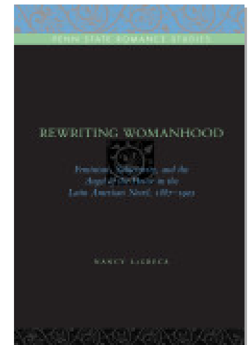
PROJECT MUSE®

Rewriting Womanhood

LaGreca, Nancy



Published by Penn State University Press

LaGreca, Nancy.
Rewriting Womanhood: Feminism, Subjectivity, and the Angel of the House in the Latin American Novel, 1887–1903.

Penn State University Press, 2009.
Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/297.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/297

Access provided at 9 Apr 2020 09:34 GMT with no institutional affiliation

INTRODUCTION

Ahora bien, la marcada repugnancia que inspira a la mujer toda observación abstracta, profunda y prolongada, a causa de la invincible fatiga que a poco le sobreviene, pone bien de manifiesto la debilidad relativa de sus órganos cerebrales que corresponden a las funciones de abstracción. En cambio, la meditación concreta, la observación sintética de las cosas reales, admite en ella un ejercicio mucho más sostenido; lo cual indica una aptitud cerebral mayor para ese género de observaciones. . . . La poca energía y vigor de sus facultades abstractas y analíticas ocasiona que la inteligencia femenina aprecie mejor las diferencias de los objectos que sus semejanzas.

[Now then, the marked repugnance that any type of abstract, profound, and prolonged observation inspires in women, owing to the invincible fatigue that sets in shortly afterward, is an obvious manifestation of the relative weakness of their cerebral organs that control the functions of abstraction. Conversely, concrete thought, the synthetic observation of real things, allow them a more sustained activity; this indicates a greater cerebral aptitude for this kind of observation. . . . The abstract and analytical faculties' meager energy and vigor cause feminine intelligence to better appreciate the differences among objects, rather than their similarities.]

—Horacio Barreda, *El siglo XX ante el feminismo,* 1909

HORACIO BARREDA, SON OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS Mexican Positivist philosopher Gabino Barreda, edited the periodical *Revista Positiva* (Positivist Journal) from 1901 to 1913. His assertions about women's intellectual deficiencies appeared in the *Revista* and were part of the lengthy essay *El siglo XX ante el feminismo* (The Twentieth Century in the Face of Feminism), which drew upon "scientific" proof to denounce women's career aspirations outside the home, positing such activity as the downfall of civilized society. Barreda's evidence, gathered from his own observations and opinions rather than from scientific experimentation or study, denied women's capacity to think abstractly and to study for prolonged periods. His assertion implied that female members of society were incapable of becoming writers, artists, politicians, or intellectuals or of pursuing any vocation other than housewife or seamstress. Other intellectuals shared Barreda's views on the alleged weakness of women's cerebral organs, and this line of thinking affected national

policy: the late nineteenth century saw a decline in women's access to education in many Latin American countries.[1]

This brief case study of Barreda is illustrative of attitudes throughout Latin America during the formation of the new republics. Historian Elizabeth Dore, in her article "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" finds in emerging historiography on Latin American women's roles that, contrary to the commonly held belief that the long nineteenth century ushered in progress for women, their general conditions actually declined as the century wore on (2000, 5). While some reforms in the protection of women were beneficial (such as protection from physical abuse) and women gained more legal rights over their children, overall the ideological push to define gender norms in order to normalize "'proper' behavior" for women in health, education, employment, and social charity work only enforced traditional and retrograde notions of womanhood, while women's legal protection related to family land holdings was taken away with the liberal trend toward the commoditization of landed property (Dore 2000, 23, 5–6). Despite vigorous campaigns in their countries of origin to create narrow and restrictive definitions of womanhood, writers such as Refugio Barragán de Toscano (Mexico, 1846–1916), Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera (Peru, 1845–1909), and Ana Roqué (Puerto Rico, 1853–1933) were challenging these ideals both through the very act of writing and through their subject matter, which often portrayed women as savvy, proactive, and authoritative heroines who drive the course of their lives and their formation as agent-subjects.

Such activity was not without its costs—women novelists were often scorned by contemporaries for preferring the writer's desk to the hearth—and an aim of this study is to discover why middle-class women in nineteenth-century Latin America would risk tarnishing their reputations and bursting the protective bubble of domesticity to write in the male-dominated and public genre of the novel.

What makes these three women novelists' stories unique, urgent, and necessary is that they *dreamed new women* for a modern age in texts that focus on the sociology and psychology of women and in which the authors imagine alternatives to women's roles and feminized identities in a world that has not yet admitted them. Thus the fiction studied here is imaginative and creative, based on fantasy rather than the realities of nation building in the era. The reader discovers, then, that these novelists' reward was worth the risk

1. For details on the decline of women's education during the Porfiriato, see Chapter 1 of this study. Women's education in Peru and Puerto Rico is discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

of ridicule: an important goal of their writing was to imagine (and invite readers to imagine) new definitions of womanhood. In so doing, they were liberating their sex from an oppressive domestic feminine ideal: the Angel of the House, in brief, the notion that a woman's virtue is measured by her dedication to domestic life, self-sacrifice, and servitude to her family.

Because the law denied women direct means of swaying public opinion (through, for example, voting or running for office), writing a novel was a way for the gentle sex to insert their voices into the national dialogue. Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué committed to press tales that included dynamic, intelligent, and desirous heroines, thereby contradicting national images of female passivity and abnegation. Like Simone de Beauvoir in France; Virginia Woolf in Britain; and later, fellow Latin Americans Rosario Castellanos in Mexico and Rosario Ferré in Puerto Rico, our nineteenth-century novelists and other women writers of their generation knew that the cultivation of the self was key to sparking feminist awareness (although they may not have used this term); they experienced the epiphany of recognizing one's oppressed condition, or "click" moment, as the U.S. feminist Betty Friedan appropriately termed it in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué were part of the group of women intellectual precursors to the feminist movement of the twentieth century because they represent early efforts to reclaim the female self and define womanhood in Latin America for a modern era.

The opening quote to this Introduction provides insight into the serious challenges that women novelists faced. Arguments such as Barreda's were used in public policy decisions to limit women's education to basic reading, some geography or other general culture, and the domestic arts. Not all public writing was taboo for women; flowery, often insipid poetic verses appeared sporadically in popular periodicals because poetry was considered a "feminine" genre fed by instinct, nerves, "la loca de la casa" (imagination), and feeling. Although there were women poets who cultivated the genre to a high artistic and intellectual level, such as the famed Cuban novelist, poet, and playwright Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873) and the well-known Puerto Rican patriot and poet Lola Rodríguez de Tió (1843–1924), poetry that appeared in women's periodicals often expressed the joys of motherhood, religious devotion, or some other chaste love in a simplistic and syrupy way that upheld patriarchal values.

To write a novel, however, was another matter entirely. It was believed that "women who wrote, expressing their thinking in public media such as newspapers and novels, were exposing themselves to mental incapacitation

as a consequence of their weak constitution" (Zalduondo 2001, 168). Narration implied a degree of intellectual acumen only recognized in men, who were capable of constructing characters with some psychological depth, thinking through a plot line, creating suspense, and dreaming up picturesque descriptions and adventures. Furthermore, publishing a work of fiction often implied knowledge of the public sphere, risqué love affairs, and politics—themes off limits to women, who were obligated to guard their virtue and innocence from such worldly matters. Not least among the reasons women were not supposed to write prose was that it meant that they would have a public voice; a woman author held the attention of a reader for the course of several hundred pages. She had an audience. Indeed, she had power, because she earned an opportunity to pen her own version of the world and present this subjective alternative reality to a reading public. And, as Angel Rama roundly proves in *La ciudad letrada* (1983), the literate public was the ruling class.

