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## Rewriting Womanhood

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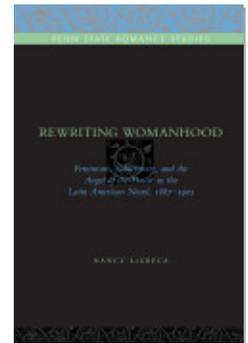
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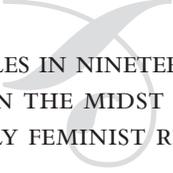
Rewriting Womanhood: Feminism, Subjectivity, and the Angel of the House in the Latin American Novel, 1887–1903.

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WOMEN'S IMAGINED ROLES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO:  
SECLUSION IN THE MIDST OF PROGRESS  
AND EARLY FEMINIST REACTIONS

BETWEEN 1810 AND 1821, women in Mexico temporarily put aside their primary duties as wives and mothers to take part in the Wars of Independence. Wartime provided an opportunity for women to break out of their domestic routines in order to work for a higher cause: freeing New Spain. The scholar of Chicana studies Elizabeth Salas in her book on *soldaderas* (women soldiers) in the Mexican military has found that women participated in the struggle for independence by fighting in battle as well as serving as spies, caretakers of soldiers, providers of provisions, recruitment agents, and financial contributors.<sup>1</sup> Women were also deployed as “seductresses” by both the royalists and freedom fighters to seduce the opponent’s troops into deserting and joining the opposing army (Kentner 1975, 92). According to Salas, Mexican women put the frustration borne of their limited options and rights into the war effort, and thereby hoped to prove themselves strong, capable citizens to be taken seriously as part of the new national project (1990, 26). Although the efforts of some wealthy donors would be rewarded with gifts of property after the victory was won, most women who helped directly or indirectly in the battles found their situations did not change very much in the new republic and, in some ways, worsened over the course of the nineteenth century.

Mexico’s founding fathers drew up the Mexican Federal Republic’s constitution in 1824. The decades that followed brought a succession of internal struggles for power as well as foreign interventions. The United States

1. A comparison with the participation of women in Peruvian independence, outlined in Chapter 3 of this study, will show that Peru’s “gentle sex” participated in wartime activities similar to those of women in Mexico. The historian Evelyn Cherpak’s findings add further evidence of widespread activity by women in the wars of independence. Cherpak’s case study of Gran Colombia (a colonial territory that is today Colombia; Venezuela; Ecuador; Panama; and parts of Costa Rica, Peru, Brazil, and Guyana) reveals that, as in Mexico and Peru, women took part in combat, espionage, missions to aid troops, nursing those injured in battle, and hosting meetings. They also donated their wealth and supplies (1978, 220).

invaded Mexico between 1846 and 1848 and took a wide expanse of its northern territories, which today make up a large part of the western and southwestern United States, while France under Napoleon III invaded and overthrew the liberal Mexican president Benito Juárez to instill the French emperor Maximilian from 1864 to 1867. This instability would subside for a time beginning in 1876, the date that marked the tenure of José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz in power.

During the Porfiriato (the term used to refer to the presidency of Díaz) foreign firms built railroads, bridges, and a telegraph system, while Mexican- and foreign-owned factories imported machinery to raise the level of production of goods to European and U.S. standards.<sup>2</sup> In part because of the reduction of the national debt, and apparent political stability, Mexico played a more visible role in the international arena. International recognition was manifested in an increase in trade and diplomacy, which in turn led to a growing cultural sophistication and cosmopolitanism in urban centers. The opening of national and cultural borders brought in examples of mobile and independent women travelers from the United States and Europe.

Foreigners came to Mexico in large numbers for business, diplomatic service, and adventure (Meyer and Sherman 1991, 450). Mexico, in turn, went abroad, ideologically and literally. Díaz's group of advisors and politicians (called the *científicos*, because they followed various forms of the scientifically driven social philosophy Positivism) emulated the French technocratic republic for modernization. The word *afrancesamiento* (which means "Francophilia") was used to refer to Mexico's and many other Spanish American countries' eye toward French philosophy, science, medicine, fashion, art, and architecture.<sup>3</sup> In Mexico French influence was not just an abstract trend; it had a concrete legacy that came from the French occupation midcentury. Being a member of the Mexican elite effectively meant having a French education, either through attending school in France or receiving an education in French arts, letters, and sciences elsewhere. The new nation was reaching out internationally to establish itself within Western modernity, and France was the center for the arts and, along with the United States, scientific and sociopolitical thought.

2. The Mexican president José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz lived from 1830 to 1915 and ruled for two terms, 1876–80 and 1884–1911.

3. Mexico's officials did not, however, share French leaders' preoccupation with workers' conditions. Tenorio-Trillo notes that during the World's Fair in Paris of 1889, France's congresses on social issues were sparsely attended by Mexican representatives (1996, 24).

While cosmopolitanism and major improvements in the national economy and infrastructure were appearing, Mexico's urban centers suffered the common ills of modernization: wide-scale disenfranchisement of the masses and a decline in the living conditions of the working classes. The alleged progress of the Porfirian era almost exclusively benefited a growing bourgeoisie and the elite. Agricultural and urban workers suffered in abject poverty, while signs of wealth sprang up in urban centers, particularly in Mexico City. To achieve the appearance of peace necessary for such developments, Díaz used the military and police to crush opposition and to keep bandits in check so as to make cities and roadways as safe as possible.<sup>4</sup> Minimizing crime in Mexico City and maintaining a semblance of safety were imperative for attracting foreign investors and creating the appearance of a stable democracy. Díaz's political corruption and his administration's efforts to concentrate wealth in the upper classes, among other causes, led to the Mexican Revolution, which ousted him in 1911.

As Mexican society became more cosmopolitan, a smattering of education for well-heeled women that did not emphasize critical thinking continued to be regarded as a prestigious reflection on their husbands. Within the role of model homemaker, perceived to be of utmost social importance, women were meant to be somewhat cultivated, yet largely unthinking, domestic beings who served as paragons of morality and propriety for their children. Hence a common characteristic of feminine education in all classes was that it was conceived to reflect well upon or provide utility to others, rather than built on developing areas of interest for women's growth as individuals; for example, a woman's fine piano playing could add prestige to her father's or future husband's home, but the moment it began to interfere with the care of her children or domestic responsibilities, she was viewed as faltering in her role and ceased to live up to the self-abnegating ideal of the Angel of the House. The development of one's abilities as an autonomous agent who thinks critically, acts upon society, and engages in public life was reserved for upper-class men, as women were thought to be too delicate and incapable of such activity.

