de traer todo lo que pasase, formaron un matrimonio sin desperdicio, pareja que podría servir de modelo á cuantas hormigas hay debajo de la tierra y encima de ella. (TH 5)

It is interesting that the couple are presented as effectively “becoming one” over time, since this challenges the inequality that was apparent in legal terms,¹² although it also conforms to the Krausista model marriage, “the union of dialectical opposites combining to form a harmonious whole” (Jago 1992, 44). The focus is on a broader sense of inequality, implicitly conveyed through the use of the “ant” image, not only highlighting the work ethic of the lower classes and their determination to not let anything go to waste, but also registering the possibility of a threat to the upper classes through the potential uprising of the organized “underdogs”, who significantly work both below and above, “debajo de la tierra y encima de ella”. This phrase is, furthermore, a mock-Biblical reference, reminiscent of the *Lord’s Prayer*: “venga tu reino, hágase tu voluntad, así en la tierra como en el cielo”. It is not inconsequential that it is another woman, his enterprising business partner, Doña Lupe “la Magnífica”, who later helps Torquemada establish a future direction and dramatically changes his life as she introduces him to the equally strong-minded Águila women.

The women’s decisive influence in the Torquemada novels extends across the classes – from the servants to the upper class. Even minor female characters demonstrate independence, stand up to their male counterparts and exact dramatic changes, although the manner in which they rebel invites dubious praise. For instance, we are told that the Águilas’ cousin, Pilar, has exploited their situation and is, in Cruz’s words, “uno de esos monstruos que causan espanto y hacen creer que Satanás anda por estos mundos” (TC 259), directly associating her with the devilish female.

The portrayal of the servants is of particular interest in highlighting female resilience and resourcefulness. Their superiors’ dependence upon them is revealed through Tía Roma and Bernardina, whose roles within the family structure are crucial. Tía Roma supports Doña Silvia, providing her with scraps to eat, she plays a key role with the children and casts a

strong opinion on Torquemada's actions. She is far from the submissive servant that we might expect. She regularly challenges her master, acting, on occasions, as the voice of reason, although the presentation of her ugly appearance (Torquemada calls her "madre de telarañas" [TH 103]) and her uncouth mannerisms cast an ambivalent shadow over claims that she represents the voice of pure virtue.¹³ Likewise, Bernardina is charged with Cruz's "comisiones delicadas, sobre las cuales era prudente guardar impenetrable secreto" (TC 190) and it is to her home that Rafael flees in order to seek refuge during times of distress.¹⁴ It is certainly the case here, as Labanyi (2000, 53) has noted, that the "'woman question' and the 'social question' are inseparable, to the point that they end up blurring in the case of the bourgeois [here the aristocrat too] as well as the working-class woman".¹⁵ All this, then, leads readers to consider whether it would be more helpful to assess the female characters on the basis of what they say and do, instead of accepting the male viewpoints. For this purpose, Fidela and Cruz, the most prominent and fascinating female characters in the series, deserve close attention.

Alpha Females

At a basic level, the situation of Fidela and Cruz can be linked to the fate of many aristocrats at a time when "no hay más aristocracia que la del dinero" (Galdós 1923b, 121) and, in Torquemada's words, "La aristocracia, árbol viejo y sin savia, no podía ya vivir sino lo abonaba (en el sentido de estercolar) el pueblo enriquecido." (TC 127). More importantly, these two characters reveal women's capacity to adapt and survive and, through their "management" of Torquemada, they expose the overlap between the private and the public spheres, particularly since Cruz is the puppeteer behind the moneylender's success.

Fidela: Conventionality and Conformity?

Fidela initially appears as a fairly conventional aristocratic woman, who, as Scott (2007) has shown, enables Galdós to focus on the themes of marriage and motherhood. At a superficial level, her attitude can be related to the conduct literature during a period when passivity, suffering and resignation were expected of bourgeois women, whose key qualities were “devotion, thrift, piety, and self-sacrifice” (Jago 1994, 142). In line with Sinués de Marco’s words, “hija, esposa o madre, su destino y su misión en la tierra es siempre sufrir y resignarse” (1878, 217), Fidela apparently accepts the prospect of marrying Torquemada with resignation: “Aunque el sacrificio fuera mucho mayor, yo lo haría” (TC 167).¹⁶

The husband/ wife relationship between Torquemada and Fidela also initially appears as a faithful rendition of the subservient status accorded to nineteenth-century women. This was expressed by Escartín y Lartiga (“El valor del hombre es activo, el de la mujer pasivo” [“El triunfo de la anarquía”, cited in Jago 1994, 26]) and extended to legal matters as the Civil Code required wives to obey their husbands.¹⁷ In line with Sáez de Melgar’s words, Fidela seems to accept that her role is to support her partner: “la mujer no ha nacido más que para ser mujer; es decir, para ser la compañera del hombre, su amiga, su hermana, su madre, su esposa, su hija, su consejera desinteresada, su ángel de caridad en sus tribulaciones y la estrella de su esperanza en sus momentos de desaliento.” (1881, vii). In addition to often taking his side, she remains faithful to Torquemada and maintains her “purity”, to the surprise of others.¹⁸