The female novelist, then, challenged traditional beliefs of the ruling class in several ways: she was a threat to the domestic status quo, she proved wrong the notion that the female brain was incapable of abstraction and intellectual activity, and she forged a forum for her views. In a backlash, women who wrote prose were often referred to as unfeminine, virile, or unnatural for daring to let their creativity overflow onto the public page.[2] As the scholar of women's narrative of nineteenth-century Spain Lou Charnon-Deutsch affirms, "Book writing was defined as a manly occupation; if a woman

2. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's contemporaries struggled with the idea that a woman could write serious literature, as she did. In the case of Avellaneda and others, the highest praise contemporaries could offer was to call them "masculine." Her contemporaries often called her writing "virile." Cuesta Jiménez notes that the phrase *Es mucho hombre esta mujer,* which loosely translates as "This woman is quite a man" (1943, 14), was often used to describe Avellaneda. This praise, however, was a double-edged sword in that there was a fine line between such a statement and calling a woman writer *marimacho* (which Zalduondo translates as "butch"). The Peruvian writer whose work is the subject of Chapter 4, Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, was often the target of slanderous remarks implying her masculine character. One critic, the Peruvian writer Juan de Arona (real name Pedro Paz Soldán y Unanue), is often quoted as having maliciously changed the novelist's name to Mierdeces Caballo de Cabrón-era (which loosely translates as "She was the dung of a bastard's horse"), an insult that is both scatological and animalizing, as Peluffo points out (Sánchez quoted in Peluffo 2002, 39). Examples of such denigration of women writers abound in nineteenth-century studies of literary history. The literary critic Virginia Cánova, who published a scholarly edition of the first known novel by a woman in Uruguay, *Por una fortuna una cruz* (1860) by Marcelina Almeida, cites scathing critiques of this novel by a contemporary who launches the insult, among numerous others, that "nada sabe, pero escribe todo" (Cánova 1998, 69) [she knows nothing, but writes about everything]. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated and all diacritical marks and spelling are original.

made a mark in the literary world, it was for her *virile* style, a distinction that always bore a price" (1994, 8). The three women writers whose prose we will explore risked their protected middle-class existences and exposed themselves to the critique of many in order to crack, or perhaps even shatter, the ubiquitous social signifier of angelic womanhood.

The Pervasive Obstacle: The Angel of the House

The Angel of the House was the domestic ideal for women of the mid nineteenth century in the Hispanic world and in Europe.[3] It portrayed the perfect woman as the Christian, chaste, maternal guardian of the happiness and success of her children, husband, and other family members. Extreme self-sacrifice and stoic suffering for the good of others were its main principles. The scholar of women's literature and culture of Spain Bridget Aldaraca acknowledges that the *ángel del hogar* took "as a starting point the negation of the real presence of woman as individual, i.e., as an autonomous social and moral being" (1982, 67). Abnegation, and the denial of the self that inevitably followed, were key to preventing women from demanding rights and moving beyond their prescribed place, as a strong sense of self is necessary to inspire consciousness regarding one's oppression and to spark activism.

In the Latin American context, the literary critic Francesca Denegri notes that policy makers who defined the roles of citizens in the new republics deliberately excluded "las 'masas de color'" (people of color) at the same time that it redefined Woman and created the image of national family of European descent (1996, 79). The Angel of the House, then, had two

3. The Virgin Mary is an ideal example of the Angel of the House, evidenced by her endless mercy, maternal chastity, and servitude to God (the father figure) and Jesus Christ (the male child figure). In Latin American letters the chaste, childlike, obedient, adoring, frail protagonist of Jorge Isaacs's *María* (Colombia, 1867), a novel read across Latin America from the time of publication up until today, is a melancholy angel who frequently leaves her beloved's favorite flowers in his chambers. Twentieth-century examples of the Angel of the House would be the long-suffering, virtuous, beautiful woman of many Latin American soap operas who is saved by a handsome man from a higher social class when he chooses to marry her (for example, the protagonist of the popular 1980s Venezuelan soap opera *Cristal*), the perfectly groomed, subservient robots in the film *The Stepford Wives* (based on Ira Levin's 1972 novel of the same name), or the nurturing and ever-cheerful homemaker Mrs. Cleaver from the popular U.S. television show *Leave It to Beaver* (1957–63). Although these various manifestations of the feminine domestic ideal spring from different cultural contexts and have different aims, they share certain angelic qualities: they equate femininity with domesticity, fidelity, obedience, abnegation, passivity, and fragile beauty.

primary functions: to charge women with providing a perfectly relaxing and safe haven for their men who had to deal with the day-to-day challenges of an unpredictable environment in a newly formed nation in flux and, second, to conserve the bourgeois family space as an exclusively white one (81); hence the emphasis on the seclusion and "protection" of women, to ensure chastity and the selection of appropriately white reproductive partners. The scholar of Argentine women's culture Francine Masiello stresses the central place of the Angel in the House in national discourse and nation building, where leading nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento "molded an image of the Argentine spouse and mother to suit their projects of state" (1992, 53–54). This conscious act of defining gender in the project of nation building is not unique to Argentina; periodicals and novels of the period link good motherhood and virtue to good citizenship consistently throughout Latin America and Spain. In the novels considered in this study, the Angel of the House is a master signifier that Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué take apart and reappropriate for the purposes of promoting women's agency, intellectual abilities, and participation in public life—aims that were not part of national discourses on women's place.

The phrase *Angel of the House* gained widespread use throughout Europe in the 1850s and its Spanish equivalent was also common in Hispanic literature of the nineteenth century. The literary critic Bonnie Frederick, in her book on nineteenth-century Argentine women writers *Wily Modesty* (1998), attributes the origin of the phrase to a didactic poem by English clergyman Coventry Patmore in 1858. Although the phrase itself appears to have originated in Victorian England, the basic tenets of the model had been advocated for women centuries earlier. Spanish readers devoured editions of Fray Luis de León's 1583 manual of comportment for women, *La perfecta casada* (The Perfect Wife), which included the basic principles of the Angel of the House: abnegation, humility, modesty, obedience, chastity, and enclosure within the home. The manual went through a minimum of seven editions from 1583 to 1872; the 1872 edition was printed in response to "la frecuencia con que la obra es buscada para regalo de boda" (Ginesta 1872, i–ii) [the frequency with which the book is sought to be given as a wedding gift]. In late nineteenth-century Spain the popularity of this extremely conservative guide for women was booming.

As noted by Aldaraca (1982), writing on women's domestic culture in Spain, de León's sixteenth-century text, like later similar texts, defines women's place within the home and views motherhood as woman's only plausible function, yet its arguments lack the Romantic, generally positive

(if restrictive), view of womanhood that was common in the nineteenth century, laying bare the author's misogyny. For example, de León dedicates the whole of chapter 16 to the importance of women's keeping silent and having an agreeable nature. The frank reasoning he offers is that women are not intelligent and therefore should not speak: "El mejor consejo que les podemos dar . . . es rogar que callen, y que, ya que son poco sábias, se esfuercen á ser mucho calladas" (de León 1972, 158) [The best advice we can give them . . . is to beg that they keep quiet, and, considering they are not very wise, that they make an effort to be very silent]. Fray Luis de León viewed woman as an inherently simple and impulsive creature prone to laziness who was to be kept enclosed, busily tending to the economy of the household. Her desires, her dreams, and the activities of her daily life were all carefully detailed for her in *La perfecta casada*; her place was to be "protected" by the man whom she gratefully served.

Fray Luis de León's manual may have been one of the models for another manual of comportment for women with runaway sales figures, María del Pilar Sinués de Marco's 1859 book *El ángel del hogar* (The Angel of the House).[4] Sinués de Marco's manual title appears to be an early use of the term *ángel del hogar,* although it is not certain when or where the phrase originated in Spanish. While Sinués de Marco's rhetoric is softer and more sympathetic toward women than that found in *La perfecta casada,* the elements that define traditional womanhood are very similar.

Sinués de Marco (1835–1893) was a renowned award-winning literary figure in her day. She was a conservative and staunch defender of separate spheres for men (public) and women (domestic), yet her status as both woman and writer was in conflict with her own ideology. (One wonders how much time she dedicated to perfecting angelic domesticity herself, as she must have quite been busy maintaining a wildly successful publishing career.) An acquaintance of Sinués de Marco's comments that whenever a visitor arrived at the writer's home, she was always "dutifully sewing"; this appeared to be staged, as she was always sewing the same piece of cloth (Nombela 1909 quoted in Jagoe 1990, 474).