This view of women as industrious yet ornamental keepers of the home did not arise in the Porfiriato; colonial Mexico's first novelist, José Joaquín Fernández Lizardi (1776–1827), recognized and criticized the superficiality of women's academic formation in the early 1800s in his novel *La educación*

4. For historical information on bandits in Porfirian Mexico and for an analysis of their role in Barragán's novel, see Zaldouondo 2001.

*de las mujeres o la Quijotita y su prima: Historia muy cierta con apariencias de novela* (The Education of Women or the Quijotita and Her Cousin: A Very True Story That Resembles a Novel [1818]). Although Lizardi believed that women could be useful outside the home, he still envisioned limited roles: “reconoce en las mujeres dones administrativos y manuales, pero no intelectuales, y jamás se le ocurre proponerles ejercer las profesiones liberales ni adquirir un saber de tipo intelectual” (Carner 1987, 104) [he recognizes administrative and manual talent in women, but not intellectual talents, and never would it occur to him to propose that they pursue professions in the liberal arts or acquire intellectual knowledge]. Dominant discourses consistently portrayed the woman intellectual as a selfish person who would end up unhappy. In 1856 an anonymous writer published an overtly misogynist article in the newspaper *El Monitor Republicano* (The Republican Monitor), in which he mockingly critiques *talentacias* (bluestockings), intellectually curious women, who “eat little, pay no attention to their appearance, constantly bemoan the ignorance of the masses, and consider themselves unfortunate because one lifetime is not enough to read even a millionth part of what has been written” (quoted in Macías 1982, 16). This was clearly a reference to the growing number of women who were interested in education instead of, or in addition to, becoming self-sacrificing housewives. Similarly, in 1894 the Mexican modernist poet Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera satirizes a young woman from the University of Cambridge for winning a mathematics competition, in which she excelled over all her male colleagues: “Esa laureada señorita no se casará,” he explains, because “una esposa fuerte en multiplicación es un peligro” (quoted in Zalduondo 2001, 44) [This celebrated young woman will not marry; a woman strong in multiplication is a danger]. As Zalduondo reminds us, his words bring to mind a Spanish saying of unknown origin: “Mujer que sabe Latín, ni encuentra marido, ni tiene buen fin” (The woman who knows Latin does not find a husband, nor does she come to a good end). Although the poet’s words may not indicate his personal opinion, they mark the unease with which many men of the era viewed exceptionally intelligent women—women who were not just bright or witty in social exchanges, but who carried out notable, extradomestic accomplishments (45).

Women’s participation in the workforce and access to public schooling in the Porfirian era were invariably a function of hegemonic ideas of national progress. For instance, if girls’ elementary education improved, it was to proliferate prudent and decisive, rather than frivolous and materialistic, mothers of future generations (Macías 1982, 8). As the historian Françoise

Carner puts it, it was assumed that “las mujeres educadas, especialmente las de las clases altas, proporcionarán a la sociedad dentro del rol de educadoras activas e ilustradas de sus hijos, una base sólida para la socialización adecuada de éstos y la transmisión de los valores sociales y morales, y el progreso de la nación” (1987, 104) [educated women, especially those of the upper classes, in their roles as active educators and enlighteners of their children, would offer a solid base for their appropriate socialization, the transmission of moral and social values, and the progress of the nation]. If women entered the workforce, it was because low-paid labor was needed for office work and other menial or time-consuming labor that did not yield high income and was not intellectually stimulating; as men generally sought work with higher pay to support their families than what this “feminine” work provided, women’s participation in the workforce was not considered a competitive threat to men, and thus their exit from the home was tolerated to some extent (10).<sup>5</sup> My point here is that bourgeois women, like working-class Mexicans, were generally considered tools of the Porfirian push toward progress, which benefited a small elite and foreign investors. As one historian simply communicates, the “condition of women was . . . a concern that Mexican Científicos did not seriously consider” (Tenorio-Trillo 1996, 24). In the section on antifeminist discourse, we see that Díaz’s advisors, the *científicos*, were indeed somewhat concerned with the status of female members of society—insofar as they attempted to maintain the angelic standard in the face of outside threats, such as suffrage and feminism.

The primary difference between women’s roles before and after the Porfiriato is that in the last quarter of the century there was a surge in middle-class women working outside the home in low-level office and technical jobs. Another distinguishing characteristic of the Porfiriato was that education became more secular and women’s legal rights and access to public education were reduced, as I will detail shortly. Particular effort was exerted to keep women from gaining equal footing with men socially, legally, and in the workplace. Political voice was completely out of women’s reach as they, like women in many European and North American countries of the 1800s and early 1900s, were not allowed to vote or hold any type of government office.

5. For instance, Macías notes that during the Porfiriato, “women were especially encouraged to become primary schoolteachers, because teaching of young children required enormous dedication, but received minimal compensation” (1982, 10). She adds that elementary schoolteachers received less than two pesos per day, which was barely enough money to support one person without additional income from the woman’s family (10).

The Porfiriato reversed gains in women's education, as a brief history of women's education during this period shows. Postindependence enlightenment ideals midcentury included women's education, which was generally limited to catechism, reading, writing, and some basic math (Carner 1987, 96). After years of considering the construction of a secondary school for girls in a changing political environment, liberals were finally able to open one in Mexico City in 1869 and several more like it in provincial areas in the next five years (Macías 1982, 10). The director of the schools heard demands from female students for courses of study in pharmacy, medicine, and other "masculine" professions, but these fields were not open to women. Many worked as schoolteachers and could be certified to teach secondary school.

As the century marched into the Porfirian era and Díaz and his *científicos* achieved progress in industry and trade, women's access to higher education was limited. The historian of women's culture in Mexico Anna Macías notes that after 1889, graduates of the women's Normal de Profesoras (Normal School) received two years fewer instruction than before 1889 and were licensed to teach only primary school, rather than primary and secondary, as had previously been the case (1982, 11). Macías finds that women's desire to study was strong; the number of female students willing to enroll in higher education consistently exceeded available spots and more than one thousand women were enrolled in vocational school by 1899. Despite women's diligence and demands for greater opportunities, the Porfiriato consistently limited its female citizens' access to higher-paying careers in the sciences and humanities, while primary teachers were not paid even enough to support one person (10–11). Apparently, for women, progress meant being sheltered from excessive knowledge and too much contact with "worldly seductions" (Moreno and Elizalde 1909, 150). Although several pioneering female scholars graduated from medical school and one from law school at the end of the century, these were the exceptions to the rule. (The law graduate received particular criticism, as there was actually a need for women doctors, but law was strictly controlled by men. She was forbidden to practice criminal law, because it was "improper," and alternatively, she concentrated on civil law [Macías 1982, 12].)