Given the age difference (almost 27 years), Torquemada initially regards Fidela as a child: “Mirábala como una niña á quien no se debía consentir ninguna iniciativa en cosas graves, y á quien convenía mimar, satisfaciendo de vez en cuando sus antojos infantiles.” (TC 93). This highlights his fatherly sentiments and complements the fact that Fidela indulges in infantile habits. More significantly, it reflects the traditionally negative reservations towards women, often viewed as adult children. The Anthropologist James McGrigor Allan wrote,

“physically, mentally, and morally, woman is a kind of adult child... The highest examples of physical, mental, and moral excellence are found in man.” (1869, ccx).¹⁹ A sense of inferiority is conveyed through Fidela’s whims, including her childlike love of sweets and dolls, which increase dramatically after the family’s descent into poverty and her marriage.²⁰ Fidela also frequently dreams, which suggests her disconnection from the real world, and she is pronounced by Zárata to be “[...] una estúpida, un sér enteramente atrofiado en todo lo que no sea la vida orgánica” (TP 186).

Motherhood casts Fidela in a more positive light, dramatically altering her and confirming the possibility of change and free will. This is presented positively from the male perspective as, in Torquemada’s eyes, she acquires a quasi-religious status when she is pregnant with his child.²¹ The positive connotations of this role are seemingly confirmed as motherhood makes Fidela physically beautiful and gives her life new purpose (TP 241-42), apparently fulfilling Fernando de Castro’s claim that a woman’s destiny and vocation was “ser madre” (cited in Jagoe 1994, 23). The use of plant imagery (“haciéndola florecer con todo el esplendor y la frescura de Mayo”) highlights the fact that this is a natural, healthy process in which she “blooms”. It is at this point that she gives up her extravagant tastes for sweetmeats, eats more healthily and stops reading.

However, the active reader will note that such interpretations regarding Fidela’s subservience and inferiority, despite redemption through motherhood, are not as clear-cut as might initially appear. For instance, doubts are cast when we read that Valentín II “no era para su madre más que una viva muñeca” (TP 241) and it is unclear whether playing with the dolls helped prepare Fidela for motherhood (as modern psychologists would claim), or whether this reference suggests that his importance is demeaned.²² More significantly, the “meek” and “pure” Fidela is far from passive and her character is open to re-interpretation. As we saw previously, the allegation that she is an indiscriminate reader is questionable and

although she is sometimes portrayed as disconnected, the active reader will recognise that Fidela is attuned to reality and even the roots of her dreams lie therein. Her dreams about staircases, for example, relate to the question of social climbing, whilst her dream of the dolls coming to life and changing money links to the increasing credit facilities granted to women during this period. More significantly, she proves her worth to Morentín on an occasion when she (regularly branded as “niña”, an inferior female) accuses him (allegedly the superior male) of being a child or a schoolboy in need of severe discipline. This leaves her listener disconcerted and embittered: “Su amor propio era en aquel momento como un vistoso y florido arbusto, que un pié salvaje hubiera pisoteado bárbaramente” (TP 250). Once again, the presence of natural imagery is significant and, interestingly, the concepts of “savagery” and “barbarity” are here applied to Fidela, which is unexpected, given that aristocrats were often presented as being “civilized”.

The narrator hints at Fidela’s perspicacity when we read of suspicions that she purely sides with Torquemada for peace’s sake. Moreover, the reference to there being no “sombra de malicia premeditada” (as she resolves to side with him and oppose Cruz’s plans to use Torquemada’s money to upgrade the house) sews the seeds of doubt in the readers’ minds, making them suspect that she secretly supported her sister:

Esto es lo más probable, y casi por seguro lo da el historiador, añadiendo que no había sombra de malicia premeditada en aquella estrategia, obra pura de la naturaleza femenina, y de la situación que la joven del Águila se encontraba. (TP 14).

It is evident that Fidela is prepared to make the best of the situation and she enjoys the material comforts that marriage has brought her: “su nuevo estado era una liberación, un feliz

término de la opresora miseria y humillante obscuridad de aquellos años maldecidos. Casada, podía vestirse con decencia y asearse conforme á su educación [...]” (TP 14-15). In this sense, it could be concluded that this is hardly an act of sacrifice, as initially presented, but an act of self-gain.

Cruz the Usurper or Man’s Redeemer?

Cruz is more powerful and extreme than Fidela and she contests, even overturns the notion of female submissiveness and inferiority. In so doing, she offers the greatest potential as a redeemer. Like Torquemada, she concerns herself with the finances and, demonstrating shrewd financial acumen, succeeds in mastering the mathematical challenge of making ends meet when faced with poverty:

Contaba una y otra vez sus escasos recursos, persiguiendo el problema insoluble de hacer de dos tres y de cuatro cinco, y á fuerza de revolver en su caldeado cerebro las fórmulas económicas, lograba dar realidad á lo inverosímil, y hacer posible lo imposible. (TC 135).²³

Gender expectations are radically subverted as she is grandiloquently compared to a military general, with its connotations of “gloria”, and the term “autoridad” is frequently employed to describe her. She is also the head of the family, which goes against the norm at a time when women were predominantly viewed (and admired) as the “heart” (but definitely not the “head”) of the household (Labanyi 2000, 61). Her siblings’ veneration borders on the religious as she takes on the role of a male leader, in this case Moses, thereby effectively supplanting Torquemada, with whom the prophet had previously been associated (TH 9):

Era Cruz el jefe de la familia con autoridad irrecusable; suya la mayor gloria de aquella campaña heroica, cuyos laureles cosecharía en otra vida de reparación y justicia; suya también la responsabilidad de un desastre, si la familia sucumbía, devorada por la miseria. Obedecíanla ciegamente sus hermanos, y la veneraban, viendo en ella un sér superior, algo como el Moisés que les llevaba al través del desierto, entre mil horrendas privaciones y amarguras, con la esperanza de pisar al fin un suelo fértil y hospitalario. (TC 136-37).