Sinués de Marco partially and indirectly addresses the disjunction between her life and the ideology of her writings in "De la literatura en la mujer" (About the Place of Literature in Women's Lives), chapter 12 of *El ángel del hogar*. Therein she acknowledges women's intellectual capabilities and

4. For a detailed analysis of the differences between Fray Luis de León's *La perfecta casada* and Sinués de Marco's *El ángel del hogar,* see Aldaraca 1991.

affirms that men deny women's intellect because of "su instinto orgulloso y egoista" (their proud and egotistical instinct) that cannot bear to see a woman surpass them (1859, 173). She then offers as proof of women's talent the Cuban writer Gómez de Avellaneda, whom Sinués de Marco believes to be the highest example of woman's brilliance. However, she goes on to point out that such singular talent is extremely rare, and that the typical aspiring *literata* (woman writer) in Spain is a repugnant creature to be taken as a negative example for all virtuous women. The *literata,* according to Sinués de Marco, is vain, superficial, selfish, spoiled, and lazy, and because of her horrible character, combined with her pride and high opinion of herself, she is simply ridiculous (1859, 177–78). Sinués de Marco adds that even virtuous women who long to write do so in vain, as the opportunities are so slim; the vocation is like chasing a "phantom." This idea, in sum, is the key to Sinués de Marco's strong recommendation that women abandon their dreams and find solace in married life: "¡Estraño delirio es, por cierto, el que hace abandonar la dulce dicha del hogar doméstico para correr detrás de un fantasma, que raras veces ve realizado el hombre y que nunca alcanza la débil mano de la mujer!" (177) [It is certainly a strange delusion, that which makes women abandon the sweet happiness of the domestic hearth to chase after a phantasmagoric dream, one that is rarely achieved by man and that the weak hand of woman never attains!]. In a rhetorical gesture that is often repeated in Sinués de Marco's writing, she defends women as inherently good, intelligent beings worthy of happiness, but recommends squelching their desires and submitting to patriarchal norms as the only way to feasibly attain well-being—and avoid the inevitable suffering that comes with going against the rules of patriarchal society.

Sinués de Marco's chapter on "the place of literature in women's lives" not only addresses the presumably dreadful character of the *literata,* but also places strong emphasis on the careful choice of proper reading materials for women. Keeping with a tendency of the times in Spain and Latin America, she condemns worldly readings for young women that teach them of passions, betrayals, and sin (she gives the example of the 1844 adventure novel *The Three Musketeers* by Alexander Dumas to illustrate this harmful fiction). However, the Spanish writer finds numerous positive benefits to be reaped from readings that cultivate delicate sentiments, goodness, and purity. One may infer that Sinués de Marco's own novels and articles are precisely what her tender young *lectoras* (readers) should consume. Thus we have a glimpse of Sinués de Marco's possible justifications for her do-as-I-say, not-as-I-do attitude: she justifies her own publishing because she has women's best

interest, rather than her personal glory, at heart (thus, we may conclude, she exhibits the important characteristic of sacrificing her time and energy solely for the good of others). Sinués de Marco envisions herself filling a gap in literature by providing materials to make young women *ángeles del hogar,* as opposed to the woman writer who seeks self-aggrandizement through the publication of worldly and intellectual themes.

Although Sinués de Marco recognized women's capacity for intellectual work and the creative arts, her advice manuals and novels roundly contest any hope that women could ever fully dedicate themselves to these endeavors, regardless of any natural talent they might possess. Two of her novels, *El alma enferma* (The Sick Soul [1864]) and *La senda de la gloria* (The Path to Glory [1863]), portray female protagonists who face the conflict between cultivating their own talents and dedicating their lives to their husbands. In both cases Sinués de Marco recommends to her female readers that they submit to masculine authority (Sánchez-Llama 1999, 754). For example, the long-suffering protagonist of *La senda,* herself a talented painter, must stoically tolerate the physical abuse of her husband and signs his name to her own paintings for the sake of maintaining domestic peace (Sánchez-Llama 1999, 754). Sinués de Marco's novel sends the message that, for the virtuous woman, creativity should be channeled into making the best of her home life; hopes of fame and public recognition should be abandoned and she should focus instead on raising a family and keeping her husband happy.

Sinués de Marco directed two popular women's journals, one, which bore the same title as her manual, *El Angel del Hogar,* from 1864 to 1869 and the other, *Flores y Perlas* (Flowers and Pearls), from 1883 to 1884. She published more than one hundred books, which were mostly sentimental domestic novels illustrating Angels of the House in action, but her oeuvre also includes various manuals of comportment for women for different stages of their lives and collections of essays, poetry, and short stories (*Gran enciclopedia aragonesa*). Her collections of moralizing short stories *La ley de Dios* (The Law of God [1862]) and *A la luz de una lámpara* (By Lamplight [1862]) gained the support of ecclesiastic authorities and were required reading in primary schools for many years (Sánchez-Llama 1999, 752). Sinués de Marco's view of womanhood, available to readers by way of fiction, anecdotes, and essays—in both printed bound editions and popular magazines—made an indelible mark on her generation and those to follow, in Spain and beyond.

Sinués de Marco's *El ángel del hogar* is a compilation of didactic stories that served as a spiritual and practical guide for women from youth through

marriage. The stories and essays in the collection were first serialized starting in 1857 in the Madrid periodical *La Moda de Cádiz* (The Latest Trends of Cádiz) (Jagoe 1990, 473). More than six hundred pages long, the volume contains dozens of stories written to teach women how to be obedient wives and self-sacrificing mothers, as well as cautionary tales about those who faltered in their domestic and religious mission. The ideal angelic woman is not focused inward on her own subjectivity, but rather outward to those around her. She is judged by her tenderness and virtue toward others: women should be "buenas y tiernas madres, hijas sumisas y amorosas, esposas irreprensibles" (21) [good and tender mothers, submissive and loving daughters, irreproachable wives]. Almost all the definitions and discussions of the Angel of the House speak of this model in terms of the woman's relationship to those around her: she is daughter, wife, and mother, rather than an individual independent of these patriarchal family ties. In addition to the stories, there are informative summaries that teach readers about the history of the monastic orders of Spain, to round out women's ecclesiastic knowledge.

The author of *El ángel del hogar* had good intentions when she published this weighty volume; although the collection upholds the damaging standards typical of nineteenth-century patriarchal mores, her goal is ultimately to protect women. She speaks as a woman who understands the "azarosa existencia de la mujer" (women's hazardous existence) and emphasizes the inherent burden and second-class status of women, which starts even before birth, as the entire family longs for a male offspring and fears the child will be female (Sinués de Marco 1859, 1). However, by teaching women to ignore their own desires and to achieve happiness by making those around them comfortable, this unrealistically perfect ideal kept women from actualizing their own identities. The angelic standard was a major impediment to women's liberation because it caused them to ignore the most basic step toward an early feminist activism: the cultivation of the self. Sinués de Marco clearly empathizes with her sisters, yet rather than criticizing the damaging standards, she advocates molding oneself to fit the perfect domestic model. In her attempt to help her sex, she glosses over the fact that the burden of perfection is, itself, a form of torment.

Sinués de Marco's influence in the Hispanic world was strong. Her articles appeared in the most respected periodicals of her day, in Spain and in the Americas (Jagoe 1990, 474). Women in Cuba and beyond could order a copy of *El ángel del hogar* through their subscription to the 1860 *Album Cubano de lo Bueno y lo Bello* (The Cuban Album of the Good and the

Beautiful), a women's journal directed by Gómez de Avellaneda (as Susana Montero [1993] reminds us, however, it should be noted that Avellaneda's publication included subversive materials in support of women's intellectual growth along with good nest-building tips). It is probable that Clorinda Matto de Turner, the Peruvian author and contemporary of Cabello, read Sinués's work because a passage from one of the essays is quoted in *Aves sin nido* (1889) and attributed to the "escritora española" (the Spanish [woman] writer), although Sinués de Marco is not named. There is little doubt that the ideal put forth in Sinués de Marco's writings concerning women's mission in life was known by literate women of the bourgeoisie across Latin America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The importance of the notion of the Angel of the House went beyond the intimate familial unit in Latin America. Print media of the 1800s and early 1900s in the region portrayed women as the vessels of national morality; it was believed that through their high moral and religious standards the nation could aspire to future generations of good citizens. Publications from the mid to late 1800s dedicated to cultivating women's domestic skills and hygiene, fashion, beauty regimens, religiosity, and dedication to the family, such as Cuba's *El Cesto de Flores* (The Basket of Flowers [1856]), Brazil's *Bello Sexo* (The Gentle Sex [1862]), Argentina's *El Album del Hogar* (The Home Album [1878]), and Mexico's *El Correo de las Señoras* (The Ladies' Post [1883–93]), were popular reading for middle-class women. Since women were responsible for purveying the patriarchal value system and rearing generations of citizens to keep progress in motion, their subscription to national ideals was of utmost importance.