Ladies of the upper classes in the Porfirian era were prepared to be just cultivated enough to be able to carry on polite conversation without appearing ignorant and perhaps entertain guests by singing or playing a musical instrument; being mothers of future generations of ruling-class Mexicans

meant having an ornamental education to make a favorable impression on visitors and reflect well on their families. They were literate and were taught embroidery and domestic arts and perhaps French or English; some literature; drawing, music, or both; and the basic notions of geography, geometry, and astronomy (Moreno and Elizalde 1909, 27).

It was commonly believed that providing a broad but very superficial education to women added prestige to the family. A cultivated young lady could attract a desirable suitor more easily than one who lacked social grooming, as this meant she could be a better role model for her children; a mother's positive influence was considered paramount to modernizing and advancing bourgeois society. Thus women's education was suited to fit their imagined social roles: "values that were deemed eternal in women [delicateness, moral superiority, and spirituality] were readapted to the specific needs of the moment" (Tuñón Pablos 1999, 47). Studies beyond the elementary levels were reserved for young men; as the overview of masculinist discourse on women will show, anything beyond a very basic education for women was considered not only improper, but also a burden to their minds and a first step toward worldly evil.

Early modernization required female labor, and women took underpaid jobs in textile and tobacco factories and, if more educated, as office workers, telegraph operators, schoolteachers, porcelain painters, or workers in photography (Carner 1987, 105; Ramos Escandón 1987b, 154–58). Although careers for women existed, it was still often viewed as inappropriate for them to work outside the home unless absolutely necessary for survival, as in the case of those who were widowed or were granted the rare ecclesiastic separation (which did not permit remarriage) and therefore did not have a man to support them.<sup>6</sup> Working women often faced criticism if they had small children, because it was considered immoral to neglect the foremost feminine duty of child care. So, although modernization's demand for cheap labor was in conflict to some degree with the Angel of the House by requiring women's work outside the home, the domestic model was still considered the most important ideal of womanhood for the nation.

Mexico's laws in the 1800s reflected and enforced the national ideology of the Angel of the House. In many respects, married women maintained "the legal status of minors," as often a woman could take legal action only with the

6. Although it would seem that the death of a separated woman's husband could free her to remarry, I did not find any information on this particular scenario.

consent of her husband (Ramos Escandón 1987b, 147).<sup>7</sup> In the 1850s, married women (unlike minors), did, however, have the power to bequeath their property or take authority away from their husbands if it could be proved that the latter were mishandling their wives' money (Arrom 1985, 73). Women could use the recourse of ecclesiastic separation to distance themselves physically and legally in extreme cases, such as in instances of harsh physical abuse, forced prostitution, or the threat of contracting an incurable disease (such as leprosy) or if the man was a "pagan," but they could not remarry (206–8).<sup>8</sup> Note that, except in extreme cases, a man's infidelity was not a reason for separation.

Despite minor rights for female citizens, the Civil Code of 1870 legally enforced the tenet of wifely submission: in return for protection and economic support, the Code specified that a wife's obligation was to "obedecer a su marido así en lo doméstico como en la educación de los hijos y la administración de los bienes" (Civil Code of 1870 quoted in Ramos Escandón 1987b, 147) [obey her husband in domestic concerns as well as in their children's education and in the administration of property].

Women lost legal control over their property under Porfirio Díaz. The Napoleonic Civil Code of 1884 "deprived married women of any rights to administer or dispose of their personal property" and "married women . . . could not take part in civil suits, draw up any legal contract, or even defend themselves against husbands who squandered their money" (Macías 1982, 15). In response to the limitations on women's rights the Mexican law student Genaro García, who would later go on to become an important advocate for women's rights, presented his thesis "La desigualdad de la mujer" (The Inequality of Women) in 1891. García summed up women's legal situation by stating that the law maintained married women in the status of "imbecilitas sexus" (quoted in Macías 1982, 13) [an imbecile by reason of her sex].

The second half of the nineteenth century saw few advancements for single women. Widows had the greatest legal and financial freedom, as they had full control over their property and children upon the death of a

7. Arrom has specified the legal differences in some detail between the status of minors, slaves, and women under the law in Mexico through the middle of the 1800s (1985, 53–97). Although she argues that women were perceived as more deserving of rights than were slaves and children; that single women were released from their fathers' legal control, or *potestas* (93); and that women of all civil statuses were given more authority over their children in the 1850s, ultimately, married women were still subordinate under the law to their husbands in most cases. After the 1850s, however, under Porfirio Díaz's Napoleonic civil codes, women lost many of the rights that Arrom discusses, as I mention in the body of this chapter.

8. For detailed information on marriage and separation in the mid-nineteenth century in Mexico, see Arrom 1985, 206–58.

husband. (It is not surprising, then, that Barragán and Cabello, who were both forward-thinking writers in terms of women's personal liberties, were both widowed at a young age, while Roqué separated from her husband early on.) In the 1850s, single adult women were legally released from their fathers' authority and given control over children and, later, were granted rights similar to those of adult males in the Civil Code of 1884 (Macías 1982, 13). Despite these gains, economically and socially life without a male head of household must have been very difficult, given society's emphasis on marriage and chastity, combined with the financial burden of having to support oneself and perhaps a family on a woman's meager income. It would appear that under such a civil code, heiresses would also enjoy a high degree of personal autonomy, although it is likely that social pressure to marry would have been great (especially if the heiress could form part of a favorable family union to ensure the consolidation of wealth).

Virtue, for women, was an oppressive burden, and yet it was also a key to some small amount of authority in the general scheme of things. Moral goodness was one area in which women were generally perceived to excel over men; women could be more authoritative in spiritual concerns, charity, and sexual restraint. However, fixing inflexible roles for women within the angelic model, which focused on their reproductive capacity and sexual fidelity, was also a way of attempting to maintain patriarchal control, according to Carner: "El trememendo poder de su sexualidad y de su papel reproductivo debe ser controlado para conservar el orden social dentro de los parámetros fijados por la sociedad" (1987, 97) [The tremendous power of [women's] sexuality and their reproductive role had to be controlled in order to maintain the social order within the parameters set by society]. Ultimately, feminine virtue was a crutch that women could use to argue cases for social rights or stake a claim for separation, but when a woman's virtue was questioned, she was in danger or losing her rights (for example, women who "engaged in improper sexual activity were denied protection from sexual crimes" [Arrom 1985, 79]).