Cruz's display of enterprise, and the manner in which she encourages Torquemada to be original, might epitomize the hope for the advent of the Messiah, which is explicitly articulated through Torquemada's futile hopes associated with Valentín II, as well as the call for "el hombre nuevo". Contesting the derogatory opinions of the female sex expressed by various male characters, Cruz is acutely aware of her skills (noted previously by Gamborena) and her potential. Like Fidela, she affirms her superiority over Morentín, telling him that she has "Más talento que usted, pero mucho más" (TP 73).

Cruz's claims to possess "talent" are all the more convincing when juxtaposed with Torquemada's recognition of his daughter's similar "talents". Rufina introduced not dissimilar and equally dramatic changes into his household: "Y vió muy pronto D. Francisco que aquellas novedades eran buenas y que su hija tenía mucho talento [...]" (TH 13). The mock-Biblical language here²⁴ is ironic since the male is not in control, yet Torquemada attributes the utmost importance to these changes exacted by the female sex in the form of his daughter. The statement also highlights the fact that money and materialism effectively constitute "the new religion" in the protagonist's eyes and Rufina significantly adopts a similar attitude to Cruz, telling Quevedito, "Papá debiera abrir los ojos, ver que con lo que

tiene puede hacer otros papeles en el mundo, subirse á la esfera de los hombres ricos, usar levita inglesa, y darse mucha importancia.” (TC 56).

The notion of female superiority is also portrayed symbolically through Cruz’s name, which directly links her to the cross on which Christ was crucified, thus associating her with the theme of religion, which was traditionally male-dominated. Fidela’s name, too, bears a religious dimension, this time centring on the notion of fidelity, arguably conformity and obedience too. Both women share the surname *Águila*, which links them to the King of the birds, and, furthermore, a bird that is not caged, wingless nor domesticated (as was the case with *Tristana* and *Fortunata*), but a male that is able to take advantage of its enormous wingspan and soar over the landscape. This particular bird image, then, arguably advocates (rather than demeans) the women’s potential.

As stated previously, Cruz is the main catalyst for the changes which *Torquemada* and his home undergo, despite his protests, and she serves to raise questions regarding female authority, progress and whether savages could (and should) be civilized. Cruz “tames” *Torquemada* in an unruly world where the public sphere is dominated by men, yet here a woman is in control:

[...] la altiva señora trataba, por todos los medios, de ennoblecer al que era su hechura y su obra maestra, al rústico urbanizado, al salvaje convertido en persona, al vampiro de los pobres hecho financiero de tomo y lomo, tan decentón [...]. (TP 135)

The description mirrors the expectation that “civilizing” advances savagery (thus the “salvaje” becomes “persona”, the “vampiro” “decentón”). Cruz also acts as the adult teacher parenting the child, thus subverting the traditional perceptions of women, often regarded as

“adult children”. Her teaching brings to the fore maternal instincts, positively portrayed as in Fidela’s case, and further challenges the traditionally negative perceptions of females, as notions of weakness, inferiority and submissiveness are replaced with those of strength, superiority and control: “Brillaba en sus ojos la alegría materna, ó más bien el orgullo de un tenaz maestro que reconoce adelantos en el más rebelde de sus discípulos.” (TP 203). Motherhood in Cruz’s case signifies authority and security, as she tells Torquemada that she is like a mother to Fidela and later we read of Rafael’s view:

En la hermana mayor vió siempre como una segunda madre, dulce autoridad que, aun ejerciéndose con firmeza, reforzaba el cariño. En Fidela no veía más que la hermanita querida, compañera de desgracias, y hasta de juegos inocentes. (TC 173-74)

Later, Cruz’s role as nurturer is apparent as she craves the task of caring for Gamborena: “Por su gusto, habríale tenido todo el día en casa, cuidándole como á un niño, prodigándole todos los afectos que vacantes había dejado el pobre Rafaelito.” (TSP 38) Once again, it is notable that the male, not the female, is the child.

Torquemada, too, regards Cruz in maternal terms, although he humorously portrays her as an evil mother-in-law.²⁵ Ironically, little predicting the extent of Cruz’s future dominance, he declares submission, telling her, “Tráteme la señora mismamente como á un chiquillo... Y si quiere que le ayude...” (TC 3). Thus Cruz attends to improving his appearance and speech and even Fidela imposes her influence upon Torquemada, thereby going against the expectation of uxorial obedience: “la mujer ha nacido para obedecer al hombre” (cited in Jagoe 1994, 36). As Jagoe has noted, there are direct parallels with Galdós’s *La loca de la casa* (1893) here:

Like Cruz del Águila with Torquemada, Victoria transforms Pepet, raising him from the status of despised upstart into a respected member of the middle classes, from a peasant into a gentleman. The novel, which is laden with allusions to Pepet as an animal and a subject of transformational processes, bears a great resemblance to the myth of the beauty and the beast, which was widely republished in illustrated editions for a nineteenth-century Europe fascinated by the concept of feminine power to effect metamorphoses in men. (1994, 161)