The Angel of the House was a pervasively consumed model in nineteenth-century Latin America; women and men, Positivists and Catholics, liberals and conservatives were counted among its supporters. As my historical chapters (Chapters 1, 3, and 5) demonstrate, discourses praising the Angel of the House—or condemning those who strayed from the model—could be found in church sermons, ecclesiastic decrees, Positivist journals, women's periodicals (those directed by women as well as by men), nationalist essays, and novels. It is no wonder, then, that conscious women like the writers I study here attack the feminine ideal subtly yet surely in their narratives.

It is easy to see why the Angel of the House presented a problem to thinking modern women. Following this paragon of obedient virtue meant stoically ignoring one's personal desires and sacrificing one's dreams for the good of the family. And today, the model of the angelic woman still poses an obstacle to a feminist reading of texts of the period. To the twenty-first-century reader,

the inclusion of a female character who exhibits some (even if not all) of its characteristics often masks authors' attempts at criticizing women's position in society. In some cases, as we shall see, the trope of the angelic housewife or daughter probably served the female author as a shield against negative criticism. In the analyses in Chapters 2, 4, and 6, I explore how the symbolic ideal of the Angel in the House is manipulated in each novel to allow the author to offer an alternative and unique female self, inviting women to look and think beyond the prescribed model and take control of their subjectivity through the fulfillment of their desires for travel, public activity, education, or adventure (to name a few of the subversive activities the heroines of our novels enjoy).[5]

Against the Grain: Women's Literary Culture and Women Novelists in Nineteenth-Century Latin America

The focus of this study is to trace specifically the reworkings of the Angel of the House signifier in three novels produced in Mexico, Peru, and Puerto Rico. To provide a context for these writers' literary ambitions it is useful to look at other examples of women's prose production from the mid-1800s to the dawn of the twentieth century.[6] While Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué stand out as three underrepresented novelists who wrote female characters with audacious levels of agency that simultaneously portray and

5. The crucial role of agency as a part of identity within society and as a vision for change (social, national, and historical) can be seen in Kristeva's idea of the *chora* as an essential part of the feminine. For further reading on Kristeva, see Arens 1998a, in which Arens focuses on Kristeva's *sémanalyse* as a critical historical analysis that emphasizes the roles of the subject and language; the chapter on Kristeva in Grosz 1989; and, for an introductory reading, the chapter on Kristeva in Moi 1988. Oliver 1993 is a reading from a philosophical perspective that navigates the ambiguities of Kristeva's discourse and examines how it can be used for feminist criticism. The *chora* is part of the semiotic realm, a complement to the realm of the symbolic, composed of pre-linguistic drives and rhythms, similar to the rhythm one may sense in music and poetry (Kristeva 1974b, 93–97)—it is the realm of social and personal sense that can be signified, but which the social order has not yet chosen to designate as significant. The chora plays an important role for women in the nineteenth century because, as Kristeva points out, the symbolic realm or the realm of language had been rendered to some extent inaccessible to women in these social historical settings. Yet below that surface of designations, a region of sense, the semiotic and the chora that is its physical presence, waits to emerge as signified. Kristeva defines the semiotic and the chora in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984, chap. 1).

6. The list of writers included here is an overview and is not intended to be comprehensive. I have chosen to include writers whose work has received some critical attention in the past twenty years and have given precedence to women writers whose work is available in recent editions

critique angelic virtue in order to recode social expectations, they were part of a growing number of women who found the courage and desire to defy convention by cultivating the intellect and publishing their work. The unearthing of many important nineteenth-century women writers from the Southern Cone has made a significant addition to the field in recent years, and slowly but surely scholars are rediscovering early women writers from Mexico and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean as well. Recent scholarship on early women writers provides critical and cultural studies of underrepresented women writers from across Latin America.[7]

The 1860s and 1870s Lima literary salon of the Argentine writer Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818–1892) is one of the best-known organized efforts to cultivate women's writing in Latin America in the era.[8] Gorriti was a prose fiction writer and essayist from a politically liberal family who left her residence in Bolivia after separating from her husband (later president of Bolivia) Manuel Isidro Belzú. She is perhaps best known today for her collection of short stories, many of them critiques of the Juan Manuel de Rosas dictatorship in Argentina, *Sueños y realidades* (1865) and the collection of writings *Panoramas de la vida* (1876).[9] Already an established writer when she arrived in Lima, Gorriti was the driving force behind the meetings. The *veladas,* or late-night gatherings, began after the evening meal and often stretched into the early hours of the morning. The veladas included piano and other musical recitals, poetry recitation, improvisations, anecdotes, and the recitation of essays, followed by discussions. Denegri points out that children were

---

for further reading. A discussion of women poets is outside the scope of this study; however, the following is a basic list of some of the most prominent nineteenth-century women poets: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba, 1814–73), Juana Borrero (Cuba, 1878–96), Lola Rodríguez de Tió (Puerto Rico, 1843–1924), Dolores Veintimilla de Galindo (Ecuador, 1830–57), Adela Zamudio (Bolivia, 1854–1928), Salomé Ureña de Henríquez (Dominican Republic, 1850–97), and Delmira Agustini (Uruguay, 1886–1914). See the following works by and about women poets in Latin America: Orjuela 2000; Caillet-Bois 1958; Flores and Flores 1986; Campuzano 1997.

7. Some examples are Jiménez 1999b; Campuzano 1997; and González Ascorra 1997. Two recent works particularly dedicated to early women writers' essays, Meyer 1995 and Gloria da Cunha 2006, also deserve mention.

8. The literary critic Graciela Batticuore's (1999) study and anthology *El taller de la escritora* provides context to these history-making meetings as well as original documents read by participants. See also Denegri 1996. Several compilations of critical articles on history and gender are very useful for nineteenth-century feminist literary studies; see French and Bliss 2007 and Vidal 1989.

9. Selections of Gorriti's prose have been translated into English by Sergio Waisman and edited by Francine Masiello (Gorriti 2003). For a brief sketch on Juana Manuel Gorriti, see Mazquirán de Rodríguez's entry in Marting 1990. For critical studies on Gorriti's prose, including her historical critiques, fantastic elements of her fiction, and her place in nineteenth-century Argentine prose, see Guerra 1985, 1987a, 1987b; Lichtblau 1959; Fletcher 1993, 1994; Urraca 1999; and Barrera 1996.

welcome at the meetings, creating an even more diversified space relative to the masculine elite version of the intellectuals' club; the various discourses of the veladas (familial, private, political, and literary) were intermingled and coexisted to form a new, truly alternative community that began to surpass the popularity of the exclusively male literary clubs of Lima (1996, 121–23). The intellectual elite of Lima, made up of both women and men, attended the meetings. These included the well-known Peruvian writers Matto de Turner; Cabello; Ricardo Palma (1833–1919); and the intellectual, politician, and literary critic Manuel González Prada (1844–1918); among many others.