In addition to limited access to education, minimal legal rights, and restrictive policies vis-à-vis female virtue, clothing trends may have been a vehicle for keeping women from cultivating self-fulfilling activities. The Scottish travel writer and wife of a Spanish diplomat Fanny Erskine Inglis Calderón de la Barca claimed that Mexican women's feet were squeezed into shoes so small that they restricted walking and dancing; this was apt to keep women from becoming too adventurous (quoted in Tuñón Pablos 1999, 56). Another reference to feet advocates limiting their use: one of the women's "ten commandments" of being good Angels of the House was

“Do not study more with one’s feet than with one’s head” (59). (Of course the reference to studying likely implied studying female-appropriate subjects such as catechism or hygiene.) These references link desirability and obedience with immobility. The Mexican historian Carmen Ramos Escandón (1987b) speaks of women’s physical and ideological restrictions in terms of a “double corset”: the article of clothing pinched her waist and limited her movement and spontaneity, while the ideological corset enforced a strict morality, which entailed taking responsibility for the actions of others as well as for her own behavior (153). The social evidence of women’s enclosure to ensure virginity and limited access to the public sphere in the 1800s and early 1900s in Mexico make Barragán’s interesting novel and ambulatory heroine all the more intriguing, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

Mexican women’s unchaperoned travel was apparently so rare that there are only indirect references to this topic. It was considered unacceptable, a stain on a woman’s virtue (Carner 1987, 97–99). According to Carner, men had three ways of controlling their women’s sexual activity (thereby protecting their honor): “el encierro, el chaperon y la interiorización de las normas de conducta adecuadas” (97) [enclosure, chaperoning, and teaching women to internalize appropriate norms of conduct]. Proper women remained indoors or ventured out only with a respectable escort such as a parent or relative. The historian of gender in Latin America Nancy Van Deusen has found in the context of Lima that *recogimiento* (seclusion)

implicaba tanto una conducta controlada y modesta como el encierro dentro de una institución o dentro del hogar, y una actitud retraída y quieta. . . . El recogimiento implicaba un dominio de la sexualidad y la conducta femenina, lo cual se podía lograr por medio del encierro institucional o el aislamiento dentro del hogar. Por consiguiente, el término implica que las libertades sociales y los cuerpos de las mujeres debían ser controlados. (1999, 39)

[implied controlled conduct and modesty as much as it implied enclosure within an institution or the home and a submissive and quiet attitude. . . . This seclusion implied dominance over feminine sexuality and conduct, which could be achieved by way of institutional enclosure or isolation within the home. Consequently, the term implies that women’s social liberties and bodies must be controlled.]

Van Deusen expresses in terms of social policy the restrictive stance toward women that limited their mobility. The institutions to which she refers were at the time probably convents and *beaterios* (reform homes, run by nuns, for women temporarily separated from their husbands during ecclesiastical conjugal trials or reform for prostitution).<sup>9</sup>

The domestic sphere was women's purported natural domain, and their lives "normally excluded travel" (Tuñón Pablos 1999, 49). This was generally true, regardless of the political background of a woman's husband or father: "The common domain for nineteenth-century Mexican women was the home: among . . . federalists and centralists, Liberals and Conservatives, women devoted their efforts to maintaining peace and order in the private sphere, to keeping the world of reproduction safe" (47). This sentiment is echoed repeatedly in the 1909 treatises I will examine shortly. We can gain a better idea of women's level of mobility (or lack thereof) by looking at contemporary essays on their place in society. First I will present some of the subversive claims on the symbolic order, which may have sparked the impassioned reactionary defenses of the angelic standard that I will be analyzing.

### Early Feminist Projects and Foreign Women Travelers

Despite patriarchal culture's almost complete prohibition of women's participation in the public sphere, Porfirian progress needed its female citizens for the underpaid work of blue- and white-collar jobs in factories and businesses, and a few, as I mentioned, even entered the forbidden areas of law and medicine.<sup>10</sup> In the 1880s to the early 1900s, lower- and middle-class women entered the workforce by the thousands, thus becoming more aware of their role as earners and of the inequality between the sexes outside the home. It was from the ranks of this emerging sector of educated bourgeois women that early feminism arose in Mexico.

9. *Recogimiento* was also a term for houses that took in marginal women (Franco 1989, xvii).

10. Most ruling-class men, even progressive liberals, did not envision major changes in women's roles. Ignacio Ramón was a noteworthy exception; he was an early advocate of sexual equality who wrote in the 1860s. As was often the case (even with early female feminists), his vision still located women in the role of mothers, and he saw equal education as a way to ingrain the value of education into the minds of their children. Nonetheless, some of his ideas were radical for the times: he condemned women's objectification as "machines of pleasure" and a "positive piece of luxury furniture" and, most notably, advocated their becoming "equal to men in teaching posts, tribunals, at the rostrum and possibly even on the battlefields" (quoted in Tuñón Pablos 1999, 62). The idea of

Women's journals were an important outlet for early feminist concerns. Between 1870 and 1910 several important publications appeared. In 1870, Rita Cetina Gutiérrez published *La Siempreviva* (The Everlasting Flower), whose name connoted the tenacity of the movement in the face of patriarchal resistance, and in 1873 *Las Hijas de Anáhuac* (The Daughters of Anahuac) appeared, this periodical nationalistically named for the Anahuac Valley where Mexico City is located.<sup>11</sup> *Album de la Mujer: Periódico Redactado por Señoras* (The Women's Album: Newspaper Written by Ladies) circulated from 1883 to 1889 and was a venue through which women voiced the concerns of their sex. One pioneer of feminism was the poet Laureana Wright de Kleinhans (1846–1896), an early suffragist and advocate of equal rights for women. In the 1880s, Wright de Kleinhans founded the feminist publication *Violetas de Anáhuac* (Violets of Anahuac), in which she reported gains in women's rights in Wyoming, Arkansas, Kansas, and Mississippi (Alvarado 1991, 15).

These early attempts at a women's movement did not seek to change women's roles drastically, but did articulate demands for the right to secular education and greater social recognition. The writings and organizing efforts of the well-known British Positivist John Stuart Mill (the author of *Subjection of Women* [1869]) and pioneers of suffrage Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony “were not hidden from Mexican society” (Alvarado 1991, 11). They were likely role models that inspired Mexican women to take action for their own causes.

In the early 1900s, feminists in Mexico began to flesh out an agenda. The feminist journal *La Mujer Mexicana* (The Mexican Woman [1904–8]) was a major step for organizing bourgeois women to create an actual and symbolic community in which to speak about sexual inequality. The publication was started by three highly educated Mexican women: Dr. Columba Rivera (Mexico's second woman medical doctor), María Sandoval de Zarco (Mexico's first female civil lawyer), and the normal school teacher Dolores Correa Zapata. Although suffrage was still not on the list of rights

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women interacting with men as equals was unusual for the times, given their official subordination to men under the law and in education. Of the areas Ramón mentions, only primary school education was an exemplary field for women. (Primary school teachers, as many scholars have noted, often received official praise for their self-abnegation and dedication—that is, they performed an important, work-intensive, and motherly job, for little money, and thus ideologically fit within the Angel of the House model.) Genaro García, whom I mentioned, was another male Mexican thinker concerned with women's legal equality in the 1890s.

