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## Rewriting Womanhood

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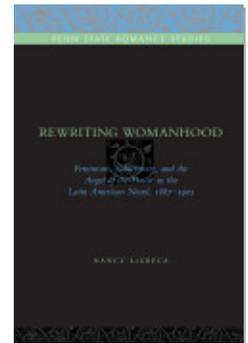
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WOMEN IN PERU:  
NATIONAL AND PRIVATE STRUGGLES FOR INDEPENDENCE

IF ONE WERE TO LOOK at a graph charting women's participation in public life in Peru through the nineteenth century, it would consist of a peak in activity in the first two decades, followed by a sharp decline in the new republic at midcentury, and then a gradual rise through the 1870s and 1880s, when women began seeking education reform and publishing their own essays, fiction, poetry, and journal articles.

As in the case of Mexico, Peru's wars of independence with Spain (1817–1825) brought social disruption that allowed women a chance to break free from their limited social roles and experience a broader range of activities and personal autonomy than in peacetime. Women's participation in the history of Spanish America became somewhat accepted and even necessary during the struggle for independence. As the historian Renán Jaramillo Flores puts it, this cause finally gave women the chance to leave their roles as “decorative elements” in the household and enter the symbolic order as agents in society and politics (1977, 21).

Although this study focuses on historical and fictional women of the bourgeoisie (as these are the women Cabello represents in *Blanca Sol*, which we will discuss in the following chapter), the symbolic reconstruction of womanhood during the independence period happened at all social levels. A well-known example is found in the pre-independence rebellion initiated by the Incan leader Tupac Amaru and his wife, Micaela Bastidas, in 1777. Bastidas participated in the rebellion in military, political, and administrative capacities. Her intelligence, dedication, and ruthlessness in battle inspired an anonymous author in the 1796 chronicles written by the royalist functionary Melchor de Paz to proclaim of Micaela that “dicha Cacica es de un genio más intrépido y sangriento que el marido” (Paz quoted in Guardia 1985, 42) [the woman Indian chief they spoke of is of a bloodier and more intrepid nature than that of her husband].

The Peruvian women whose participation is most often mentioned in historical accounts are the indigenous *campesinas*, called *rabonas*, who, as

camp followers, were the most visible women agents in the war effort. The *rabonas* traveled with their husbands and lovers from battle to battle gathering food, cooking, rationing water, managing supplies, and participating in direct combat when necessary. These women were so important to the soldiers that when there was talk of excluding them from the camps, the soldiers protested because they feared they would suffer if the women's tasks were left to the military. As virtual parts of the army, *rabonas* were not spared the consequences when the pro-independence forces were defeated in battle; they were the victims of rape, murder, and imprisonment. Historical accounts praise them for their heartiness and bravery.

It is perhaps because of the *rabonas*' dramatic role on the battlefield that historians favor their inclusion in twentieth-century historical accounts of independence, while the roles of women of the bourgeoisie seem to have been largely overlooked.

### Bourgeois Women's Agency in the Independence Era

The educator and historian Elvira García y García's 1924 study is one of the few sources dedicated to women's history in Lima (the bustling city center and setting for *Blanca Sol*). Her work shows that women of Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera's social class were a vital part of the independence movement in Lima, as was true throughout Spanish America. The desire for power by Lima's upper crust and growing bourgeoisie drove the fight against the Spaniards, so it was often within these rising-class households that much of the conspiring took place and women were actively included (Jaramillo Flores 1977, 22). Although Jaramillo Flores provides few examples from Lima in particular, he claims that in general Latin American women were involved in activities of the pro-independence leaders as hosts for their meetings and that they also had a role in decision making (22). He mentions that some women in Buenos Aires took part in the distribution and purchase of arms and that ladies of means sold their jewels and valuables to contribute to the constant costs associated with the war effort.

Rosita Campuzano, Jaramillo reveals, was a wealthy *limeña* of the elite who contributed financially and politically. It is possible that the historian mentions her because of the racy tidbit of rumors of her romantic involvement with Argentine freedom fighter General José de San Martín (28). While her amorous liaison may have made her seem unique to this

particular historian, her participation in the revolution was not uncommon. In the name of independence, women in Lima performed jobs that they would not have dreamed of under the strict social restrictions of the colonial period: they acted as spies, messengers, financial contributors, hosts for pro-independence affairs, and writers of propaganda.

García y García's history offers the most detailed catalog of the activities of *criolla* women (women born in Peru of Spanish lineage) in Lima during independence. The study, despite being written in a Romantic style in which all women are repeatedly praised for their "unparalleled bravery" and "supreme dedication," is nonetheless valuable for its extensive listing of the names of individuals and the specific tasks they performed during independence.<sup>1</sup> García y García's main sources are the official records of the Peruvian Ladies' Society (Sociedad Peruana de Damas), an organization created by San Martín in 1821 to honor women's wartime assistance. The study gives short descriptions of about 50 of these women and identifies 136.

García y García's research on the Sociedad Peruana de Damas archives reveals that women from Cabello's social class left the domestic sphere and their responsibilities to children and hearth to take part in worldly activities that were normally strictly taboo for women: war and politics. For example, two sisters named Juana and Candelaria García donated all their wealth to help the pro-independence forces, carried messages from pro-independence prisoners to their troops, and informed troops of the whereabouts of the Spanish. Both were caught by royalist forces, bravely withstood torture without revealing any information, and were finally released when the Spaniards departed Lima. Other women who were honored for their participation were Josefa Carrillo, the marquise of Castellón; Rosa Merino, a famous vocalist who delivered the first public performance of the national anthem at the postindependence victory gala; and Angélica Zevallos, who provided the army with weapons. Petronila Ferreyros is mentioned for serving as messenger and also for writing the pro-independence propaganda that

1. An interesting side note to this history of women is that its author, the well-known educator and director of el Liceo Fanning (a school in Lima) Elvira García y García (1862–1951), did not agree with Cabello's untraditional views on girls' education. Upon hearing the novelist's criticism of religion and the clergy and her suggestion that girls learn about their bodies, García y García responds that "en su colegio se respeta mucho la religión, que no se tomó examen de fisiología sino de zoología" (in her school religion is well respected and physiological exams are not given, but rather those on zoology [quoted in Glave 1999, 103]). This may explain the more traditional, romanticized, and, by extension, Angel of the House–style prose used to talk about historical women here.

was distributed throughout the country. Although partaking in war-related activities was less comfortable at times than tending the home, these women were engaging in a struggle for power on a large scale, likely for the first time in their lives.