One of the many intriguing features of the veladas is the public and publicized aspect of their existence. The literary scholar Graciela Batticuore notes that the veladas began when a reporter overheard Gorriti mention that she would like to start a literary group and published this information in the Lima newspaper: "Los cronistas no sólo promueven la realización del evento sino que acompañan cada encuentro con la reseña detallada de las actividades, la publicación simultánea de muchas de las producciones leídas en la velada y la interpretación del rol social que este círculo de intelectuales se dispone a ejercer" (Batticuore 1999, 27) [The reporters not only set in motion the beginnings of the event, they also follow up each meeting with a detailed review of the activities, the simultaneous publication of many of the writings read during the velada, and an interpretation of the social role that this circle of intellectuals sets out to fulfill]. The reviews in the Lima newspaper *El Comercio* (Commerce) stressed the high attendance rate by Lima intellectuals; the importance of the event to Peru's national body of literature; and the variety of their content in terms of genre, themes, and styles of the readings and events (Batticuore 1999, 201–23). This woman-centered group, with Gorriti as the undisputed leader, became an integral part of the national literary scene of late 1870s Lima society. It is important to note that male intellectuals often approved of women's erudition, but *only* as a supplement to the latter's domestic skills and viewed education and critical thinking as ways to make women smarter and more apt homemakers, as well as better role models for the future generations of Peruvians (Denegri 1996, 82–83). Despite the fact that there may have been patriarchically driven motives for the public acceptance of women's cultivation of letters within the veladas (namely, that "civilized," somewhat learned mothers produce good future citizens), the experience of community for these women writers allowed them to flourish and they became examples for future generations of women intellectuals.

Several of the participants in Gorriti's veladas would go on to become accomplished writers, and some would make important contributions to early feminist causes.[10] The initiation of the woman-centered press (a press owned and operated by women, for women) across Latin America during this period was part of this important early feminist wave.[11] For example, Gorriti and the Peruvian writer Carolina Freire de Jaimes (1844–1916) founded the weekly publication *El Album* (The Album [1874]), which provided a forum for women's writings and discussions on women's topics.[12] The Peruvian writer and pedagogue Teresa González de Fanning founded one of the most academically rigorous schools for girls in Peru and made girls' education an important mission of her life's work (Batticuore 1999, 229). Fanning also went on to write the novel *Regina,* which won an award in the international literary competition of the Athenaeum of Lima in 1886 (Batticuore 1999, 229). Matto de Turner, an important Peruvian novelist whose work is widely studied today, used her tenure as editor of the daily newspaper *La Bolsa* (The Stock Exchange) in 1883 to advocate higher standards for women's education (Berg 1990, 304).[13]

10. One writer whose name does not commonly appear associated with Peruvian women writers born in the nineteenth century, but who nonetheless deserves mention for her literary contributions, is Zoila Aurora Cáceres (1877–1958), who married the well-known Guatemalan *modernista* writer Enrique Gómez Carrillo. This absence may be because of the later dates of Cáceres's publications or because she spent most of her life abroad, in Germany, France, and Spain. Cáceres stands out for being one of the few women prose writers of the *modernista* movement (Latin America's first autochthonous literary movement, which was in vogue between 1888 and 1920). Her work most typical of *modernismo* is her novel *La rosa muerta,* published in Paris in 1914 (Cáceres 2007), which deals with medical themes and a woman's sexual awakening at the hand of her gynecologist. The theme of this novel may make Cáceres sound very liberal; however, demonstrating a contradictory nature typical of modern women between two eras, she was a staunch Catholic who objected to other religious cults being allowed into Peru. Cáceres also published a travel narrative, a history of famous women, and a memoir of her life with Gómez Carrillo. Most of her work appears after 1910. Cáceres was an activist for suffrage and other rights for women.

11. In addition to the information in this Introduction and the historical chapters of this study on the early woman-centered presses in Latin America, for the history of the feminist press in Latin America, see studies by Bergmann et al. 1990 and Greenberg 1990; for women's periodicals in Mexico, see Herrick 1957.

12. Freire de Jaimes published dramas; poetry; and two short novels, *El regalo de bodas* (1887) and *Memorias de una reclusa* (Batticuore 1999, 228).

13. Matto de Turner's work is still studied today, in particular for her status as an early *indigenista* writer and for her 1889 novel criticizing clerical abuses and defending the cause of indigenous Peruvians, *Aves sin nido* (2004; trans., 1996). Berg has published critical editions of Matto de Turner's novels *Indole* (Character [1891]) (Matto de Turner 2006b) and *Herencia* (Heredity [1895]) (Matto de Turner 2006a). For a thorough critical study of the indigenous novel and on Matto de Turner's fiction, see Cornejo Polar 2005. See also Ana Peluffo's (2005) insightful study *Lágrimas andinas,* which

She then gained the editorship of the prestigious Lima literary weekly *El Perú Ilustrado* in 1889, but was forced to resign when, in her absence, a story was published about the life of Christ that alluded to an amorous attraction between Christ and Mary Magdalene (Berg 1995, 83). Matto was burned in effigy and excommunicated, and her writing was prohibited for consumption by the Archbishopric of Lima. After Nicolás de Piérola's troops sacked her home for political reasons in 1895, Matto fled for Argentina; there, she founded and edited the bimonthly magazine *El Búcaro Americano* (The American Urn), which specialized in publishing women's writing. Cabello, who is discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 4 of this study, became a successful writer, publishing several high-selling novels and many essays, including the prize-winning *La novela moderna* (The Modern Novel).[14]

As we can see in the case of both Gorriti and Matto de Turner, there was significant communication and intellectual exchange between Argentina and Peru. Gorriti's homeland produced several important women writers who are gaining recognition today. Although Frederick points out eight women writers who make up the "Generation of '80" in Argentina (1991, 282), I will highlight a few who have received critical attention

---

delves into Matto de Turner's strategic use of sentimentality to insert her discourse into the national program for liberal reform. Denegri 1996 also includes a chapter on Matto de Turner's Romantic discourse and struggle for entry into the national discourse. For an analysis and overview of Matto de Turner's essays, see Berg 1995.

14. Today *Blanca Sol* is the best-known work by Cabello. The rising number of critical studies on the novel inspired a 2004 edition, edited and with an introduction by María Cristina Arambel-Guiñazú and a 2007 edition with an introduction by Oswaldo Voysest. Interest in Cabello's work has led to other recent editions of her novels. Cabello's first novel was the 1886 *Los amores de Hortensia, biografía de una mujer superior* (Hortensia's Loves: Autobiography of a Superior Woman); however, this novel is not readily available today, even in specialized archives (Mazquiarán de Rodríguez 1990, 96). In 1886 she also published *Sacrificio y recompensa* (Sacrifice and Reward) (Cabello 2005), which won a gold medal from Athenaeum of Lima, and 1889 saw the publication of *Las consecuencias* (Consequences) (Cabello 1889b). A 2005 edition of *Sacrificio y recompensa* has recently appeared; contemporary interest in this novel likely arose as a result of the similarities between the character Elisa in this novel and the later, more fully developed character of Blanca Sol. Cabello's last novel, written in 1892, *El conspirador: Autobiografía de un hombre público* (The Conspirator: Autobiography of a Public Figure) (Cabello 2001) is considered a veiled critique of the presidency of Nicolás de Piérola (Peru, 1839–1913), who served during 1879–81 and 1895–99; the novel exposes, in the form of a fictional autobiography, the moral corruption and decline of Peru's political system. The discovery of evidence on video of the political corruptions of the Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori and his advisor Vladimiro Montesinos in 2000 inspired a 2001 edition of *El conspirador* (Voysest 2001, 5). Cabello is a nineteenth-century woman writer, along with Gorriti, Matto de Turner, and others, who is making her way into discussions on Latin American narrative in the nineteenth century.

in recent years.[15] The work of the feminist literary critics Masiello, Lea Fletcher, and Frederick have helped to bring these writers' work back into focus.