There are arguably similarities with Wagner's female redeemers too; Rieger, for instance, notes that "The Valkyrie Brünnhilde was, in the final version of the Ring, turned into a model 19th-century woman, who was endowed with the ability to redeem man." (Rieger 2011, 110) It is also possible to regard Cruz's actions as a practical complement to, if not extension of, the spiritual missions of female redeemers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; as noted by Steele (2001, 84),

[a]t their most ecstatic, some nineteenth-century reformers articulated a new "Woman-Power" by defining themselves as female messiahs. In England, for example, Joanna Southcott, "the Woman clothed with the sun", became the focus of a cult that worshiped the image of liberated woman as the bride of Christ. In America, the Shakers followed a female Redeemer, "Mother Ann" Lee, who taught "that God had a dual nature, part male and part female".

The result is that, like Rafael, Torquemada comes to live in a *ménage à trois* where the women are in control.²⁶ This directly challenges Monlau's notion that "El hombre hace a la mujer" (*Higiene del matrimonio* [1892], cited in Condé 2000, 60) and overturns the aforementioned reference to women as passive "dolls". Cruz acts as puppeteer, controlling both Rafael and Torquemada.

Cruz learns to "play" Torquemada, advancing arguments that will appeal to him.²⁷ We read,

su hermana política tenía sobre él, sin duda por la fineza del ingenio ó la costumbre del gobernar, un poder sugestivo que al bárbaro tacaño le domaba la voluntad, sin someter su inteligencia. (TP 104).

The dramatic contrast between Cruz's power to innovate and Torquemada's lack of originality are revealed as he adopts Cruz's ideas as if they were his own. Cruz diplomatically accepts this and also gives others the impression that these are his ideas, thereby feigning inferiority ("afectando sumisión á la primera autoridad de la familia" [TP 13]) and apparently accepting that he, as the male, should appear to the public sphere as the innovator, even when that is not the case.

Cruz adopts a similarly controlling attitude towards her brother when she fabricates a story to persuade him that Fidela must marry Torquemada: "No le argüía la conciencia por haber mentado, pues Rafael era una criatura, y había que adormecerle, como á los niños llorones, con historias bonitas." (TC 262). Once again, the male is portrayed as a child ("criatura") and she recognises that it is largely as a result of her "teaching" that her brother clings so desperately to his values and status. However, the male aristocrat, unlike his female

siblings, proves that he is not adaptable, as he objects vehemently to the marriage and later commits suicide.

How should we interpret Cruz's actions? We may be swayed by others' evaluations. Despite his misgivings and hostility, Rafael, like Gamborena, acknowledges Cruz's success. He compares Cruz to Pope Joan and informs Torquemada:

—Mi hermana ha sacado de usted [Torquemada] un partido inmenso [...]. Es artista de veras, maestro incomparable, y aún ha de hacer con usted maravillas. Alfarero como ella no hay en el mundo: coge un pedazo de barro, lo amasa... (TP 319).

Once again, Cruz's achievements acquire a religious significance as Rafael's words recall the words of the Bible: "But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand." (Isaiah 64:8). They also contrast with La familia de León Roch, where León is unable mould his wife since "no era barro flexible [...] sino bronce ya fundido y frío" (1878, 87). Rafael admits that he is as surprised by Cruz's success as by Fidela's transformation, together with the fact that she has not committed adultery: "mi hermana Fidela, de quien pensé que le aborrecería á usted, sale ahora por lo sublime, y es un modelo de esposas y de madres, de lo que yo me felicito..." (TP 329).

¿Mujeres al borde de un naufragio?

In order to elucidate the possible implications of the women's roles and actions, the level of ambiguity and the corresponding twists and turns therein, we can usefully examine the narrative device of the shipwreck motif within the novels.²⁸ It first appears to express Cruz's

determination to survive²⁹ and she later employs the image when explaining to Fidela that her marriage to Torquemada is essential:

Figúrate que somos pobres náufragos flotando entre las olas, sobre una tabla podrida. ¡Que nos ahogamos, que nos traga el abismo! Y así se pasan días, meses, años. Por fin alcanzamos á ver tierra. ¡Ay, una isla! ¿Qué hemos de hacer más que plantarnos en ella y dar gracias á Dios? ¿Es justo que, ahogándonos y viendo tierra cercana, nos pongamos á discutir si la isla es bonita ó fea, si hay en ella flores ó cardos borriqueros, si tiene pájaros lindos, ó lagartijas y otras alimañas asquerosas? (TC 166)

Cruz's words stress the struggle to survive in the face of powerful Nature and her reference to an island recalls works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, where the protagonists (significantly both male) are successful in their quests for survival. Her speech is cleverly constructed to stipulate that there is no alternative and she employs exclamations and rhetorical questions, together with repetition (“¿Qué hemos de hacer?”) to manipulate her listener.

The shipwreck motif also relates to Ibsen's *Casa de muñecas*, where it is associated with the possibility of regaining lost love. In Act 3, Krogstad tells Cristina, “Cuando la perdí á V., fué lo mismo que si me hubiese faltado el suelo. Míreme; soy como un náufrago asido á una tabla.” (Aug. 1892, 169). She reciprocates, “Yo también soy un náufrago asido á una tabla: no tengo nadie á quien consagrarme, nadie que necesite de mí” (Aug. 1892, 170) and suggests that they should help each other.