This era of increased and diversified agency necessarily altered women's day-to-day activities. Social roles were more fluid than they had been under colonial rule. For example, Ferreyros, a woman of means, served in the hospitals "en el mismo rol que las sirvientas" (García y García 1924, 211) [in the same role as the servants]. Previously sheltered women were leading more varied lives with more mobility. Freedom fighters needed nurses, messengers, and others helpers, and this gave women the opportunity to transgress social norms (for example, by traveling freely without a chaperone), thereby gaining a broader understanding of the world outside the family and hearth. Women embarking on these adventures were sure to have viewed themselves and their contributions to society in a new light. Wartime experiences likely made them cognizant of their ability to engage in society and politics; they were aware that their intervention contributed to a grand cause. It is likely that, upon interacting with women and men of various social backgrounds united in civic duty, these women discovered facets of themselves they never knew existed and were able to develop a sense of self with more complexity than women whose existences did not extend beyond the usual domestic concerns.

This newfound individuality had its consequences for the angelic standard, by which women were expected to forgo their own desires for those of male heads of the household. For example, in Colombia a woman named Genoveva Ricaurte went against the wishes of her husband, a royalist Spaniard, by aiding her fellow freedom fighters who had been taken prisoner (Jaramillo Flores 1977, 28). Similarly, the well-known Manuela Sáenz of Ecuador, daughter of a wealthy and powerful Spaniard, abandoned her husband and privileged position to become independence leader Simón Bolívar's lover for seven years, traveling with him and advising him as he led battles across Spanish America. This is perhaps the first time in the history of *criolla* women's history in Latin America that larger numbers of women were publicly actualizing their own desires and beliefs, against those of their parents and spouses.

From a gender-conservative pro-independence perspective, women's participation in independence was a double-edged sword: it was necessary for success and also represented a threat to the ruling class's hold on power.

If women were taking on responsibilities outside the home and were needed beyond the domestic sphere, they were gaining power in these new realms that, under normal circumstances, were exclusively occupied by men.

The self-conscious wording of García y García's biography of Brígida Silva de Ochoa, honored for her services in 1822, seems to reveal this fear of women's venturing into the political realm. Silva was a bourgeois woman noted for helping her two freedom-fighter brothers, Remigio Silva, a colonel in the armed forces, and Mateo Silva, a lawyer. Reflecting what must have been the opinion of the era, García y García first carefully praises Silva's role as wife and mother of *seven children* (1924, 211). Only after this emphasis on "la augusta misión de madre de familia" (her august mission as mother) does the historian introduce her role in the independence process. García y García then takes a gendered perspective in her praise of Silva: "Doña Brígida Silva se reveló siempre como la mujer toda corazón, que no se convierte en ningún marimacho, ser híbrido, que carece de las delicadezas propias de la mujer" (212) [Doña Brígida Silva always behaved as a woman full of heart, who never turned into a butch [*marimacha*], a hybrid being who lacks the delicacy common to women]. The historian's emphasizing Silva's motherhood and femininity, while defensively reviling the notion of any contamination of this femininity, reveals her desire to counter women's agency with elements of the Angel of the House, symbolically angling women back into that role. Although written in 1924, this account reveals the element of discomfort a traditional ruling-class person likely felt toward women's level of freedom in wartime Peru. It also demonstrates the slow pace at which expectations for women have changed.

After independence, the fate of many women of the privileged class who had lent their services to the war was poverty: they had donated much or all of their property and the new republic did not offer compensation for their contributions. Some were taken prisoner by the Spaniards and even tortured or killed; many were widowed. Their overall condition would worsen when the stability of colonial rule gave way to chaos and economic decline. For those who survived, the level and scope of their activities returned to the domestic sphere. Rather than acting upon their high-minded beliefs for a lasting cause, they likely went back to preparing meals that would simply disappear and have to be prepared again the next day. While their war efforts and suffering must have brought them some glory, caring for children was merely the expected minimum. Women who had experienced some thrill of democratic participation and power were now to serve as models of morality and self-sacrifice. That is, they were now the mothers of the new nation.

## Republicanism and the Tightening of the Moral Noose: The Mid-1800s

After the South American freedom fighter Simón Bolívar's permanent departure in August 1826, Peru experienced two decades of political instability. Between 1826 and 1845, less than twenty years, the new nation suffered the inconsistencies in policy and rule of thirty different chief executives, the majority of them *caudillos* (military strongmen). Debate and strife over the independence of Bolivia added to the general turmoil, under which social reform and rebuilding after the battles of independence were impossible. The once prosperous colonial city of Lima was in a state of disrepair and the previously thriving mining economy was stagnant.

During this postindependence period, there appeared to be a campaign to limit women's rights and freedoms. It is possible that keeping women at home in their traditional role was one way for the ruling class to add an element of control over the political and social turbulence. Lima's growing population and the increase in the numbers of urban masses and rural workers also motivated policies to restrict women's activities (Hunefeldt 2000, 149). While bourgeois *limeñas* did not experience the mobility that comes with entering the market economy in the capacity of vendors or artisans, as the historian of women's culture of the Andean region Christine Hunefeldt points out, they had, as we have seen, enjoyed increased freedom and participation during the independence period. The experience of leaving the domestic sphere, coupled with the efforts of liberal politicians to implement education for girls, was sure to have provoked counter-reactions aimed at keeping women from gaining power in the emerging nation. Unofficial regulation of women's activities came in the form of greater emphasis on the Angel of the House standard. As I discussed in the Introduction of this study, two tenets of the angelic ideal of womanhood were self-abnegation and seclusion or chaperoning to ensure virginity and properly monitored behavior. We have seen that special institutions, such as *beaterios* and *recogimientos* (reform homes run by nuns for women who were temporarily separated from their husbands pending an ecclesiastic conjugal trials or who were prostitutes), were created in an attempt to uphold high moral standards for women.

Although records show there were ample opportunities for women to slip out of such refuges or receive visitors (Hunefeldt 2000), the practical function of *beaterios* and *recogimientos* was to control the whereabouts and movement of women who were not under the protection of a husband or father. The late

eighteenth-century Spanish-born bureaucrat José Ignacio de Lequanda, member of the *Sociedad de Amantes del País* of Lima (Society of Friends of the Country, an organization from the pre-independence era), in an article in the Lima newspaper *El Mercurio Peruano* voices his approval of the policy of enclosure that was brought back in the early republican era: “Nadie duda que la reclusión de las mujeres contribuye a conservar las buenas costumbres” (quoted in Rosas Lauro 1999, 143) [Nobody doubts that the women’s seclusion helps to maintain good behavior]. Thus, the church, together with the bourgeois society in power, exerted efforts to restrain women’s movement and, therefore, limited the scope of women’s experience and kept them in the role of the Angel of the House. In these ways, women were kept from participating in public affairs. Perhaps there was some fear on the part of the men of the ruling class that women’s essential roles as camp followers, spies, financial supporters, and organizers of meetings, among other things, would warrant demands for political voice in the new nation.