Juana Manso (1818–1875) was born in Argentina but later lived in Uruguay and Brazil. She started the scholarly and cultural organization the Ateneo de Señoritas (Young Ladies' Athenaeum) in 1841 and directed the early feminist journals *Jornal das Senhoras* (Ladies' Journal), *Album de Señoritas* (Young Ladies' Album), and *La Siempreviva* (The Everlasting Flower).[16] Through her essays and the founding of women's journals and schools for girls, Manso was a staunch advocate of women's education and participation in national literary production. The 1882 travel narrative of the Argentine Eduarda Mansilla de García (1838–1892; sister of the writer Lucio Victorio Mansilla and niece of the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas) *Recuerdos de viaje* (Travel Memoirs) has seen a revival in a 2006 edition. The narrative tells of Mansilla's time abroad in Washington, D.C., with her diplomat husband and offers a woman's perspective on North American culture and mores, while at the same time shedding light on Argentine culture from a female viewpoint. As Masiello points out, an important facet of the narrative is Mansilla's wonder at the liberty of "yankee" women (1992, 83). The Argentine writer and activist Emma de la Barra (1861–1947) published five high-selling novels in Argentina, all of them largely forgotten until recently. In 2005 the specialist in Latin American women's writing Mary Berg edited a scholarly edition of de la Barra's 1905 novel *Stella* (originally published under the pseudonym César Duayen), which is a love story that also grapples with Argentina's transition into modernity and the role of women in this process. Thanks to the literary critics mentioned above, Argentine women writers are reappearing in nineteenth-century literary studies with ever greater frequency.[17]

One of Colombia's most prolific writers of the nineteenth century was a woman, Soledad Acosta de Samper (1833–1913) (Ordóñez 1977, 233), yet her work is largely unknown among Hispanists today. Specialists in women writers and nineteenth-century Colombian literature, however, have brought

15. The other women writers featured in Frederick's (1991) study "In Their Own Voice" are Elvira Aldao de Díaz (1858–1950), Agustina Andrade (1861–91), Silvia Fernández (1857–1945), Lola Larrosa de Ansaldo (1859–95), Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta (1848–88), and Edelina Soto y Calvo (1844–1932).

16. For more information on the feminist press in Argentina during this period, see Azua 1988.

17. Berg (1990, 1995, 2003, 2004) has published several critical articles on Emma de la Barra (pseud. César Duayén).

this multifaceted intellectual back into focus over the past fifteen years and now she is among the more frequently studied women writers of the era.[18] Acosta de Samper's literary career spanned half a century, and her oeuvre covers many genres: she translated works from French and English into Spanish and published prose fiction (historical, psychological, and fantastic); news articles; biographical articles; essays on women's social roles and education, science, religion, and history; travel narratives; and her own letters (Encinales de Sanjinés 1997, 229; Ordóñez 1997, 233). Like many women thinkers of her time, she was in favor of increasing women's education, and as a means of providing positive role models for young women, she published a collection of more than four hundred biographies of famous women throughout history, *La mujer en la sociedad moderna* (Woman in Modern Society [1895]).[19] She is perhaps best known today for her collection of short novels and narrations from the 1860s that were collected under the title *Novelas y cuadros de la vida sur-americana* in 1869 (of which a 2006 edition, edited and with an introduction by Flor María Rodríguez-Arenas, is currently available). Many of the stories in the collection are about the lives of women who face and overcome the challenges before them, and in Acosta de Samper's narratives, rising above these obstacles often includes the act of writing (González Ascorra 1997, 55–56). Through her biographies of successful, ambitious women and positive examples of fictional heroines taking control of their lives, Acosta de Samper sought to empower her Colombian sisters.

The hispanophone Caribbean produced several women prose fiction writers of importance. The aforementioned Cuban-born poet, dramatist, and novelist Gómez de Avellaneda appears to be the only woman writer of the nineteenth century who has achieved a steady place in the literary canon of Hispanic letters.[20] Gómez de Avellaneda's novels deserve mention for boldly

18. In 2005 Iberoamericana published an extensive compilation of critical studies, edited by Carolina Alzate. This collection includes more than five hundred pages of scholarship on the Colombian writer by respected scholars of nineteenth-century Latin American letters and women's writing such as Mary Berg, Lucía Guerra, Nina Scott, and Lee Skinner. Jiménez 1999b and Campuzano 1997 contain studies on Acosta de Samper, as does González Ascorra 1997. See also Ordóñez and Osorio 1997, a collection of critical studies.

19. A fully reproduced digital and searchable online edition of the original 1895 edition of *La mujer en la sociedad moderna* is available online at http://books.google.com.

20. At the time of writing Gómez de Avellaneda is the woman writer appearing most frequently on the Ph.D. and master's reading lists of top-ten-ranking programs in Hispanic literature in the United States, according to the latest available data from the *Gourman Report* (Gourman 1996), whereas many of the works by women writers listed in this section are rarely considered required reading (although this is changing over time, as scholars highlight women writers' central importance in filling in the gaps of the male-dominated canon in terms of nationhood, national identity,

taking on the onus of defending women's intellect and autonomy early in the century. Although she is best known for her 1841 abolitionist novel *Sab* (a passionate defense of the virtuous and noble character of a mixed-race slave), her 1843 novel *Dos mujeres* (Two Women), originally banned from Latin America for presenting an illicit love, is an unambiguous championing of a talented, beautiful, intellectual, and fiercely independent woman who is scorned by society for her relationship with a married man. Insightful book-length critical studies exist on Gómez de Avellaneda's work, such as Beatriz Pastor's *Fashioning Feminism in Cuba and Beyond: The Prose of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda* and Florinda Álzaga's *La Avellaneda: Intensidad y vanguardia,* as well as dozens of critical articles.[21] There is still much work to be done on this prolific and brilliant writer; in particular, her numerous plays, which were performed in Madrid to rave reviews, have received little critical attention.[22]

Two significant women novelists from Puerto Rico have gained some critical recognition over the past two decades. Over the course of her long life, Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo (1871–1961) produced seven novels, twelve biographies, thirteen essays, a collection of short stories, a book of poetry, and twenty translations (Jiménez 1999, 181). Like her contemporary and compatriot Ana Roqué, she was a firm supporter of and activist for women's suffrage and equality, as well as a defender of women's ability to form part of the intellectual elite. The only work of Eulate Sanjurjo's that has received significant attention is *La muñeca* (The Doll [1895]), a story that criticizes the superficial, vain socialite who lives only to maintain her good looks and manipulate those around her. Roqué, the subject of Chapters 5 and 6 of this study, established several schools, scholarships, and vocational programs for girls as well as a feminist periodical, *La Mujer* (Woman). Her scholarly interests were varied, ranging from the natural sciences to literature, and she

---

and cultural meaning). In several cases, she was the only woman writer listed as required reading in the nineteenth century. Her poetry and her 1841 abolitionist novel, *Sab,* are often included in the nineteenth-century sections of general anthologies and literary histories of Latin American literature.

21. For further reading on Gómez de Avellaneda, see Araujo 1993; González Ascorra 1997; Guerra 1985, 1987a, 1987b; S. Kirkpatrick 1990; LaGreca 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Lindstrom 2007; Picón Garfield 1992.

22. Another eloquent and aristocratic Cuban-born woman whose work merits brief mention is María de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo, the condesa de Merlín (countess of Merlín, 1789–1852), as she is known in Spanish. The condesa de Merlín published her memoirs and travel narratives, originally written in French. The work most often studied is the 1844 travel narrative of her return visit to Cuba after several decades living in Europe, *Viaje a la Habana* (Voyage to Havana). Several works of importance have been published concerning this fascinating historical figure in recent years, including Méndez Rodenas 1998; Campuzano 1997, 2004; and Molloy 1996.

published nonfiction books on geography, botany, grammar, and pedagogy that were used for many years in Puerto Rico. Her best-known work of fiction is the 1903 novel *Luz y sombra,* under consideration in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study. She also published several collections of short stories that, unfortunately, are not available in recent editions as of this writing.

Considering the central place of Mexican literature in the history of Latin American letters, the dearth of information available on nineteenth-century Mexican women prose writers merits correction.[23] Ana Rosa Domenella and Nora Pasternac's collection of critical studies and anthologized writings *Las voces olvidadas* is an important step toward filling this gap.[24] The collection contains one of the few essays on Barragán, along with some of her prose selections, and also points out several of her contemporaries who were accomplished writers during their time. Barragán is the earliest novelist Domenella and Pasternac list, while María Néstora Téllez Rendón (1828–1887) is the second woman known to have published a novel, *Staurofila, precioso cuento alegórico* (Staurofila, a Valuable Allegorical Tale) in 1889. Téllez Rendón was a blind schoolteacher, and *Staurofila* was a didactic tale that she told her students. The literary critic Gloria María Prado recognizes elements of Romanticism as well as mysticism and biblical allusions in the narrative, which features a female character, Staurofila, who is compared to both Eve and the Virgin Mary in the burdens she must bear (1991, 38). The Mexican prose writer and poet Laura Méndez de Cuenca (1853–1928) is not studied today; outside Domenella and Pasternac's compilation there are very few sources available on her. However, Méndez de Cuenca was an established member of intellectual circles in her time. She attended the meetings of the Ateneo de la Juventud (Athenaeum of Youth), a Mexican intellectual group that formed as a reaction against the Positivism of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, and made the acquaintance of many young writers and intellectuals of her day, including the Mexican poet Manuel Acuña (Domenella, Gutiérrez de Velasco, and Pasternac 1991, 118). She published essays and poetry in Mexico's most important newspapers and served as professor and director of the normal school of Toluca. Her publications include a "novela de costumbres mexicanas" (novel of Mexican customs),

23. Although she was not a novelist, Laureana Wright de Kleinhans (Mexico, 1846–96) deserves mention for starting two important feminist journals in Mexico that advocated women's suffrage and equality, *Violetas de Anáhuac* (Violets of the Anáhuac, 1884) and *Mujeres de Anáhuac* (Women of the Anáhuac, 1887).