Cristina. ¿Qué le parece á V., Krogstad, si esos dos náufragos se tendiesen la mano?

Krogstad. ¿Qué dice V.?

Cristina. ¿No vale más juntarse en la misma tabla?

(Aug. 1892, 170)

Although the motif is primarily associated with the loss of the family fortune and the ongoing legal case in the *Torquemada* novels, it is similarly tied to Ibsen's prospect of joining forces to guarantee survival.

The power behind the motif is conveyed when Gamborena later employs it to exert a mesmerising influence over the sisters. This time it is associated with Gamborena's apparently real travels and adventures, together with his first-hand experiences of savagery.

Los naufragios, en que estuvo su vida en inminente riesgo, salvándose por milagro del furor de las aguas embravecidas, unas veces en las corrientes impetuosas de ríos como mares, otras en las hurañas costas, navegando en vapores viejos que se estrellaban contra los arrecifes, ó se incendiaban en medio de las soledades del Océano; [...]; los peligros que á cada paso surgen, los horrores de las guerras entre distintas tribus, y las matanzas y feroces represalias, con la secuela infame de la esclavitud; [...]; todo, en fin, resultaba en tal boca y con tan pintoresca palabra, la más deleitable historia que pudiera imaginarse. (TSP 40)

We cannot fail to appreciate the abundant use of contrasts and adjectives, which, with the integration of abolitionist discourse, explicitly present through the term “esclavitud”, inflate

the account to such a dramatic extent that it is worthy of comparison with Biblical conquests. Furthermore, this reference draws a parallel with the subordinate situation of women, overtly highlighted in John Stuart Mill's influential *The Subjection of Women* (1869), translated by Pardo Bazán as *La esclavitud femenina* (1891). However, the narrator's subtle reference to "historia" in the last line reminds readers that Gamborena's tales are pure fiction and highlights the priest's skill in manipulating the sisters, weaving them into a web of fantasy and thence subordinating them to his power. Cruz is more susceptible than Fidela and, enticed by "the exotic", she even appears to regard Gamborena's words as offering some kind of spiritual rebirth:

Cruz, más que su hermana, se asimilaba todas las manifestaciones espirituales de aquel sér tan hermoso, las agasajaba en su alma para conservarlas bien, y fundirlas al fin en sus propios sentimientos, creándose de este modo una vida nueva. (TSP 42).

It is not insignificant that the shipwreck motif is also used to describe Cruz's relationship with Gamborena, but not to emphasize her determination to survive, but her defeat: "Se agarró á él como á tabla de salvación" (TSP 34). This is remarkably similar to Ibsen's reference ("soy un náufrago asido á una tabla") and might also suggest that Cruz had an unhealthy veneration for the priest, one which had been exploited by priests such as Don Fermín de Pas in *La Regenta*. Thus, although Rafael pronounces "Mi hermana Cruz ha ganado" (TP 328), in the end she relinquishes the task of "domesticating" Torquemada to Gamborena.

Does the fact that Cruz "the manipulator" is "manipulated" and hands over the reins to a man, thus, imply that masculine power is ultimately superior? Should readers conclude

that even this strong woman is essentially malleable, a view expressed by the narrator of Galdós's piece "La mujer del filósofo" (1871), which also focussed upon a character named Cruz?³⁰ Does this, thereby, reaffirm the need for patriarchal structures and greater male power, corresponding to Castro's dictum to women: "vuestro destino es influir, de ninguna manera imperar" (cited in Jagoe 1994, 36)? Alternatively, does the outcome represent the situation within nineteenth-century Spain, when "[w]omen's invisibility in the public sphere was made concrete by laws which abrogated married women's rights to own and dispose of property (Civil Code Draft Proposal of 1855, and Civil Code of 1889), to engage in business, or to discharge official functions" (Jagoe 1994, 37)?

The presence of the term *naufragio* employed as a corrupt form of *sufragio* might seem to highlight the reservations associated with giving women more rights. Torquemada, unknowingly, misuses the term but is, ironically, praised for doing so.

«Señores, yo tengo para mí [...] que ya hay bastante libertad, y bastante naufragio universal, y más derechos que queremos.» [...] ; Y qué ingenioso el chiste de llamar naufragio al sufragio! (TC 101)

Apprehensions regarding women's rights might also be apparent from the fact that the question of women's education is not brought to the fore in these novels.³¹ What is clear is that the *naufragio* motif, appearing in various contexts, initially underlining Cruz's resilience and creativity, but then shifting to expose her vulnerability, notably at the hands of the male sex, reinforces the notion of hazy boundaries and shifting identities, particularly when presented with effeminate males.

Hazy Boundaries, Shifting Identities and Effeminate Males

It is noteworthy that even if the novels articulate reservations regarding women, the men are not portrayed in a positive light either. In fact it is the male characters who fail to adapt and often confine themselves to bland imitation, whereas the female characters demonstrate flexibility, originality and initiative. Moreover, gender boundaries are blurred and revealed to be inherently unstable since the consideration of “lo femenino” is not limited to the female characters.