Pressure for women to suppress complaints about their domestic situations coincided with the social policies of seclusion and domesticity mentioned above. Christine Hunefeldt’s study of 1,070 conjugal suits in the archbishopric of Lima between 1800–1910 reveals an increased emphasis on suffering in silence for women who endured domestic problems at mid-century. During these years, women could not argue their case plainly in court as they had done in the years following independence: “Between 1840 and 1860, fewer women resorted to lawsuits; and women filing suit had to find the ‘right’ mix of arguments—for example, demonstrating poverty and suffering coupled with her own virtuous behavior—or present dramatic evidence of extreme abuse. Short-term personal suffering no longer constituted a sufficient reason to win a judge’s compassion” (Hunefeldt 2000, 325). This observation shows that it behooved women to articulate their arguments within a discourse of the long-suffering Angel if they wanted positive results from the judicial system. A woman had to prove that her virtue had hitherto prevented her from speaking out, and that she finally did so out of concern for her family, rather than for “selfish” motives.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of women from the lower classes, Hunefeldt notes that, with the threat of women’s participation in the urban economy, “decency and correct moral behavior became mechanisms to separate women from men and women from each other to maintain class boundaries and political exclusion” (57).

2. An example of this type of court case argument is that of the upper-class *limeña* Fermina Godoy (Hunefeldt 2000, 326).

Some women seeking legal separation, however, found a loophole in the Angel of the House's emphasis on maternity.<sup>3</sup> As the scholar of nineteenth-century literature Doris Sommer (1991) notes, the health of the national family was a major concern of policy makers at a time when it was believed that to govern meant populating the large expanses of territory in new Latin American countries. Thus at around midcentury in Peru, women began using the excuse of "sexual incompatibility" for ecclesiastic separation (Hunefeldt 2000, 140).<sup>4</sup> The church considered this a valid argument because it prevented procreation—the main goal of marriage. Women could not, however, legally remarry and start families with other men; if the courts allowed separation because of sexual incompatibility, wives were allowed to return to their parents' homes and live apart from their husbands (141).

Historical records of upper- and middle-class women's activities in public life show a sharp decline in the first decades of the republic. Although García y García manages to write about sixteen women who were significant during this time period, the short biographies read more like the socialite pages of a gossip magazine than a study noting the feats of women worthy of inclusion in the annals of history. Most of the women are mentioned because they are the wives of presidents or generals and have found their way into the pages of the study for being supportive, loyal spouses—a sharp contrast with the spies, writers of propaganda, and weapons dealers of the independence period! Most are praised for their excellent manners, beauty, and conversational skills. Some are noted for writing verses—that were never published, so far as we know. (The act of publishing one's intimate thoughts would be considered too public to be modest or virtuous.)

3. Hunefeldt explains that divorce in nineteenth-century Peru meant "a temporal separation of the spouses with ecclesiastical court approval and not the dissolution of the marriage" (13). Despite debate in the 1850s over whether marriage should be considered a sacrament (thus indissoluble) or a civil contract, the latter view did not prevail until 1930, when dissolution by divorce was legalized (Hunefeldt 2000, 83–85).

4. Arguments of sexual incompatibility took various forms and usually entailed medical examinations of the genitals. In one case a woman argued that genital size made intercourse impossible; another complained that she did not receive pleasure from intercourse with her husband *and claimed this as her right* (Hunefeldt 2000, 142; my emphasis). The sexual incompatibility argument was later expanded to include character incompatibility. It is of particular importance that these women were focusing on their own desires and happiness, even as they were insisting on the official standard. It is also noteworthy that they were voicing their concerns in quasi-medical terms by speaking of intercourse as a purely biological, reproductive function, thus taking a Positivist approach, which I will discuss shortly. Such attempts at circumlocution around an unhappy marriage indicate that women were finding ways to challenge the system even before the greater early feminist movements of the 1870s.

Two exceptions in the first half of the century are Flora Tristán, whom I will discuss shortly, and the extraordinary Francisca Zubiaga de Gamarra (“la Mariscala”), who commanded her own troop under her husband, General Agustín Gamarra. It is clear from this general decline in women’s agency during the postrevolutionary period that women were once again confined to the domestic sphere and restrictive roles they endured under colonial rule.

Flora Tristán, a Frenchwoman of Peruvian descent who traveled to Peru in 1833–34 in a frustrated attempt to claim her inheritance, wrote a detailed account of bourgeois Lima society in the early republic.<sup>5</sup> In her travel narrative, *Les pérégrinations d'une paria* (*Peregrinations of a Pariah*, 1834), Tristán describes women’s condition in the nation at the time. Although she initially states that women in Lima are freer than in any other place in the world because the traditional dress of *manta y saya* (a shawl, which was worn partially covering the face, and a skirt) allows them to leave home and move outside the domestic sphere without being recognized, her later accounts do not uphold this view (329–30). Her psychological portraits of specific women in her family paint a bleak picture of the hardships women were forced to endure within marriage and in convents.

One example is that of Tristán’s cousin Carmen, who must choose between the two options for women at that time: to enter a convent or marry. Carmen opts for the latter and is the victim of an abusive husband who marries her for the dowry, parades mistresses in front of her blatantly, abandons her, and only returns when he has wasted her fortune on gambling and debauchery (Tristán 1983, 131). When Carmen dares to complain about her spouse to friends and family, they silence her by saying that she should be happy to have a good-looking husband, since she herself is ugly. Carmen’s voicing of her unhappiness and desire to work against the system, rather than within it, go against two main principles of the Angel of the House: silent suffering and self-abnegation. The female self does not exist in this economy, except as a tool for the well-being of others. Tristán laments the apparent lack of recourse for an unhappy marriage and women’s entrapment in marital “hell” (132, 143).

5. Although Tristán was born and raised in France and her mother was French, her father was a Peruvian from a wealthy family in Lima. After the death of Tristán’s father, her relatives in Lima offered her a stipend but refused to grant her the inheritance because of lack of ecclesiastic proof of her parents’ marriage. This disappointment probably instigated her subsequent antibourgeois, pre-Marxist activism; she dedicated her life to fighting injustices against men and women of the working classes, with whom she most likely identified.

Tristán's narrative offers a view of how women were oppressed: they had very few options and were perceived to hold a superior position only in regard to morality, but were left ignorant despite a promising natural intelligence (335, 141). *Pérégrinations* nonetheless offers insight into the meager or nonexistent education for women that Cabello overtly criticizes in *Blanca Sol*. Tristán's observations confirm Hunefeldt's research findings that "in the absence of efficient mechanisms of social control, morality was *the* weapon to maintain order. This control was acted out in the realms of family and marriage" (2000, 76).