24. Other women writers in Domenella and Pasternac's study either published their work after about 1910 or wrote in genres other than the novel.

El espejo de Amarilis (Amarilis's Mirror [1902]), and a collection of short stories, *Simplezas* (Simplicities [1910]), which is a series of seventeen short stories that are dated between 1890 and 1909. The short fictions focus on the dark side of a woman's existence and, in line with the dates of the writing, harbor influence from Naturalism and some momentary shades of *modernismo.*

The current state of the field shows a marked concentration of nineteenth-century women writers hailing from the Southern Cone and the Caribbean. It is possible that women in the mining nations of South America and in the international port cities of the Caribbean enjoyed more cultural exposure than those in other regions, thereby gaining greater access to novels, theater, and opera (several of high culture's forms of storytelling). However, this hypothesis does not explain the scarcity of information on women prose fiction writers from Mexico, as Mexico City, along with Buenos Aires, was a principal literary center in the late nineteenth century. It is likely that texts by Central American and Mexican women writers exist and have yet to be discovered by scholars. Certainly there is more archival work to be done to locate and evaluate texts by early women writers who have been forgotten over time.

The objective of the study at hand is to bring back into focus the work of three writers from three different regions of Latin America who were widely read in their countries of origin and to trace the surprising overlaps in the symbolic rewritings of womanhood through their prose. The particular novels I have chosen by Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué lend themselves to deciphering the ways in which these writers manipulated specific aspects of the Angel of the House in order to expand definitions of womanhood so to include agency, wit, intellect, and the freedom to act on one's desires without invoking society's scorn. These similarities serve as evidence of thinking women's desires to criticize, each in her own way, the ubiquitous Angel of the House as a damaging national model put forth for women separated by thousands of miles, yet united by the gender politics and ideology of their day.

Author and Text: The Unconscious and the Symbolic in *La hija del bandido, Blanca Sol,* and *Luz y sombra*

Although archivists in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, recognize the value of Barragán's novel *La hija del bandido* (1887) and published a local limited edition in 2004 and despite the fact that she is, at the time of writing, the earliest woman known to have written a novel in Mexico, Barragán is

mostly absent from mainstream and feminist scholarship alike.[25] The same can be said of Roqué's *Luz y sombra* (1903); fortunately, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's 1994 critical edition of *Luz y sombra* includes a rigorous introductory study and analysis. Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, Cabello has received increasing critical attention, particularly because of her use of Naturalism for feminist ends. Scholars such as Oswaldo Voysest, Lucía Guerra, Juan Armando Epple, Ana Peluffo, and Gonzáles Ascorra have published compelling studies on Cabello's novels.[26] A scholarly edition of *Blanca Sol* (1888), with a critical introduction by María Cristina Arambel-Guiñazú, was published in 2004 and another appeared in 2007 with an introduction by Voysest.

What distinguishes these novels from others by Latin American women authors from the nineteenth century is not that their primary focus is to propose or amend nationalist agenda, or to present a purely didactic story to young readers, but rather that they are more concerned with the identity politics of women. The division that I indicate is not black and white, as we know that national and private agendas overlap in subtle and intricate ways in novels of the period; however, one may speak of certain qualities that the novels of Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué share. While their subject matter may include messages that underline a need for social reform, specific sociopolitical issues are not the primary focus of their narratives and are not addressed overtly, as they are, for example, in the novels of Matto de Turner, who wrote in opposition to clerical exploitation and in defense of indigenous Peruvians, and in the work of Gorriti, whose fiction points out the need to reform women's material well-being or criticizes the Argentine dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas by emphasizing the suffering of women and children. The novels of Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué offer three excellent, clear examples of novels by women writers that focus on the sociology and psychology of a central protagonist, rather than on their place in geopolitics; these authors have chosen to imagine alternatives to women's roles and feminized identities in a world that has not yet admitted them.[27] That is not to say that other women writers were not concerned with identity and gender

25. María Zalduondo's 2001 study of Barragán is the only in-depth work available at the time of writing. Zalduondo's scholarly edition of *La hija del bandido* (2007) is a readily available, glossed edition of the novel.

26. For an overview of criticism on Cabello, see Chapter 3 of this study.

27. Feminist literary scholarship on Latin American writing in the past twenty-five years has productively explored the role of women writers in the formation of a national identity. Jean Franco's (1989) *Plotting Women* is a cross-temporal study of women's struggle for interpretive power in Mexico.

politics, but rather that Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué offer up heroines who challenge very specific tenets of the Angel of the House, inviting readers to reimagine their prescribed roles and assert themselves as individuals.

By writing in a subversive and circuitous manner, Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué participated in the ongoing effort by women writers of the last quarter of the nineteenth century to insert their own ideals of womanhood into mainstream culture. Speaking to the reader's unconscious, they sought to imagine new women's voices and to tell of new dreams in poetic form so that they, like the repressed material of the dream, could force their existence into consciousness.[28] Logic tells us that these authors, aware of the negative criticism

---

It focuses on the nation-building process from the Aztec Empire through the modernization of Mexico. Franco analyzes the silencing effect of nationalism on women's writing and intellectual activity and the ways in which women represented themselves as gendered subjects in the construction of national identity. Also regarding women novelists and prose writers in Mexico, Domenella and Pasternac's (1991) aforementioned compilation of critical studies *Las voces olvidadas* is an important addition to the literature; it includes essays by various literary critics on little-known women writers, along with excerpts of their fiction and essays. Argentine women authors of the nineteenth century have enjoyed more critical attention in recent years than those of any other country in Spanish America. There are three major critical works on women's writing in Argentina, probably the result of the rediscovery of texts by Argentine authors such as Gorriti (1819–92), Eduarda Mansilla de García (1838–92), and Manso (1819–75). In *Between Civilization and Barbarism,* Francine Masiello, like Franco, is interested in women's "struggle for access to the symbolic realm that determines the cultural imagination of a nation" (1992, 2). The volume covers the early nineteenth century up to the 1930s. Lea Fletcher's (1994) compilation *Mujeres y cultura en la Argentina del siglo XIX* (Women and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Argentina) includes literary as well as sociological studies; the first part of her study focuses on women writers and their texts, while the second part contains studies on women's social, political, and cultural context in nineteenth-century Argentina. The authors in Fletcher's compilation analyze themes in women's fiction and poetry discuss biographical elements of their writing, and explore the place of the woman writer in the literary history of Argentina. Bonnie Frederick's (1998) *Wily Modesty* identifies women's construction of an authorial self that pretends to take on the self-abnegating role of the Angel of the House to appease male critics—a strategy that Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué also employ to greater or lesser degrees. Frederick believes that the strategy of "wily modesty" enabled women to have a better chance of forming part of the national literature. She terms this tactic "speaking up with eyes lowered" and the "rhetoric of femininity" (11). Frederick examines how male critics' reception of women's writing led to the marginalization of women authors by excluding them from the canon. One of the more recent studies on a nineteenth-century woman writer is Anna Peluffo's (2005) monograph *Lágrimas andinas: Sentimentalismo, género y virtud republicana en Clorinda Matto de Turner* (Andean Tears: Republican Sentimentalism, Gender, and Virtue in Clorinda Matto de Turner). Peluffo's project examines how Matto de Turner employs sentimentalism to insert her concerns regarding the status of women and indigenous peoples into the national discussions of social policies in Peru.