11. Translations for the names of journals in this section (with the exception of *Album de la Mujer*) are taken from Tuñón Pablos 1999, 80–81.

that women demanded, the following were concerns that the women contributors to the journal voiced passionately: the right to a single sexual standard (legal recourse for wives against unfaithful husbands), reformation of the 1887 Civil Code to grant married women more legal control over their property and the ability to sue and make contracts, higher wages for women workers, and more training for women to earn their own livings and share in Porfirian progress (Macías 1982, 14–15).

Although these early feminist desires did *not* include women's abandoning their traditional roles (they still wanted to be good wives and mothers), one contributor to the periodical *La Mujer Mexicana* stated in 1904 that the idealization of bourgeois and elite women as selfless, dutiful, and good was not enough; they needed to be able to earn more income to support themselves without the help of a man, if necessary (Esther Huidobro de Azua quoted in Macías 1982, 14). Thus it is during this era that women were recognizing that the praise and idealization that ruling-class men bestowed upon them for self-abnegation was a substitute for paying them living wages, granting them civil rights, and enfranchising them into the public sphere. Women were getting wise to the detrimental myth of the “eterno femenino” (the eternal feminine), to employ a phrase that the twentieth-century Mexican feminist writer Rosario Castellanos would later use in her play of the same name to describe the phenomenon that, ideologically, put women on a symbolic pedestal as a substitute for granting them financial, legal, and civil opportunities equal to those of men.

New models for womanhood came from at home and abroad. An important difference in the landscape of Porfirian Mexico in comparison with previous decades of the nineteenth century was the increased presence of foreign, independent, and ambulatory women. The presence of the wives and daughters of foreign investors and diplomats in Mexico altered the symbolic order in ways that may have affected how Mexican women viewed womanhood.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that Barragán was aware of the rise in foreign travel because in *La hija del bandido* the narrator makes specific reference to the increase in the attendance of foreigners at festivals. Several of these women, including Frances Erskine Inglis Calderón de la Barca, Helen Sanborn, and Fanny Chambers Gooch, left written testimony of their experiences in Mexico. Their writings give us valuable insight into their own

12. According to June Hahner's research, Mexico and Brazil were the most frequented destinations for European and North American travel in Latin America in the later part of the nineteenth century.

experiences as women and into the lives of Mexican women (perspectives that male travel writers such as Alexander von Humboldt could not offer).<sup>13</sup> These women wrote about courtship rituals, convent life, gender roles, housekeeping, servants, and dress, as well as politics and local customs.

At the same time that foreign women were insisting on touring Mexican cities and going to the markets unchaperoned and then writing about the confinement of Mexican women, Barragán was dreaming up her own independent heroine. The scholar of travel writing and English literature Indira Ghose notes that travel writing “serves to circulate stereotypes and images of the other and actively participates in the production of knowledge and the dissemination of the effects of power,” and in terms of its effect on the other, it “serves as a mirror held up to the self” (1998, 2). Thus, by the 1880s, when Barragán was imagining an active female adventurer for her novel, a small percentage of Mexico’s learned female elite were imagining their own alternative roles for their sex (possibly galvanized in part by the presence of more independent foreign women). This early feminist activity did not go unnoticed; masculinist contestations with the intention of stagnating these early surges of feminism and maintaining traditional roles were well under way.

### Ecclesiastic Reactions Against Feminism: The Catholic Discourse of Moreno and Elizalde

The publication *La mujer* (Woman [1909]) carries the seal of the secretariat of the archbishop of Mexico City, which meant that vast numbers of Mexican women loyal to the Catholic Church would have placed their trust in its contents. This document is relevant to the study at hand because it brings into stark relief that dominant discourses of so-called modernity, whether Positivist and secular or church approved, vehemently upheld the Angel of the House just as passionately as they admonished women for attempting to develop their intellects. The document appears to be epistolary correspondence between

13. In 1843 the Scottish wife of a diplomat, Erskine Inglis Calderón de la Barca, published a collection of her writings, titled *Life in Mexico*, some of which appeared in a Mexico City newspaper the same year. From the United States, the Wellesley graduate Sanborn traveled extensively in Mexico and Central America in the 1880s, and later helped found the Instituto Internacional language school in Madrid. Sanborn published *A Winter in Central America* in 1884. Her compatriot Chambers Gooch Iglehart lived in Mexico intermittently from 1880 to 1887 and authored *Face to Face with the Mexicans*, published in 1887, the same year as Barragán’s novel.

the Mexican poet and intellectual Antonio de P. Moreno (who writes in a spiritual, Romantic style) and his young protégé Domingo Elizalde.<sup>14</sup> The collection of letters, which are not individually dated, seems rather to be a didactic manual written in epistolary form, although I was not able to determine whether the letters were authentic or invented.

In the epistolary dialogue, Moreno defends women in response to Elizalde's critiques of them. The point of the exchange is that the delicate sex is very easily influenced by men or God toward good, but is also extremely vulnerable to evil (Cepeda 1909, vii). Women's easily impressionable nature must be taken seriously, since, Moreno asserts, they exert a profound influence on society as mothers. Thus men bear the burden of defining models for them as "vírgenes . . . esposas . . . madres" (Cepeda 1909, viii) [virgins . . . wives . . . mothers]. According to Cepeda, a contemporary who wrote the introduction to *La mujer*, Moreno's letters are an "estudio concienzudo acerca de la mujer y de su misión en la tierra" (v) [conscientious study about woman and her mission on earth]. His statement indicates that the publication expressed common beliefs about female citizens and their social responsibilities in the early 1900s.

Elizalde takes, or at least initially pretends to take, a Positivist outlook toward women (his message later becomes heavily religious). He claims to "juzgarle desde un punto de vista real, positivo y desapasionado" (8) [judge them from a real, objective, and dispassionate perspective]. He will throw open the doors of women's domain, the home, and, he exclaims, "á la luz de una razón fría y reposada y de una filosofía inflexible y severa, busquemos la causa de los males que se han apoderado del sér débil" (10) [by the light of cold and calm reason and of a severe and inflexible philosophy, let us search for the causes of the evils that have overcome the weaker sex]. The severe, cold, inflexible philosophy to which Elizalde refers seems to be Positivism; the letters appear to be staged to criticize the anticlerical policies of the Positivists by presenting them as purely rational, unfeeling intellectuals. It is not surprising that the published letters would not favor a Positivist stance,

14. The following is an example of the flowery, metaphoric, poetic style that characterizes Moreno's discourse: "Esto ya es un buen principio, y casi estoy por creer que, al llegar al término de nuestra discusión, estaremos enteramente acordes en nuestro modo de pensar, como lo estuvimos antes de que tu alma impresionable apurara las primeras gotas de hiel en que mojaste tu pluma para escribirme la carta que tanta pena me causó" (13) [This is already a good beginning, and I am almost ready to believe that, upon arriving at the end of our discussion, our modes of thinking will be in agreement entirely, as it was before your impressionable soul consumed the first drops of bile, into which you dipped your pen in order to write me the letter that caused me so much pain].

since Porfirian *científicos* generally believed that religion had little or no place in social policy.