Although I have highlighted the negative side of the Angel of the House, it is important to note that exceptional virtue and adherence to the angelic model could also provide social mobility. That is, conforming to patriarchal ideals had its rewards. A woman who was raised "properly" and was sheltered or constantly chaperoned (and who, hence, would have been assumed by society to be a virgin) could be offered in marriage to a better-off man.<sup>6</sup> This appears to be the case of the secondary character Josefina in Cabello's novel, whose hard work and self-sacrifice in raising her siblings and supporting her grandmother wins her a husband from a higher social class (although, as we will discover, even in this case Cabello's angelic facade is just that—a false and unrealistic front). Significantly, Cabello chooses to situate this benefit of female virtue within the secondary plot. The novelist focuses rather on the main character as a means of condemning stereotypes and critiquing the meager career options for women. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that meeting unrealistic standards of virtue promised financial and romantic benefits, which explains why the Angel of the House standard was often appropriated and perpetuated by women themselves.

It was not until 1845, under President Ramón Castilla, that the government stabilized and began to perform its basic duties. This consistency in leadership, coupled with the discovery of guano (natural fertilizer) for export, gave Peru the peace and funds required for desperately needed reform. Under liberal leadership, women would benefit to some degree through qualified inclusion in public education reform. But eventually they would have to engage in a kind of struggle different from the battles of independence, one toward personal liberty, in which women would use language to defend

6. I emphasize the idea of social perception of chastity here because if a woman did not have a protector or someone to chaperone her (to give the appearance of living a sheltered life), she might not have been considered chaste by society, regardless of her moral caliber. Likewise, a woman who was not a virgin but who was very discreet might have been perceived as virtuous by society.

their interests. This battle would necessarily have to entail an attack upon the angel standard through the elimination of virtue as the sole saving grace for their sex (an ambitious goal for that era), or at least an expansion of what it meant for a woman to be virtuous. In addition, women would have to privilege their own intelligence and skills outside the home.

### Challenges to the Angel of the House: Liberal Reform and Women's Education

The political situation during the first part of the nineteenth century was generally characterized by fluctuations between liberal and conservative tendencies, with no formal political party coalescing until the later part of the nineteenth century, with the appearance of the Civilianist Party (*civilistas*).<sup>7</sup> Many of the politicians who welcomed education for female citizens did so because of women's role as the guardians and caretakers of the future generations of Peruvians—but these supporters wanted women's education to be limited to subjects that would improve child-rearing and homemaking skills. These politicians favored women's education as a means of distinguishing their (more enlightened) nation from that of Spain, where little effort was being made toward public education for women.<sup>8</sup> Although some liberal politicians believed the new nation could benefit from educating its female population, women took it upon themselves to voice concern for a thorough reform in the 1870s.

Liberal and conservative tendencies in the late 1800s meant that women intellectuals and activists such as Cabello and her early feminist friends

7. The label *liberal*, in the context of the first half of the nineteenth century in Peru, roughly implied a faith in the innate goodness and ultimate perfectibility of man, characteristic of the Enlightenment. Liberals believed in Peru's capacity for self-government and sought to protect the individual from the abuses of those in power. They favored nearly universal manhood suffrage and relatively unrestricted access to government office. While women were not directly incorporated in this democratic vision, there were advances in education for women under liberal governments. Conservatives feared rule by the masses and subscribed to literacy and property qualifications for voting and election to public office. They were often frustrated royalists adapting to independence by favoring an aristocratic republic with a strong president (Peru had been, after all, one of the most loyal territories of the Spanish Crown and among the last to rebel). Conservatives believed that society was composed of inferiors and superiors and that the latter group should ensure its control over the state (Werlich 1978, 67–68).

8. As Bridget Aldaraca has found, Spain was a major emissary of the angelic standard: “[From the 1850s on] the growing public of Spanish middle-class women were instructed in minute detail on how to be and act, what to do and think, and, especially, what they as superior beings might never aspire to” (1982, 63).

Clorinda Matto de Turner and Juana Manuela Gorriti would fashion their pro-woman arguments in dialogue with liberal discourses of progress.<sup>9</sup> As the literary critic Oswaldo Voyses has pointed out, Peru's national literature grew to become an integral part of Positivism, as the novel was "supposed to render a service to the nation since . . . [writers such as Matto and Cabello] viewed it as an essential endeavor that offered a critical spirit to all social processes" (1998, 195). In their essays Cabello and Matto criticized the conservative faction while using the language of Positivism to court the liberals who were flexible regarding fixing higher standards for women's education, while Gorriti critiqued conservatives as well as Positivist views of history and society that excluded women and racial minorities, as we will see in a moment.

After the initial declaration of Peru's independence in 1821, as noted, a special effort had been made to initiate the education of the "bello sexo"; this was, in part, the vehicle that politicians used to articulate Peru's national identity as distinct from the mother country of Spain, where no effort was made to create public schools for women (Villavicencio 1992, 37). However, this education would be significantly inferior to the formation available to boys. The education women received was clearly geared to prepare them to be better housewives and mothers, with some very basic knowledge of geography, history, composition, and penmanship. A closer look at girls' education is particularly relevant to our study of *Blanca Sol*, as the protagonist's poor education and role models are important underlying causes of the action of the plot.

A curriculum from a Peruvian girls' school from 1822 shows that girls' education was heavily geared toward piety and homemaking: religion, spelling, calligraphy, and arithmetic (Tauzin Castellanos 1988, 99). The curriculum for the Colegio del Espíritu Santo in Lima, a school for girls of wealthy families, added French grammar, history, geography, and mythology (99). An 1826 curriculum from the Escuela Normal de Mujeres, established to prepare women to teach primary school for girls, is indicative of the very basic education that would continue to be made available to girls: it included spelling, grammar, arithmetic, catechism, and sewing (98). It is noteworthy that the listing of arithmetic in the girls' curriculum provoked heated dialogue, published in local newspapers; arithmetic was later removed in 1840 (99). Religious and domestic instruction, as well as classes on social graces, would continue to be the foundation for curricula in girls' schools. In 1826

9. For an overview of Juana Manuela Gorriti's literary gatherings in Lima and women's intellectual culture across Latin America, see the Introduction in this study.

under President Santa Cruz, fully state-subsidized (although not mandatory) primary education was made available to girls, and in 1836 Santa Cruz issued a decree to create equal numbers of learning institutions for both sexes, at the primary level (Villavicencio 1992, 38). It is clear that girls' preparation was grooming them to be authorities in domestic chores, morality, and spirituality. In other words, these educational programs were never intended to change women's role in the symbolic order or broaden their horizons, but rather to make them better Angels of the House.