28. Psychoanalytic theory provides tools to discover desires and intentions in narrative and makes a viable connection between the unconscious and language; thus it has much to offer in the search to uncover women intellectuals' symbolic battles. Freud's chapters in his 1904 *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* reflect an inseparable link between words and the unconscious; he grapples with

and scorn their critiques of society could provoke, did not voice their concerns directly. Yet their narratives show how concerns regarding women's place in the symbolic order are subtly woven into the authors' discourses, paralleling the way our unconscious weaves our everyday worries into our mental narratives while we sleep.[29] Just as our dreams offer cues from the unconscious that we do not have during waking hours that can help us to decipher the nature of our desires and fears, these women authors give their readers subtle cues to facilitate the liberation of women through development of their identities.

The various types of theory that inform my literary analyses (psychoanalytic, philosophical, anthropological, and so on) help reveal how Barragán, Cabello, and Roqué highlight and deconstruct the myths behind traditional visions of female identity, as they move to designate the unspoken senses of the semiotic.[30] The historical context of each writer is also an integral part

---

subconscious meaning of forgetting proper names, foreign words, and word order, as well as other types of mistakes in speech, reading, and writing (Freud 1994, 3–55). As Lacan reminds us, dreams have the structure of a form of writing, and in adults reproduce the "simultaneously phonetic and symbolic use of signifying elements, which can also be found in the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt and in the characters still used in China" (1977, 57). The connection between the symbols of the written language and the hidden desires of dreams is apparent in Freud's and Lacan's thought; writing can structure the unconscious workings of the mind and also serve as a medium by which the unconscious is expressed. Lacan further lists many rhetorical tools of literature that reveal the intentions of oneiric discourse, in which desires are expressed: "Ellipsis and pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, regression, repetition, apposition—these are the syntactical displacements; metaphor, catachresis, autonomasis, allegory, metonymy, and synecdoche—these are the semantic condensations in which Freud teaches us to read the intentions—ostentatious or demonstrative, dissimulating or persuasive, retaliatory or seductive—out of which the subject modulates his oneiric discourse" (58). Twentieth-century feminist theorists have criticized Freud and Lacan for ignoring female sexuality or aligning it with a phallocentric notion of sexuality, for example, Freud's concept of penis envy. Luce Irigaray's (1985) *Speculum of the Other Woman* is just one example of this critique. Here I use Freud and Lacan's elaborations on the subject and language to explore the parallels between the unconscious mind and writing. For theories of feminine desire I draw on Julia Kristeva's thought later in the study, as Freud and Lacan have limited use in this area.

29. Lacan and Kristeva refer to the shared social understanding as the *symbolic order:* a realm or discourse of spoken and written language which, more broadly, includes sets of social as well as linguistic signs. Lacan discusses the symbolic in his lecture "On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" (1977, 180–97). For more on Kristeva's view of the symbolic order, see selections from "Women's Time" (Kristeva 1986, 199–200). The symbolic order is a system of signs in which the women writers I study here hope to participate and alter. This symbolic system known as the symbolic order is different from Foucault's definition of discourse, for example, in that it not only comprises print culture, social gestures, and art, but also broader symbolic signs such as the placement of bodies in society (such as the number of female bodies in the senate or the fact that women are free to walk in public spaces).

30. For an overview of current feminist theory written by U.S. and Latin American Hispanists and a discussion of current debates on the application of foreign theory to Latin American texts, see LaGreca 2006.

of this exploration. In the chapters that follow we will see how these authors subvert the traditional myths of the symbolic order and replace them with new visions of women that can move out from individual (female) subjects' isolated imaginaries into the symbolic order in general.

Obstacles to the Reading of Nineteenth-Century Female Subjectivity

There are several problems associated with the project of deducing female subjectivity from texts. The first, and most obvious, problem for modern readers is trying to reach across temporal and cultural boundaries to reveal notions of identity and uncover what we think authors wanted to express. Frederick and the critic Janet Todd, among others, have voiced this concern when looking at women's writing from the nineteenth century. The logical solution is to use the tools we have at our disposal: the fictional text and historical documents. Working from the text and available historical and social documents puts the reader back in touch with an 1800s reality and provides insight into the writer's position as an intellectual female subject who grappled with imposed limitations.

A second concern for feminist literary critics is the problem of generalizing a concept of female identity to an entire culture. The critical theorist Denise Riley challenges the overgeneralization of the term *woman* in her 1988 critical feminist work *Am I That Name?* while theorist Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* reminds us that gender itself is a complex and constantly evolving situation that cannot be divorced from its political and cultural setting. I do not attempt to discover a single, unified, coherent type of womanhood put forth by Spanish American women, as Gilbert and Gubar have done in the case of nineteenth-century British women's writing.[31] Perhaps more fitting to analysis of one country's literature, such generalizations would level the specific internal histories of the various countries in which my authors lived. However, it is possible to use theory to uncover the strategies of reconstruction of female identity from a specific cultural context. While I use the Angel of the House as a common theme that allows comparisons between the works, I look at how the trope is manipulated differently in each particular context and in light of each country's history.

31. See Gilbert and Gubar 1979.

Chapter Summaries

Rewriting Womanhood tells a story about the plight of real women and the writers who attempted to better their lives through fiction; the real women and the fiction, then, are two sides of the same coin. I have included two chapters for each novel that I explore: one on the history of women in the country and time period of each author and the second on the imaginary early feminist journey brought to life in the novels.

Chapter 1 reveals Mexican women's domestic seclusion and limited opportunities for intellectual growth in Porfirian Mexico (1876–1911). This overview sheds light on the theme of exuberant freedom and travel in Refugio Barragán's *La hija del bandido*. This lively novel presents the coming-of-age ritual (the fifteenth birthday, or *quinceañera*) as a catalyst for agency, rebellion against the father, and the heroic acts of a girl dynamo.

The advancement of women's education in nineteenth-century Peru was a precarious project that seemed to change with every new political wave, yet never seemed to set sail. Understanding this historical context (the topic of Chapter 3) brings into focus Cabello's literary project, which focuses on women's paltry education, in *Blanca Sol*. On a symbolic level Cabello's narrative manipulates the patriarchal trappings of the Cinderella fairy tale to blur the boundaries between female "virtue" and "evil" in a more humanizing way, while emphasizing the role of proper education in determining these traits in both sexes. Agency and desire also play a central role in the development of Cabello's intriguing title character.

The historical and cultural story of colonial Puerto Rico and Ana Roqué's novel *Luz y sombra* are the subjects of Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 5, I outline the social policies in Puerto Rico that focused on repressing and containing women's bodies. Roqué's discursive efforts to legitimize female desire and pleasure in a symbolic order that marginalized and pathologized the sexualized female body respond to these repressive social practices.

To conclude my discussion, I point to certain generalities and differences characterizing the fight for identity and agency shared by these women in Latin American fiction. By discovering the ways in which Latin American women authors between 1887 and 1903 conceived and strategically wrote alternative creations of female subjectivity, we can begin to define a formalized, specifically Latin American brand of feminism for a modern era that was in germination in the second half of the nineteenth century and flowered over the following decades.

In the analyses that follow, images of fictional women are subversive alternatives to those in predominant literature of the period. These distortions of mainstream womanhood redefine *female subjectivity* because they rewrite the process of creating an individual as an imagined subject within an alternative social formation. The formation of such a subject, according to Lacan, occurs when an individual confronts and learns to deal with others or a symbolic other (an other in the mind or social consciousness, also denoted by Other, or *grande Autre*).[32] This is precisely the process that women writers undergo when they confront the ethereal specter of the Angel of the House, as we shall discover.

32. As his translator Alan Sheridan notes, Lacan avoids defining terms explicitly in his writings and lectures and instead lets the reader gather meaning from the use of the terms in context (Lacan 1977, vii). For this reason, and the complexity of the writings, secondary sources on Lacan are very useful. I suggest Grosz 1990 and the introductions by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose to Lacan 1982. For the novice Lacanian scholar, Leader and Groves 1998 gives a basic outline of Lacanian principles and terms, complete with illustrations. For a postmodern perspective that mixes interpretations of Alfred Hitchcock with Lacanian theory, see Žižek 1992a or 1992b. For a Lacanian interpretation of desire and historicism, see Copjec 1994.