Elizalde claims that one of the gravest mistakes women make is to neglect their moral education and that of their daughters, which entails avoiding flirtatiousness and vanity and instead cultivating modesty, humility, and self-abnegation (12). Moreno, in turn, agrees and only mentions academic education to question its importance relative to the indispensable teachings of “religion, morality, and duty.” Elizalde adds that the role of women’s education is “in a word, to take care of the heart, almost exclusively” (28, 30). Elizalde makes the distinction between *educación* (education, upbringing) and *instruir* (to instruct), in which the former deals with the heart and the latter deals only with the brain, the cultivation of the “intellectual faculties” (30). Needless to say, women were to be educated in matters of the heart rather than instructed intellectually; he scorns parents who teach their daughters math and science and neglect religion (31). Elizalde, in the end, champions religion as the savior of men and women, and as the panacea of society.

According to Elizalde, evil influences on women are fiction, journalism, Protestantism, and any other outside “theories.” He likens the sources of entertainment and information to “un reptil que, astuto y arrastrándose, acecha á su víctima, ha penetrado el descreimiento en el hogar bajo la forma de la novela y del periódico, atacando desde luego el pudor de la mujer, lanzando después el soplo de su hálito sobre la llama de la fe, y queriendo, en fin, arrancarle el grandioso poder que le da la religión” (46) [a reptile that, astute and slithering, spies on its victim, and has infiltrated disbelief into the home by way of the novel and the newspaper, suddenly attacking women’s chastity, then extinguishing with its breath the flame of faith, and seeking, finally, to wrench away the grandiose power that religion bestows upon them]. His words are in accordance with hegemonic ideology, which purported that women were not socially impotent, but rather held power in domestic, moral, and religious matters. This power only functioned within the angelic model; straying from it (by self-indulgently educating oneself with periodicals and novels, for example, as Elizalde notes) strips away the fragile legitimacy women could claim in society.

Besides including newspapers and novels, Elizalde expands the category of threats to woman’s morality to a vast one: outside ideas and carriers of faiths other than Catholicism were also “slithering reptiles” waiting to dampen women’s faith. He explicitly makes reference to the French Revolution (perhaps for women’s prominent and notably nondomestic role in

it) and the reforms, taken up by the United States, that had “demoralized” these societies (70). He specifically mentions “*Volterianismo*, . . . *Protestantismo*, *Racionalismo*, etc.” as dangerous influences (71). The negative references to rationalism and the French deist *philosophe* and writer Voltaire (real name François-Marie Arouet [1694–1778]) are likely reactions against the political era in which Moreno writes, which is as dominated by science and Enlightenment ideals of reason as it is skeptical of religion.

These unwholesome philosophies, then, could “pervertir á la mujer por medio de falsas religiones, de teorías seductororas y de libertades que le concedían vivir á sus anchas, satisfacer sus deseos y despreciar todo lo que la ennoblece” (55) [pervert woman by means of false religions, seductive theories, and liberties that would allow her to live large, satisfy her desires, and reject all that ennoble her]. In this passage, development of one’s identity and self-indulgence through worldly knowledge is explicitly adverse to the feminine ideal. This message is repeated in a section titled “Virtue in the Home,” in which Moreno notes that errors women can make are often caused by “demoralization and free thought” and “individual liberty,” which open the door to “worldly seductions” (150). The book Moreno recommends for female citizens is, in sum, the Roman Catholic Bible (14), although general reading on the improvement of one’s domestic skills and other morally edifying and church-approved reading was likely acceptable.

It is thus the duty of men and God to keep women from being led astray: “la mujer, más que él, necesita de guía para emprender el áspero camino que la conduce al hogar, término natural y preciso de sus aspiraciones, á despecho de todas las teorías que se inventen en contrario para deslumbrar á la que debe ser astro” (5) [woman, more than man, needs a guide to set forth on the harsh road that directs her to the home, the natural and precise goal of her aspirations, despite all the theories that are invented to the contrary, in order to confuse she who is meant to be a leading light ]. The final tone is that of a protective shepherd who must look over the flock of women who are to be the gentle caretakers of Mexico’s children.

### Positivist Antifeminist Rhetoric: Redefining Progress for Women

Although the following antifeminist discourse has a very different tone and style from *La mujer’s* religious rhetoric, the fundamental symbolic role that it defines for women in society is the same: that women’s strengths are

self-abnegation, morality, and nurturing others; that they are best at being wives and mothers; and that any foreign ideology that contradicts this is dangerous. The principal differences in the following essay I will examine are that the rhetoric is scientific, women's strengths and weaknesses are biologically defined, and contradictory ideology (such as feminism), in line with Positivist rhetoric, is not evil poison to the soul, but rather "unhealthy" and "unnatural," given women's *organic* constitution. It is also communicated within the nationalist rhetoric of the *científicos*, rather than in a religious tone and context.

*El siglo xx ante el feminismo* (The Twentieth Century in the Face of Feminism) is a compilation of articles by the Mexican Positivist thinker Horacio Barreda (1863–1914) from 1909. Published in the respected and influential *Revista Positiva* (Positivist Journal), the articles use "scientific" logic to disprove the viability of feminism as a social theory. That is, the articles consider what Barreda conceives as women's biological and psychological makeup (drawing on anthropological material of the Aztec and Spanish family structures, among other "facts" of science and human nature), and then determines social factors that act upon them to influence their behavior (Barreda 1991, 124–26).

Barreda's study follows closely the tenets of Positivist womanhood that the originator of Positivism, Auguste Comte (France 1798–1857), expresses in *Système de politique positive* (*System of Positive Polity*, 1851–54) in the section titled "The Feminine Influence of Positivism."<sup>15</sup> Comte, like Barreda, posits ideal republican women as fundamentally maternal and loving and champions their superiority in domestic, moral, and spiritual matters, while stressing their essential intellectual inferiority (Landes 1988, 170–89).