Although liberals and conservatives clashed frequently over the years, the former enjoyed almost two decades of rule at midcentury. The economic success in the 1840s to 1870s from the export of guano (the historical setting for the novel *Blanca Sol*) provided income to fund infrastructure, social programs, and public education. In her late adolescence, Cabello witnessed both the reforms and the shortcomings of reform efforts that surely shaped her own social and political views. This experience would manifest itself in her later essays on women's place in society and the importance of education for women. Weak secular and ecclesiastic educational options for girls is also a central theme in *Blanca Sol*.

In 1845, the year Cabello was born, Ramón Castilla's presidential inauguration marked the beginning of an age of liberal politics.<sup>10</sup> From about 1845 to 1862, during Cabello's formative years, the young author witnessed Castilla's abolition of slavery as well as his elimination of the tribute tax indigenous groups had been forced to pay, earning him the title of "the Liberator." The constitution of 1856 called for the direct popular election of the chief executive and limited presidential power. Despite the increased wealth of the national economy, governmental efforts for women's education waned from the 1830s through the 1850s as enrollment dropped and the quality of the girls' schools significantly diminished. Nonetheless, there was a Ruling for General Instruction in 1850 that fixed curricula for girls' education and improved it somewhat from the earlier years. The ruling added classes such as drawing, French, English, geography, and basic history, but continued to concentrate heavily on domestic arts and religion (Tauzin Castellanos 1988, 101). In 1855 the primary school Los Sagrados Corazones

10. There are two book-length biographies published on Cabello: Augusto Tamayo Vargas 1940 and Pinto Vargas 2003, the latter an exhaustive study. Luis Miguel Glave's (1999) biographical article is another useful source on the suffering the author endured at the end of her life and on her alleged insanity; it also highlights the harsh criticism she suffered for voicing her ideas on girls' education and women's role in society. All biographical information on Cabello in this section is from Tamayo Vargas's work unless otherwise indicated.

was founded and later expanded into two schools when education for girls was made obligatory (Guardia 1985, 51).

It was not until the 1860s (when Cabello was fifteen to twenty-five years old) that the campaign for women's education was revived by Mariano Amézaga, who published articles lobbying for this cause and condemning the tradition of keeping half of society ignorant (Villavicencio 1992, 42). In the 1870s, for the first time in Peru's history, a group of women engaged in the struggle for the enlightenment of their sex. In 1874 a woman named María Trinidad Enríquez was allowed, with special permission, to enter the University of San Antonio Abad in Cuzco. She later founded a girls' school with a truly academic curriculum, which included mathematics, law, philosophy, and logic (Guardia 1985, 52). Later María Aragón de Rodo, Luisa Rausejour, and Magdalena Chávez were to follow her lead and start more schools of this type (52). Cabello was also at the vanguard of this battle, and the repeated message in *Blanca Sol* of the necessity of education for women is proof of her passion for this cause.

Cabello's own education is exemplary of the inconsistency in public education for girls. Because there was no regularly functioning school in her hometown of Moquegua, Cabello received lessons from private tutors (Tauzin Castellanos 1988, 105). Cabello's education seems to reflect the failure of public schooling for women, as sources show that beyond some basic lessons in subjects considered appropriate for young ladies of the bourgeoisie, she was primarily self-taught. Biographer Tamayo Vargas describes her education in history as coming from both formal lessons and tales told in the home (1940, 14).

We also know that Cabello preferred reading and studying music, two areas in which she was very skillful, to practicing more domestic hobbies, such as sewing:

Ella no cose a las caídas de la tarde, ni pasa rozando con sus manos las teclas del clavicordio. Hace estudio intensivo de música, y su gozo es dominio absoluto de técnica, apreciación de un metódico superarse diario. Y si la cultura del colegio no era usual en las mujeres, ella tiene cultura de mesa de noche y de rincón de la huerta. (16)

[She does not sew when afternoon falls, nor does she spend the time passing her fingers idly over the keys of the clavichord. She studies

music intensively, and her joy is absolute mastery of technique, the cumulative value of improving her skills methodically, day by day. And while classroom culture was not common to women, she had [her own brand of] night-stand and garden-niche culture.]

The end of the quotation alludes to Cabello's desire to study on her own, whenever and wherever she could. From available sources we may assume that most of her education came from her voracious appetite for books; she was very well read for a woman of her time.

Cabello's intellectual development and self-education were facilitated through her marriage to a prestigious doctor who did not hinder her intellectual development. The couple did not have any children; Cabello was widowed young and never remarried. She was a single, independent woman of means at a young age. It is significant that all these factors seem to have had to be in place to allow Cabello to be as prolific as she was in her writing career. Nonetheless, she was likely aware that this type of independence was not possible for the general female public and that if women were to enjoy a degree of independence and development of their own identities, they had to challenge oppressive ideals of virtue.

The political situation, however, did not facilitate such modification of women's roles. In the midst of the focus on education and building up the new nation's infrastructure, Peru's disputes over borders with the more stable and better-equipped Chile intensified, erupting in war. The disastrous and expensive War of the Pacific (1879–1884) drained much of the wealth that Peru had acquired from guano and mining. The country suffered a humiliating occupation in 1881 during which Chilean troops pillaged Lima as well as towns in the interior. In the process of losing the war, Peru was forced to turn over the rich mining region of Tarapacá.

Regarding women's roles in the War of the Pacific, it seems that the ruling class of the Peruvian republic had significantly less interest in involving "el bello sexo" in the struggle than did the pro-independence forces during the revolution. The *rabonas* followed soldiers into battle and performed the same duties as they had during the war of independence. This was not the case, however, for women of the bourgeoisie, who were involved in the distribution of charity and worked with the Red Cross rather than as spies and conspirators as they had done during independence.

A comparison of the language that García y García employs in her introduction to the wars of independence versus that of the War of the

Pacific is indicative of the less active role women played in the latter. For the independence era, the historian speaks of women's "courage," "loyalty," "accomplishment of their designs," and "irrepressible fire" in their desire to battle and that patriotism had awakened in them in "a lively and violent way" (García y García 1924, 207). In contrast, the vocabulary in the introduction to the War of the Pacific shows the marks of the Angel of the House: phrases such as "limitless abnegation," "tenderness," and "proverbial charity" characterize this section (351). For example, the historian characterizes Magdalena Ugarteche de Prado, a woman who organized the distribution of charity, by focusing on "su conducta de esposa solícita y ejemplar y de madre amorosa y abnegada" (351) [her solicitous and exemplary wifely conduct and her loving and selfless [role as mother]]. Clearly, during this national crisis women were extending their services in capacities compatible with the Angel of the House ideal.