Rafael de Águila, the 35-year old male heir, has effeminate characteristics and, notwithstanding the narrator’s initial attempt to persuade us that “la belleza [de sus facciones]” was “más que afeminada dolorida y mortuoria” (TC 43), they are indicative of his weakness. His hand is “blanca y fina como mano de mujer, de una pulcritud extremada” (TC 44) and his feet are “pies de mujer, de una forma intachable” (TC 46). Later he later suffers from some kind of ‘neurosis’, if not hysteria, to which women were prone (hence the sisters propose taking him to Paris to see Charcot [TP 41]) and he feels neglected and jealous of Valentín, who has taken his place as the baby of the family.³² The manner in which he chooses to kill himself (throwing himself out of the window) was frequently associated with women (who regularly threw themselves off bridges) and although some (notably Schopenhauer) viewed suicide as a form of asserting one’s will, it is likely that the quasi-comic manner in which his death is described from the servant’s perspective is intended to elicit a contemptuous response from the reader,³³ particularly as we had previously witnessed Fidela’s horror at the prospect of such an act.³⁴ The priest Gamborena also has some female features (“ojos de doncella andaluza ó de niño bonito” (TSP 22]) and our attention is drawn to Bailón’s similarity with the female sybil depicted on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.³⁵ It is also evident, through Torquemada’s fascination with Donoso’s “levita herméticamente cerrada”, that men are not free from the preoccupation with fashion, generally regarded as a female

obsession. This, then, subverts the readers' expectations about the "clear" division between males and females.

The male characters are also victims of the pre-established categories imposed on the female sex and subject to the same standards, which restrict and impose particular expectations upon them. This is articulated when we read that the women can weep when Torquemada tells them about his dead son, but Rafael "no lloraba, sin duda por no ser propio de hombres, ni aun ciegos, llorar." (TC 109-10). As well as alluding to the scientific connection between crying and unbalanced female hormones, interestingly, the use of "ni aun" implies that blindmen are not "real" men but instead form a distinct category. Hence we are presented with an identity crisis that affects the two sexes.

The narrative technique reinforces the confusion deriving from these hazy boundaries and the reader wavers between identification and distance. Just as the initially "stable" male viewpoints are undermined and revealed to be "unstable", the use of irony can yield alternative, often radically different, interpretations. Irony can be detected in the aforementioned shipwreck motif, for instance, if we deem the characters' perception of their situation to be exaggerated (particularly since it is also compared to martyrdom and torture) and their faith in Cruz misguided. It is equally noteworthy that Torquemada informs Cruz "Es usted la exageración personificada." (TP 10) Further doubts are cast if we consider the possibility that the section commencing "Era Cruz el jefe de la familia [...]" is actually written in Free Indirect Discourse, from the perspective of Cruz herself, who has a high opinion of her "talent". Likewise, it is not always clear whether certain comparisons should be interpreted positively or negatively. Although Cruz is described in religious terms, the analogy with a lioness ("Para combatir la terrible dolencia, realizó empresas de heroína, en cuyo sér se confundieran la mujer y la leona" [TC 139]) might also be a reference to the

Sphinx, thus arousing negative perceptions of her thoughts and actions, for example as she disguises herself to go out shopping.

Familiar stock images, too, are often turned on their head and terms such as “ángel” are used indiscriminately, thereby devaluing their initial specificity and significance. Confused identities extend not only to the men who are portrayed as female and vice versa, but to the application of opposing terms to the same character. Thus the novels elicit multiple readings as Cruz is both “ángel” and “embustera” and, in the case of Tía Roma, virtue and reason are accompanied by ugliness. The sense of a *mise-en-abyme* is articulated too since Gamborena employed tales of shipwrecks to charm his female listeners. Are we, thus, being warned as readers against the prospect of being duped by simplistic terms, by artificial and superficial accounts?

Another key question is whether the women are worthy of our sympathy, even praise. Are the novels questioning whether women are truly as subordinate as the Law dictated? Should they have more control or less? Are the male characters victims or exploiters (in the sense that Torquemada can be seen as reaping the rewards of what was not of his own making or initiative)? Could the women’s management of the private sphere be applied to modernize society? Are the novels symbolic of the state of the nation? Do they engage with the discourses based around regeneration centred on the coming of a Messiah, suggesting that women have more potential for redeeming Spain? Alternatively, was Galdós representing the fact that although change was on the horizon as regards women, it had not yet come to fruition, due to the fears that any changes involving women (and particularly “new women”) might threaten the “harmony” of the family institution?³⁶ Interestingly, Galdós had planned to write a fifth novel entitled *Torquemada Herencia*, which might perhaps have ended with Cruz’s death, but abandoned this in favour of *Nazarín*.³⁷ It is thus left to the readers to reach their own conclusions.

Conclusions

The striking use of ambiguity and the proliferation of unanswered questions might have been intentionally incorporated in the Torquemada novels since they reflected Galdós's own attitudes. As Kirkpatrick comments, Galdós's female protagonists "embody for him the most poignant contradictions of consciousness and the world." (1989, 294). Critics have noted that his mother was domineering and Condé has suggested that he found "the intensity" of the staunch feminist Emilia Pardo Bazán "overpowering and was unable to accept her ideas of equal sexual freedom" (1990, 91). He did, nevertheless, express support for improvements to female education (1923d, 245).