The result of Barreda's applying Positivist philosophy to women is that his essays support roughly the same oppressive and traditional roles for women as they previously had in Hispanic and European culture, but his writings are packaged in the Positivist prose that is specifically in dialogue with the new threat of feminism. Whereas earlier writings about women's place in society tended to romantically extol the spiritual and virtuous beauty of women's place with their children by the hearth, Barreda's sentences, each often occupying all of ten lines in a standard eight-inch page, are a compilation of clauses into logical sequences, replete with scientific-sounding vocabulary. This style lends authority to the words, even though Barreda

15. For an analysis of Comte's Positivist view of women, see Landes 1988, 173–200.

lacks hard evidence, namely, statistics from any sort of organized scientific experiment or study.

Feminism, in the context of Barreda's articles, was a potential danger to the existing socioeconomic structures (Alvarado 1991, 9). Thus Barreda's study is an effort to give a Positivist examination of women's roles with the goal of maintaining their traditional domestic placement and subservient position to men; his ideas were an expression of the general male consensus of the time (9). Tuñón Pablos notes that "discourse on women focused on two basic aspects of their supposed nature: their biology and their affective temperament" and indeed these are the bases of Barreda's arguments (1999, 74).

Looking at Barreda's rhetorical approach, it is interesting to note that he puts in much effort to appear completely objective by avoiding an early dismissal of feminism. Barreda makes a point of seeming to seriously consider feminism as a viable option for women:

La importancia del feminismo en México la examinaremos de preferencia, desde el punto de vista teórico; pero antes se hace indispensable tratar la cuestión en abstracto, con el fin de averiguar cuál es el valor real de la solución feminista, examinando en relación con las conclusiones de la biología y con los principios fundamentales de la sociología positivista; esto es . . . a las condiciones *estáticas* o de existencia social. (38)

[We will examine the importance of feminism, preferably from a theoretical perspective; but first it is indispensable to approach the question in the abstract, with the goal of determining the real value of the feminist solution, examining it in relation with biological conclusions and with the fundamental principles of Positivist sociology; that is . . . with the *static* conditions or those of social existence.]

It is not a surprise that Barreda's theoretical consideration of feminism will arrive at the conclusion that women's best route, for them and for the nation, is to serve the development of society as well-mannered and cultivated keepers of the home; feminism is not the solution to anything, but rather an obstacle to women's immutable natural condition. What is noteworthy is that feminism, this imported idea that bolstered Mexican

bourgeois women's frustration with Porfirian sexual oppression in the midst of progress, is enough of a threat to Barreda (and, we may assume, to the *científicos*) to merit a lengthy, detailed analysis in one of Mexico's most prestigious journals of that era. From this fact, and from early feminist efforts in Mexico that I have discussed, it seems very likely that a number of Mexican women were familiar with foreign women's freedoms and struggles for equality and were articulating their own feminist agendas.

It is useful to look at Barreda's definitions of words, such as *progreso*, *libertad*, and *igualdad* (progress, liberty, and equality), that were commonly used in Positivist rhetoric, as they were applied to women. The text I analyze in this section is titled "Planteo positivo del problema social de la mujer" (A Positivist Consideration of the Social Problem of Woman). First, Barreda redefines *progress* as *development*, which implies advancement within an existing model (that is, perfecting women's traditional roles). The idea seems to be that development is good for women because it does not drastically change their current status, while progress implies evolution and moving beyond one's current situation—which seems to be too extreme a transformation for women. After a long sequence of sentences filled with vocabulary taken from the social and natural sciences to speak about this particular interpretation of progress, Barreda concludes that

el progreso individual no podrá consistir jamás en alterar o invertir el orden fundamental de desarrollo, pero ni aun siquiera en trastornarlo, salvando algunos de sus eslabones importantes. De todo esto resulta, que el progreso en su marcha sería impotente para desarrollar bruscamente en el niño, facultades que fueran propias del hombre maduro. (43–44)

[individual progress will never be able to consist in altering or inverting the fundamental order of development, or even disturbing it, except some of its important links. The outcome of all this is that progress, in its course, would be impotent to develop, all at once, in children, faculties typical of a mature adult.]

The message is the following: women, like infants, may not budge from their traditional roles and must remain obedient, regardless of how much society advances in terms of wealth and opportunity. Barreda compares women to children in other sections as well as in this one, where he likens the natural

growth of a child with the “natural” social growth of women; just as radical progress applied to children would be pushing the natural pace of development, so it is for women. He makes it clear that progress, for women, does not mean altering their roles as domestic wives and mothers.

The next word Barreda defines for us is *libertad*. He explains that although it seems to suggest the meaning “apartar todos aquellos obstáculos que pudieran impedirnos el ejercicio de nuestra actividad en tal o cual sentido” (46) [to do away with all those obstacles that could impede the accomplishment of our activity in one sense or another]—that is, freedom is mistakenly interpreted to mean fulfilling “selfish” desires as individuals—this is not the case in the context of social laws. He corrects the misconception by explaining that “la libertad verdadera a que debe aspirar el hombre y la mujer digna, habrá de consistir en el libre ejercicio de las facultades superiores que sean características de uno y otro sexo” (49) [the true liberty to which men and worthy women should aspire should consist of the free exercise of the different mental faculties that are characteristic of each sex]. *True* freedom, for Barreda (and, we may assume, the architects of progress in Mexico), is liberty to act within a model dictated by the state. Before moving on to what these sexually particular characteristics are, so that we may see in what ways women are “free,” it is important to note that the same Positivist ideas that Barreda applies to women in this essay were applied to the (largely indigenous) working classes in order to dissuade them from attempting to gain power that was destined for the bourgeoisie and elite.

In the following section, “La organización física, intelectual y moral que es característica de la mujer” (The Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Makeup that Characterizes Women), we learn that these female mental qualities are not actually mental qualities at all, but rather, emotional faculties, because “en la mujer . . . predomina la vida afectiva sobre la intelectual” (61) [in women . . . affective dominates over intellectual life]. The sections of Barreda’s essay that follow, and that are quoted from in the Introduction of the present study, are worth citing at length, because it is here that he specifies women’s inherent intellectual limitations, according to “scientific” Positivist thinking:

Ahora bien, la marcada repugnancia que inspira a la mujer toda observación abstracta, profunda y prolongada, a causa de la invencible 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 objetos que sus semejanzas. (59)

[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, allows them a more sustained activity; this indicates a greater cerebral aptitude for this kind of observations. . . . The abstract and analytical faculties' meager energy and vigor cause feminine intelligence to better appreciate the differences between objects, rather than their similarities.]