Tamayo Vargas does not mention whether the literary salons started in 1876 by the Argentinean writer and longtime Lima resident Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818–1892) continue during the war, but he does tell us that Cabello was still publishing articles under the pseudonym Enriqueta Pradel in the periodical *El Album* (The Album) and *El Recreo* (The Re-creation) (Tamayo Vargas 1940, 35). Cabello also managed to publish her novel *Las consecuencias* (The Consequences) in Lima in 1880 during the war. However, she would write the rest of her novels in the aftermath of this national disaster: *Sacrificio y recompensa* (Sacrifice and Recompense [1887]), *Blanca Sol* (1888), and *El conspirador* (The Conspirator [1892]). Naturalism and Positivism were the cultural movements that influenced her literary production during these years.

### The Roles of Naturalism and Positivism in the New Generation of Women Writers in Peru

If Romanticism was Spain's legacy to the colonies, then Naturalism and Positivism (also European in origin) were the first literary and philosophical movements adapted to a Peruvian context by the writers of the new republic.<sup>11</sup> As Voysest has pointed out, these schools of thought facilitated the new

11. For introductory reading on Romanticism, Naturalism, and Positivism in Spanish America, I recommend the following texts: Carilla 1975; Zea 1949, 1963; Pérez Petit 1943; Foster and Altamiranda 1997.

nation's articulations of a national literature distinct from any expression that prevailed in the colonial years (1998, 195). As such, they could be tools of power for those writers who could wield them effectively, and Cabello was one of these early few.

Naturalism entered Latin America at the end of the century through the novels that Émile Zola (France 1840–1902) published in the 1870s and his 1880 manifesto, *The Experimental Novel*, in which he describes his application of the experimental method of French scientist Claude Bernard (1813–1878) to the process of writing a novel. Naturalism is a product of Positivist philosophy of 1800s Europe and its profound faith in science. In the Naturalist method, the writer approaches the problems of society and the individual (which form the subject matter for Naturalist literature) in an empirical manner, through direct and detailed observations of human behavior and environment, which are then objectively relayed to the reader. Zola thought the function of the novel should be to present an objective diagnostic photograph of society's ills for politicians to then "treat." Naturalist novels create an experimental space in which to diagnose and examine social problems. Observation and deductive logic take center stage, in place of emotions, exoticism, or patriotism. The settings for the Naturalist novel do not showcase the beauty of nature or the grandeur of civilization, but rather the breeding grounds for society's problems: the brothel, the congested coal mine, the opium den, and urban slums. An important feature of Naturalism (one that was sure to have inspired the writers who followed it) is that it most directly links the novel with the power to change society.

Latin American writers who incorporated Naturalist techniques have tended to modify Zola's model, often mixing it with a more subjective and somewhat Romantic tone (Voysest 1998; Epple 1980). Few come close to representing society's ills in such grim detail as the French originator (of the Hispanic Naturalists, the Puerto Rican novelist, doctor, and politician Manuel Zeno Gandía arguably follows Zola's model most faithfully). The Argentinean novelist Eugenio Cambaceres (1843–1889), for example, follows Zola's Naturalism in terms of the influence of the environment on the individual, but his writing mixes Naturalism with Romantic elements. The emotional and dramatic ending of his novel *Sin rumbo* (1885), in which the protagonist disembowels himself by carving a cross into his gut, is one example, as the literary critic George Schade has noted. This is true of Cabello, who employs Zola's method and structure while swapping the urban alleys and coal mines for the elegant ambiance of Lima's high society.

While Zola's view does not admit belief in any metaphysical force that cannot be empirically proved, writers such as the Spanish novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán (1852–1921) maintain their Catholic faith. In the controversial essay “La cuestión palpitante” (1883), Pardo Bazán offers her own Catholic version of Naturalism. Cabello's adaptation of Naturalism to a Peruvian context is similar; Cabello critiques some superficial practices of Catholicism, such as the way women in Lima's high society used religious festivals to show off their latest fashion; however, she never denies belief in the Catholic God (nor was it in the writer's best interest to do so, as the mere suspicion that Matto disrespected the figure of Christ by publishing a controversial story while editor of *El Peru Ilustrado* led to her persecution). While Cabello opposes clerical policy in her belief that religion should play only a minor role in education (Zalduondo 2001, 162), she is quick to include characters' formulaic invocations to the heavens and the hope that a higher power will save the day in certain scenes of her novel. Notably, this rhetoric is most commonly associated with Josefina's elderly grandmother, a representative of an outdated Peruvian elite in economic decline.

Although Cabello has been generally viewed as a Naturalist writer, it is important to note that there has been lengthy critical debate over the years regarding whether or to what degree her novels are Naturalist and, based on this conclusion, whether they should be considered “modern” and progressive.<sup>12</sup> In fact, as several critics in this debate point out, Cabello herself does not purport to follow Naturalism, but rather a mix of Romanticism, Realism,

12. Tamayo Vargas's 1940 evaluation of Cabello's novels contains praise of the writer as an early innovator of the Peruvian novel for her foray into the genre of Naturalism. Lucía Guerra's “Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera” (1987a) focuses on the Positivism and Naturalism of Cabello as elements of her total view on morality and art. Guerra reads the writer's philosophy of art as “una trayectoria de permanente perfectibilidad” (trajectory of permanent perfectability) based on the Comtean ideals of progress and on the aim of art to present human beings as they are and as they should be (27–28).

Juan Armando Epple's 1987 article “Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera y el problema de la ‘novela moderna’ en el Perú” differs from the aforementioned studies in that he aims to show that *Blanca Sol* is not progressive, but rather retrograde. Epple considers Cabello's views of society conservative and backward looking because of Cabello's spiritual, moralizing discourse aimed at finding a “conciliatory” relationship between the newly rich Peruvians and the old ruling classes, as well as her reluctance to grapple with the racial issues that Peruvian Positivists such as Manuel González Prada were bringing to the fore. If one is to define “modern novel” by the degree to which a work is Naturalist, as the early twentieth-century critics Ventura García Calderón and Tamayo Vargas have done, then Epple correctly notes that the novel is not fully Naturalist—it is, in fact, a combination of genres, as Cabello intended. While I agree with Epple's findings in regard to Cabello's reluctance to take up the cause of Peru's racial diversity, it should be pointed out that his assessment of the novel ignores gender politics to explain her use of spiritually loaded discourse (namely, that

and Naturalism that she calls American Realism (*el realismo americano*). For the purposes of the study at hand, the degree to which Cabello's Naturalism follows that of Zola is not as important as the fact that her incorporation of the newest literary current of the 1880s sparked controversy and interest in her work that continues into today; she is the best-known writer of the three women whose work is featured here and many of the critical studies on Cabello concern her use of Naturalism.