What is clear is that the Torquemada novels invite active reading as they question and move beyond gender stereotypes, challenging the boundaries in nineteenth-century Spain, customarily viewed as a "vast, patriarchal landscape where configurations of gender were radically polarized and predictable" (Charnon-Deutsch and Labanyi 1996, 2), and dismissing the tendency to classify the female sex in simplistic categories. After lulling the reader into a false sense security by presenting what are apparently clear and stable identities, Galdós questions conventional notions, including the assumption of male superiority, providing readers with reasons to contest those perspectives and the tendency to adhere to fixed categories by exposing the contradictions therein. He also questions what Jagoe has termed the "patriarchal construction of gender" (1994, 69) by portraying women who are neither passive nor imitators, but strong, resourceful and catalysts for change. Cruz and other female characters actively adapt to and change their situations, often dramatically influencing their male counterparts, whilst the latter, notably Torquemada and Rafael are passive, essentially puppets. However, although this may suggest female power and superiority, the ambiguity that pervades the novels, the indirect manner in which female strengths are displayed and the

shifting identities that their characters are ascribed, together with the fact that Cruz's potential is curtailed as she ultimately relinquishes her power to a man, means that the female characters cannot be regarded as clear-cut redeemers, as Jagoe has suggested.³⁸ Hence Pardo Bazán might, once again, have bemoaned that, as in *Tristana*, "Galdós nos dejó entrever un horizonte nuevo y amplio, y después corrió la cortina" (cited in Jagoe 1994, 126). Nevertheless, the novels demonstrate that women were central to the debates surrounding modernity and Spain's future, exposing what Labanyi (2005, 172) has described as "the problem posed by the need to incorporate them into the national project while maintaining their confinement to the private sphere." Although Labanyi proceeds to note that "The position of women with respect to the nation is a logical impossibility", it could be contended that, rather than presenting women as "a problem", albeit "precisely because of [their] strengths" (Labanyi 1993, 13), the Torquemada novels offer an empowering interpretation of the female sex, revealing their potential and reflecting the sense of excitement, combined with apprehension and uncertainty, surrounding the possibilities that women offered in terms of Spain's future.

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¹ Following the death of his son, Valentín, Torquemada, who has wealth but no social status, marries Fidela, a member of the impoverished aristocratic Águila family, and becomes the Marqués de San Eloy. On the self-made man, see Fuentes Peris 2007.

² Aldaraca (1983, 49) notes that Montesinos describes Rosalía Bringas as “una mujer odiosa, la más odiosa que quizás inventara Galdós”. Amongst the excellent studies on Galdós’s female characters are those by Aldaraca, Charnon-Deutsch, Condé, Jagoe and Labanyi.

³ Fidela maintains, “«Será lo que Dios disponga. ¿Qué sabemos nosotros de los designios de Dios?»” (TP 152) and, at the end of TSP, Cruz decides to devote her life to religion, declaring that she will leave all her possessions to the poor and advising Torquemada to leave a third of his wealth to the Church.

⁴ Rita Arañó draws upon this image in *La Luz del porvenir* (1884): “Ayer la mujer que sabía leer y escribir era una bruja, una endemoniada [...]” (Cited in Arkinstall 2014, 31.)

⁵ This had a long tradition in history, harking back to the likes of Eve, Salomé and Cleopatra, who often featured in literary works and articles published in reviews such as *La España Moderna* (LEM) during this period.

⁶ Interestingly, Gamborena’s views (here communicated in the style of an apostle) were not confined to the male perspective since they correspond closely with those of the feminist Concepción Arenal, who wrote, “La mujer española es devota, beata, supersticiosa; el culto al rito superficial, la forma, lo son casi todo para ella, dejando muy poco lugar para el fondo, para lo profundo, para lo elevado, para lo íntimo, que constituye verdaderamente la religión.” (1895, 67).

⁷ Ironically, Fidela appears to endorse such expectations as she jokes about Valentín II’s love for women and potential for future relationships (TP Part 3 Chap. 3).

⁸ The work’s radical nature is evident from the fact that “the first Spanish presentation of Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House* was given in Barcelona in 1896 by an anarchist theater group” (Shubert 1992, 203).

⁹ This has been examined by various critics, including Gilman, Hart, Moncy Gullón and Utt.

¹⁰ Once again, he is perhaps echoing Arenal and her desire to fight the “International of Hate” with the “International of Love” (i.e. the First International). (See Shubert 1992, 50).

¹¹ It is also alluded to via Cruz, who, “Á poco de morir Fidela, dióse [...] á la lectura de escritores místicos, y tal afición tomó á este regalo, que ya no podía pasarse sin él, durante largas horas del día y de la noche.” (TSP, 175).

¹² Pateman has noted that the marriage contract was between one “free individual” and one “natural subordinate”. (The Sexual Contract, cited in Labanyi 2000, 39).

¹³ See, for example, García Sarriá (1980, 109): “La tía Roma representa un cristianismo primitivo y puro, caracterizado por el desprendimiento más completo de todo lo material.”

¹⁴ Although this is not explicit, her loyalty contrasts with that of Lucas, the footman, who stole cigars and champagne from Rafael’s father. (See TC Part 2, Chap. 12).

¹⁵ One could go further and suggest that this blurring of boundaries reinforces Huyssen’s claim that “the male fear of women and the bourgeois fear of the masses become indistinguishable” (After the Great Divide, cited in Blanco 1996, 128).

¹⁶ She does, however, also express hope: “¡Cuántas se han casado creyendo que iban á ser muy felices, y luégo resultaba que él era un perdido y un sinvergüenza! ¡Y cuántas se casan como quien va al matadero, y luégo...!” (TC 167).