Barreda goes on to elaborate the differences between female and male intelligence, which basically amount to men's excelling at coming to universal conclusions or generalizations and synthesizing information, while women excel at "rapid" concrete observation; at focusing on details; and at negative comparisons, or how one thing differs from another (60). So, based on Barreda's "biological" assessment, abstract or analytical intellectual functions such as interpreting or modifying laws, critical thinking, and decision making would be masculine intellectual duties, while the thought process for picking out items for the house, choosing between fabrics for the sofa or clothing, and distinguishing right from wrong on a superficial level (as long as it did not entail prolonged or profound contemplation) are mental tasks appropriate to the female brain. From our current perspective, it is clear that Barreda was making a strong case by using loaded rhetoric and pseudoscientific facts in order to convince women and men that the former were incapable of holding any kind of power beyond the execution of very mundane domestic duties.

The section concludes by summarizing all of women's strengths and weaknesses, which biologically determine their static place in society, regardless of how much society itself may advance:

Así, la naturaleza física del sexo femenino, su debilidad muscular, su viva sensibilidad, la movilidad de su imaginación, la rápida sucesión

de sus sensaciones, sus tendencias a la observación minuciosa de detalle, la preponderancia de sus sentimientos de amor, de adhesión, de bondad, de abnegación y sacrificio, son atributos que se hallan en consonancia con los rasgos característicos que presenta el carácter de la mujer.

Ni el valor, ni la firmeza ni la verdadera energía, son cualidades que puedan distinguir a la mujer; y en ella lo que se nota es la timidez, la indecisión, la variabilidad y la debilidad en sus actos. . . . Su admirable aptitud espontánea para poder subordinar el egoísmo al altruismo, la sociabilidad a la personalidad, la eleva muy por encima del [hombre]. La mujer será siempre, biológicamente considerada, *el tipo moral* de la especie humana. . . . En cambio, la inferioridad de su inteligencia y de su carácter la colocará por necesidad, en una posición subalterna respecto del sexo masculino. (61)

[So, the physical nature of the feminine sex, her muscular weakness, her heightened sensitivity, the mobility of her imagination, the rapid succession of her sensations, her tendencies toward the observation of minute detail, the preponderance of her feelings of love and bonding, of goodness, of abnegation and sacrifice, are attributes that one finds in harmony with the characteristic traits that woman's character presents.

Neither valor, nor strength, nor real energy are qualities that can be distinguished in woman; and in her what one notes is timidity, indecision, fickleness, and weakness in her acts. . . . Her admirable spontaneous ability to be able to subordinate egotism to altruism, the sociability of her personality, elevate her far above men. Woman will always be, biologically speaking, *the moral type* of the human species. . . . On the other hand, the inferiority of her intelligence and her character will necessarily place her in a subaltern position with respect to the masculine sex.]

In Barreda's estimation of women's place in society, as in Comte's, there is no social learning that can liberate them in an age of progress in which such emphasis is placed on society's ability to move forward into international markets, and advance into an industrial stage.

*Liberty*, for the weaker sex, then, means the freedom to cultivate and participate in *all activities that pertain to an Angel of the House*, and remain

subordinate to men in all other arenas, on the basis of their physical constitutions. Women, in addition, are granted the *freedom* to maintain their weak physical constitutions in a “safe” environment by remaining at home and fulfilling their natural function: bearing and raising children.

The section on defining *equality* in a Positivist context is fairly short, as it basically builds upon the base that Barreda has already established in the previous sections: that individuals are biologically diverse and have differing weak and strong points, and therefore the idea of equality cannot realistically be applied in the concrete world, outside theory. He admits that the slogans of liberty and equality worked well for revolutionary purposes, but that with the development of culture and society, “natural” differences between individuals became apparent. Equality is thus not only unfeasible but “opresiva” (oppressive), because it would not be fair to put the same demands on men, women, children, and the developmentally disabled, as all have very “different” levels of intelligence and development (50–51):

Salvo el conjunto de garantías individuales que la legislación debe asegurar por igual a los diversos miembros de una sociedad cualquiera, es evidente, que no naciendo iguales los hombres, *orgánicamente* considerados, y produciendo la libre actividad de cada uno de ellos, aptitudes, capacidades y resultados muy diversos, las posiciones, prerrogativas y consideraciones sociales, tienen que ser por necesidad también desiguales. (51)

[With the exception of the set of individual rights that legislation must provide equally to all the diverse members of a given society, it is evident that men not being born equal, *organically* speaking, and given that the free activity of each one of them produces very diverse aptitudes, capacities, and results, the social positions, prerogatives, and considerations have to be, necessarily, also unequal.]

Barreda repeatedly makes unambiguous essentialist claims that women are intellectually and physically inferior to men. From the passage above we can see that Positivist society subordinates certain men, whom we may assume to be men of the lower classes and of non-white races, as well as women.

Barreda abandons his high scholarly prose at the end of his essay to emphatically address feminism's threat to society. He concludes with this

vehement admonition, which I present in an abbreviated version of the original diatribe, nineteen lines long:

Si vuestras teorías ¡oh feministas! alcanzasen el triunfo social que ambicionáis, si la mujer llegase a ser virilizada en el grado que pretendéis . . . vuestra obra será el baldón de la civilización, podéis estar seguros de ello, y la posteridad os pediría severas cuentas de semejante labor revolucionaria. . . . Al contemplar el hogar desierto y frío . . . os gritarían con voz llena de dolor e indignación: ¡feministas! ¡feministas! ¿qué habéis hecho de la mujer? (151)

[If your theories, oh feminists! achieve the social triumph you seek, if women become masculinized to the extent that you wish . . . your work will be the disgrace of civilization, you may be sure of it, and posterity will have much to reproach you for such revolutionary labor. . . . Upon contemplating the cold and deserted hearth, they will scream to you with voices filled with indignation: Feminists! Feminists! What have you done to women?]

Barreda's final rhetoric rings of that of the conservative Mexican thinker Ignacio Gamboa, who published the book-length essay *La mujer moderna* (The Modern Woman [1904]), in which he condemned feminism, separation of spouses, and lesbianism for causing the prospective downfall of womanhood and the end of reproduction (Macías 1982, 16). Masculinist rhetoric of the period, whether hailing from the conservative sector, the Catholic Church, or those in favor of Positivist progress, generally prescribed strictly domestic roles for women, despite their increasing presence in the workforce. Feminism, "outside theories," and, we may assume, any challenges to the angelic model were adamantly opposed in hegemonic conceptualizations of female identity. Women were ideologically tied to the home and systematically denied public voice.

While in real life this oppressive social propaganda was the code by which women were expected to lead their lives, in Barragán's fiction readers were encouraged to think beyond this mold by reading about a female character who single-handedly took control of and reversed her father's criminal affairs and traveled the countryside independently. In the following chapter, I will further discuss how Barragán's protagonist was a symbolic contestation to this real-life silencing and seclusion.