In her 1892 essay "La novela moderna," Cabello criticizes Romanticism for representing an overly idealized perfection of humankind and Naturalism for focusing disproportionately on its base and animal aspects. She therefore proposes her own genre, namely, American Realism, which is a mixture of the two. To construct her American Realism, Cabello draws on Zola's approach for the narrative structure of *Blanca Sol*, while the characters of the

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women novelists taking on risqué topics could elude critique more effectively if they included some traditionally feminine rhetoric in their prose) and does not consider an interpretation of *Blanca Sol* as a novel about women's education and social options, a progressive project for her era, even if her particular view of women's advancement did not fit within today's notions of progress.

Later studies reevaluate and valorize Cabello's creation of a hybrid literary genre that was not meant to follow Naturalism to the letter. Voysest is perhaps the contemporary critic who has focused most closely on Cabello's Naturalism. He points out, along with Henri Mitterand, a French specialist on Zola, that Zola himself did not follow his own theory of the novel as he outlines it in *The Experimental Novel* and that the French writer's theory includes a paradoxical mix of objective science and artistic individualism (1998, 196). Voysest reads two lines levels of discourse in the novels of both Cabello and Matto: one mode of discourse is representative (which goes along with the objectivity of Zola's style) and the other is evaluative (which is subjective and can be seen as a remnant of Realism). Voysest coined the phrase "spiritual Naturalism" to describe Cabello's approach: "*Naturalismo espiritual*—una tendencia a aunar ideas o movimientos a menudo opuestos como una respuesta a un momento histórico de ambivalencias, contradicciones y prejuicios que pedía soluciones urgentes" (2005, n.p.) (Spiritual Naturalism—a tendency to link movements considered opposite as a response to an historical moment of ambivalence, contradictions and prejudices that required urgent solutions).

Peluffo's "Las trampas del naturalismo" is a response to claims that Cabello's writing is too sentimental to be Naturalist. Peluffo points out that to Gorriti's 1880s ear Cabello's stark Naturalism was scandalous; in fact, Gorriti criticizes Cabello's 1889 novel *Las consecuencias*, claiming that the Peruvian writes more boldly than Zola ("con más valor aún que Zola" [quoted in Peluffo 2002, 38]) because she attacks not only the lower classes, but the elite as well. Supporting what Voysest has affirmed in his studies regarding the Latin American preference for the Naturalist novel as an *étude sociale* (1998, 197), Peluffo aptly demonstrates that Cabello follows the experimental method outlined by Zola by pointing out the many environmental and educational influences in the title character Blanca Sol's formative years that shaped who she would become as a young woman. Joan Torres-Pou seeks to counter claims by early critics such as García Calderón and John Brushwood that Cabello's novels were weak examples of Naturalism. In Cabello's defense, Torres-Pou correctly points out that the novelist never intended to follow Zola's Naturalism to the letter. Torres-Pou supports this argument with pertinent quotes from Cabello's essay "La novela moderna" (1892) in which she advocates a hybrid genre of Romanticism, Naturalism, and Realism (Torres-Pou 1998, 252).

novel are mostly from the nouveau riche of the guano boom. As Voysest points out (1998), Cabello's work, unlike Zola's Naturalism, includes subjective, moralizing discourses in the narrative. Her writing is Naturalist in its lengthy descriptions of the protagonist's psychological background and society's influence on her development, which account for her frivolous behavior. In *Blanca Sol* the experimental space is Lima, with its detrimental symbolic representations of womanhood. Within this controlled environment, the author shows how a potentially upright person can be capable of reprehensible behavior. The main character's misguided education teaches her to value money, glamour, and social position above virtue, love, and family life. While championing these characteristics seems to support the angelic norm, many elements of the plot structure significantly complicate the unattainable ideal of the Angel of the House.

Taking this scientific approach to literature into consideration is important in examining Cabello's agenda, specifically because of the degree to which this method authorizes the novelist to pass informed judgment on the symbolic order. Zola's conceptualization of the novel grants the author a tremendous amount of power, placing him or her in the role of both "authoritative" observer and social activist. The goal of the experimental novel's author is to "possess knowledge of the man, scientific knowledge of him, in both his individual and social relations," rendering the novelists "examining magistrates of men and their passions" (Zola 1880; 1964, 9–10). No behavior is mysterious; conduct is dictated by specific genetic or environmental conditions. The experimental novel has the purpose of aiding in the reversal of this determinism (although to a lesser degree in the case of hereditarily determined illnesses): hence the role of author as social scientist whose work is meant to influence political decisions. Cabello's use of aspects of Naturalism reveals her quest for textual power in the intellectual milieu. She uses Naturalist techniques as a means of authorizing herself to critique the debilitating roles society imposes upon women.

Positivism also plays an important role in the early feminist thought of Cabello, as well as in that of the fellow women intellectuals living in Peru Matto and Gorriti (although Gorriti's stance is more critical of the rationalist approach to progress than that of her younger contemporaries). Whereas Naturalism is a form of aesthetic expression as well as a social consciousness-raising literary movement, Positivism is a political and philosophical school of thought that Cabello and Matto drew on to express their views on women's role in the nation's progress. As I mention in Chapter 1, Positivism is based on the ideas of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

and followers such as the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1920). The origins of Positivism in Peru can be traced to 1850; however, the philosophy did not become popular until the end of the century (Trazegnies Granda 1987, 16). Cabello’s contact with Positivism was most likely through the noted Peruvian poet and essayist Manuel González Prada (1844–1918), whose literary circle Cabello joined in 1887 (Denegri cited in Zaldondo 2001, 154). The scientific approach to social reform would prove invaluable to the author in her agenda for helping society to restructure the way people thought about women, and it is most apparent in the scientific language of her essays.

We can see an example of Cabello’s use of Positivist language in her “Influencia de la mujer en la civilización” (Woman’s Influence on Civilization [1874]):

La instrucción y la moralidad de las mujeres ha sido en todo tiempo el termómetro que ha marcado los progresos, y el grado de civilización y virilidad de las naciones . . . Educad a la mujer, ilustrad su inteligencia, y tendréis en ella un motor poderoso y universal, para el progreso y la civilización del mundo; y una columna fuerte e inamovible en qué cimentar la moral y las virtudes de las generaciones venideras. (quoted in Villavivencio 1992, 65)

[Women’s education and morality has always been a thermometer to mark progress, the quality of civilization, and virility of nations. . . . Educate Woman, bring her intelligence to light, and you will have in her a universal and powerful motor for progress and world civilization, and a strong and sturdy column onto which to build the morality and virtue of upcoming generations.]