¹⁷ Shubert (1992, 32-33) notes, “Upon marriage she lost most of her legal rights and became an appendage of her husband. She required his permission to be in business and he had the authority to administer her property: she could not sell or mortgage the property she brought to the marriage without his approval, nor could she accept or reject an inheritance by herself. The Civil Code told wives that they should obey their husbands and punished disobedience with jail terms of five to fifteen days.”

¹⁸ Cruz informs Rafael, “Fidela es la pureza misma; quiere y estima á su marido, que en su tosquedad es muy bueno para ella, y para toda la familia.” (TP 161).

¹⁹ This was also expressed in Schopenhauer's essay "On Women", where women were described as "big children, a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is the actual human being, 'man'." (Cited in Murphy 2012: 1104.)

²⁰ "Conservaba de los tiempos de su niñez opulenta algunas muñecas magníficas, y á ratos perdidos, en la soledad de la noche, las sacaba para recrearse y charlar un poco con sus mudas amigas, recordando la edad feliz. Confesábase, además, golosa." (TC 93-94).

²¹ "Cuidaba D. Francisco á su mujer como á las niñas de sus ojos, viendo en ella un vaso de materia fragilísima, dentro del cual se elaboraban todas las combinaciones matemáticas que habían de transformar el mundo." (TP 186-87).

²² It is, nevertheless, evident that the handicapped Valentín II, significantly a male heir, thrives in her care, which seemingly confirms the Krausistas' belief that women played a crucial role in nurturing their children. Furthermore, following Fidela's death, which could be symbolic of the death of the diseased aristocracy, Valentín falls into a rapid and significant state of decline.

²³ Despite their poverty, the Águila women also make a valiant effort to maintain an excellent level of cleanliness and retain their dignity. They make food at home to save money and alter their clothes so that they look "new". Their success in running the household with little money and without a maidservant is deemed by Torquemada to be "higiénico" (TC 31).

²⁴ It is reminiscent of Genesis 1:31: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good".

²⁵ "¡Por San Caralampio bendito, abogado contra las suegras! Porque usted es una suegra, por decirlo así, la peor y más insufrible que hay en familia humana." (TP 130).

²⁶ Torquemada helplessly reflects, "hace de mí un chiquillo..." He also recognizes that his marriage, "esta endiablada máquina del matrimonio...", consists of a triangular relationship with Fidela, "propiamente mi mujer... con respeto...", and his sister-in-law, "mi tirana... y de la tiranía y del mujerío" (TP 106-07).

²⁷ For example, pandering to his obsession with hygiene, she tells him that he must have a billiard room since "sus amigos de usted, que también trabajan, juegan al billar, pasatiempo grato, honestísimo, y muy higiénico" (TP 101).

²⁸ Galdós had included a physical shipwreck in *Gloria* (1877) and employed the motif in *Marianela* (1878).

²⁹ "No se discute el madero flotante, al cual se agarra el náufrago que ya se ha bebido la mitad de la mar." (TC 145).

³⁰ We read (1928, 199), "la mujer, más flexible y movediza que su compañero, en goces y desdichas, cede, prontamente, a la influencia exterior, adopta las ideas y los sentimientos que se le imponen, y concluye por no ser sino lo que el hombre quiere que sea."

³¹ There are only three possible allusions to education: TC 37, 39-40 and TSP 66. This is surprising, since the topic had recently been discussed at the Congreso pedagógico (1882) and the Congreso Pedagógico Hispano-Portugués-Americano (1892), when, for the first time a special section was devoted to women's education.

³² His attitude corresponds closely to the description of men offered by Arenal (1895, 75): "[...] tienen inclinaciones de sultán y reminiscencias de salvaje, pretensiones de sacerdote, queriendo ser escuchados como oráculos, obedecidos como señores, y amados con una fidelidad a que se creen en el caso de corresponder, cosas todas que más veces pretenden que logran."

³³ —¡Por la ventana... patio... señorito... pum!

Bajaron todos... Estrellado, muerto. (TP 337).

³⁴ "¡Virgen Santa, lo que dolería la cabeza al caer!" (TC 186).

³⁵ "Parece, en efecto, una vieja de raza titánica que lleva en su ceño todas las iras celestiales." (TH 27).

³⁶ According to Dowling, "[C]ritics feared that the New Woman, in her hyper-modernity, her ambitious attempt to transcend established notions of sexual consciousness and behaviour, would irreversibly unfit herself for her essential role as wife and mother – that, in short, she would follow the decadent down the road to personal and, ultimately, racial extinction." ("The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s", cited in Murphy 2012, 1113).

³⁷ See Weber 1967, 26 note 3. This presumably refers to Galdós's letter to Tolosa Latour dated 24.v.1895: "[...] en vez de ponerme con Torquemada Herencia, me he metido en otra novela, que me va saliendo muy bien [...]. Se llama Nazarín." (Galdós 2016, 412).

³⁸ "In the contemporary novels of the 1890s - in particular the Torquemada series, Ángel Guerra (1890-1891), *La loca de la casa* (1892), *Halma* (1895), and *Misericordia* (1897) - Galdós portrays the women protagonists as redeemers, with a greater amount of psychological power over their male counterparts than at any previous stage in his novelistic production." (Jago 1994, 153).