Cabello’s discursive strategy here is pointed: she uses the charged lexicon of the nationalist discourses (“civilization,” “morality,” “virtue,” “strength,” “power,” and “virility”)—and goes beyond them by updating this rhetoric with technical language (“progress,” “thermometer,” “motor”).<sup>13</sup> As we saw

13. The nation-building lexicon to which I refer can be found throughout the writings of revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar (Venezuela, 1783–1830) and the noted Argentine essayist and politician Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–88). The essay *Ariel* (1900) by José Enrique Rodó (Uruguay, 1872–1917) also transcribes the fear of moral weakness and vulnerability to neo-imperialism that was circulating among the ruling classes in the second half of the nineteenth century.

in Chapter 1, Barreda's antifeminist essay (which draws heavily on Comte) used Positivism to prove women biologically incapable of analytical thought. Cabello, conversely, uses a Positivist discourse to lobby for women's opportunities. In addition, the essay contains several digressions on advances in the sciences that are aimed at linking women's education to progress and modernity. Cabello's incorporation of nation-building language plays on the ruling class's fears; she formulates her agenda so that it becomes the answer to one of the most important political concerns of her day. She posits that educating women, the mothers of future leaders and citizens, will prevent society from falling into the "barbaric" lifestyle that her fictional character Blanca Sol is forced to endure.<sup>14</sup>

The adoption of Positivist principles that advocated an empirical and scientific approach to social problems allowed Cabello and Matto to position women's advancement as essential to the nation's desire for progress. As Berg notes, Matto's 1882 essay "La industria nacional" (National Industry) allowed the reader to envision women's advancement as compatible with and necessary to the future of the nation: "[Matto's] essays deplore national chaos and sloth and suggest following the model of French postwar recovery, with emphasis on industrialization and education" (Berg 1995, 81). Matto's essay "La mujer y la ciencia" (Woman and Science, published in Matto's periodical *El Búcaro Americano* in January 1898) "points out that women cannot hide behind sentimental notions of motherhood, because 60 percent of women are in fact not actively engaged in the roles of wife or mother" (Berg 1995, 85). Although Matto's female characters exhibit characteristics of the Angel of the House, Matto viewed as an obstacle to women's rights the Romantic, sentimental, traditional definition of woman as *exclusively* mother and wife. Her later essays further undermine the dependent model of womanhood by advocating women's career advancement and their development as self-sustaining individuals as a way of furthering the progress of women *and the nation*.<sup>15</sup>

Rather than incorporate Positivist discourse to tout women's advancement, Gorriti's writing, as Denegri points out, deconstructed rationalist approaches to social problems while highlighting the suffering of marginalized groups

14. I use the term *barbaric* in reference to the book-length biographical essay *Civilización i barbarie: La vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* (1845) by the Argentinean essayist and politician Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–88). Like Sarmiento, Cabello juxtaposes civilization and barbarism, but for the latter the aim is to promote women's education.

15. Berg's essay refers to several of Matto's articles in *El Búcaro Americano* that advocate women's self sufficiency and condemn viewing women as objects (1995, 85–86).

under such policies. Employing a tactic that she would use into the early twentieth century, Gorriti's collection of short writings *Sueños y realidades* (1865), for example, rewrites the official history of the Argentine Federalist Juan Manuel de Rosas's dictatorship (1829–52) in order to highlight the suffering of orphans and women in the conflicts between Unitarians and Federalists. Rather than downplay sentimentality, Gorriti evokes strong emotion and the pain of the female characters to make her point: that neither side wins in such a bloody conflict. Denegri's observations aptly characterize Gorriti's strategy: "Desarrolló su propia escritura precisamente a partir de las diferencias que existían entre su discurso intuitivo y centrado en la mujer, y el de la razón erudita masculina" (112) [She developed her own writing precisely based on the differences that existed between her intuitive discourse centered on woman, and that of the erudite masculine reason]. In sum, whether intellectual women were critical of Positivism or whether they embraced it for new causes, they had to negotiate it, as Positivism was part of the language of the new nations in the second half of the century.

### Cabello's Intellectual and Literary Strategies

One can hypothesize that Cabello saw in certain techniques of Naturalism and Positivism new and highly desirable means of voicing her concerns for women's condition. Why so? First, I have already mentioned the empowering nature of Naturalism. Second, from the perspective of the Peruvian intellectual, Naturalism and Positivism were established and relatively respected (if not undisputed) modes of thought. Finally, there was clearly a preference by the ruling class during the postcolonial era to emulate and appropriate European culture as a means of "civilizing" the nation and helping it earn international respect. The visual dominance of French-inspired architecture in many of Latin America's capital cities and nineteenth-century efforts to attract European immigration confirm this. By voicing her concerns in the language and symbols of the new Peruvian republic, Cabello was helping her nation distinguish itself from the mother country of Spain. She was a forerunner in the development of the Peruvian novel and was using it as a vehicle for her early feminist beliefs. She was ambitiously taking the initiative and using her position as a pioneer novelist (among the first to experiment with Naturalist techniques) to advance a social agenda that placed women's plight at dead center. That is to say, she was consciously placing the nation one step closer to its "own" literature, which it so desperately

desired, but with the implication that it must consider women's education, social options, and development as individuals as a central concern.

However, Cabello's outspokenness did not go without harsh repercussions, despite the subversive strategies she used in her narrative to include and appear to support some aspects of angelic virtue. Her unconventional vision of girls' education and the feminist ideas in her writing inspired negative criticism from many Peruvian intellectuals of her day, including the poet José Santos Chocano (1867–1935), the author of short prose narratives (*tradiciones*) Ricardo Palma (1833–1919), and the well-known educator Elvira García y García (1862–1951) (Glave 1999, 102–3).<sup>16</sup> Besides insults and harsh criticism being published about her in the most important newspaper of Lima, *El Comercio*, the novelist was declared insane toward the end of her life and institutionalized in horrible conditions, as Glave's research has confirmed. Glave convincingly argues that Cabello was unjustly confined.

Cabello's choice of expression and literary techniques, nonetheless, were popular with readers, and *Blanca Sol* went through three early editions. The novel interests us for early feminist writings of the self because it was a widely circulated story that focused on a subversive and active female heroine. The novel made enough of an impression on its readers to earn it a comparison with one of the most popular French novels of its day—it was praised as the *Madame Bovary* of Lima (Torres-Pou 1998, 251). According to Torres-Pou, the work's brief but certain success among its audience, the Peruvian elite, had to do with the supposition that the protagonist was loosely based on an actual figure in Lima's society (251), although Cabello herself denies any such parallel in her foreword to the text. It is probable that the Naturalist techniques aided in sparking interest in readers, who likely found it fresh and innovative. Whatever the reasons for its success, the novel seems to have accomplished part of its author's aim: she had the ruling class's attention.

16. For a detailed discussion of the denigration Cabello suffered, see Zaldondo 2001, chap. 4.