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## Rewriting Womanhood

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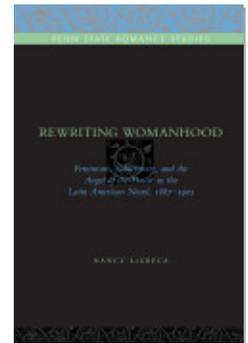
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SEXUAL AGENCY IN ANA ROQUÉ'S *LUZ Y SOMBRA*:  
A SUBVERSION OF THE ESSENTIALIZED WOMAN

La sociedad siempre tiene un anatema para el que delinque, y sobre todo para la mujer, a la que no se le permite ni un mal pensamiento; y es porque las ciencias que de la moral tratan no son aún las mejor estudiadas.

Las fuerzas físicas de la Naturaleza producen innumerables estragos; el rayo mata, el huracán arrasa . . . Pues también en nuestra naturaleza existen fuerzas instintivas muy poderosas, que son los principales móviles de nuestras acciones, por lo que ya son objeto de estudio para los hombres pensadores.

[Society always has an anathema for those who are delinquent, and above all for women, of whom nary an evil thought is permitted; this is because sciences concerned with morality are still not adequately studied.

The physical forces of Nature produce immeasurable damage; lightning kills, hurricanes demolish . . . Then very powerful instinctual forces exist in human nature as well; they are the prime motors of our actions, and for this reason they are the object of study for thinkers.]

—Ana Roqué, *Luz y sombra*

THE PUERTO RICAN NOVELIST AND women's rights activist Ana Roqué fought for a change in the national standard for women that would include education, a variety of career options, the vote, and (through her fictional representations of women in the 1903 novel *Luz y sombra*) acceptance of female sexual desire.<sup>1</sup> Her conceptualizations of Puerto Rican female identity contradicted the angelic standard for women by attempting to grant them agency and greater opportunities to develop as individuals. Her fiction also condemned the abuse

1. In the preceding epigraph, the emphasis is mine. Ana Cristina Roqué Géigel de Duprey was born on April 18, 1853, in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and died October 3, 1933. When her mother died several years after her birth, she was educated and raised by her paternal grandmother, a teacher by profession who inspired the child's quest for knowledge in diverse areas of study. Roqué was self-educated and founded a private school in her home at the age of thirteen after mentoring with instructors. In 1885, at the age of thirty-two, she attended the Civil Institute for Secondary Education in San Juan. She married Luis Duprey when she was nineteen, and they had five children, three of whom survived to adulthood. Although the couple did not remain together physically (her husband lived with several different women during their marriage), they never divorced (Paravisini-Gebert 1994, 154). Later she founded the Colegio Mayagüezano (School of Mayagüez), the Liceo Ponceño

and exploitation of women. Roqué's 1895 short novel *Sara la obrera* is a tragic story of an unmarried *mulata* seamstress, Sara, whose best friend helps her own husband rape and drug the seamstress out of fear of the husband's abusiveness should she resist him. Roqué's short 1919 novel, *Un ruso en Puerto Rico*, also levels a critique of the sexual and economic domination of white men over Puerto Rican women and men of African and racially mixed heritage.<sup>2</sup>

Roqué was able to write about sexual transgression because of her social credibility and because she limited this topic to her fiction, which was carefully crafted within traditional discourses of womanhood, to soften the subversive material. Women activists who lobbied more directly for women's sexual freedom, such as Roqué's contemporary Luisa Capetillo, who openly supported women's right to leave their husbands and form new unions as they pleased, suffered harsh critique.<sup>3</sup> For example, in Capetillo's 1911 essay, *Mi opinión*, in the section called "On Honesty," she cites a Dr. Drysdall's view that women's sexuality is not animalistic or dangerous, but rather normal and healthy: "In women, as in men, the vigor of sexual appetites is a great virtue; it is the sign of a robust constitution, with healthy organs and a naturally-developed sexual disposition" (Drysdall quoted in Capetillo 2004, 50).

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(Ponce Secondary School) in 1902, the organizations Liga Femenina Puertorriqueña (Puerto Rican Feminine League) in 1917, and the Puerto Rican Women's Suffrage Association in 1924. Roqué opposed the U.S. policy of teaching basic courses in English in public schools. She published articles in educational journals voicing her disagreement with this policy (Rivera 1987, 129). According to Delgado Votaw, Roqué estimated that she "granted degrees to 110 teachers, and educated 5,200 children in 23 years of public teaching, and 300 more in 10 years of private teaching" (1995, 76).

Delgado Votaw's short biography shows that Roqué published *Explicaciones de gramática castellana* (Explanations of Castilian Grammar [1889]). She also edited and founded the periodicals *La Mujer* (Woman [1893]), *La Evolución* (Evolution [1902]), *La Mujer del Siglo XX* (The Woman of the Twentieth Century [1917]), *Album Puertorriqueño* (Puerto Rican Album [1918]), and *El Heraldo de la Mujer* (The Woman's Herald [1918]). Her books *Geografía universal* (Universal Geography [1894]) and *La botánica en las indias occidentales* (Botany of the West Indies [for which I could not locate a date]) and the essay "Estudio sobre la flora puertorriqueña" (Study on Puerto Rican Flora [1908]) are some examples of her work in the natural sciences. Further evidence of her interest in the sciences is her study of meteorology and her membership in the Astronomy Society of Paris; she was even known to hold stargazing seminars in her home.

2. The summaries in this section are paraphrased from my forthcoming article "Ana Roqué de Duprey." Roqué published several other collections of fiction: *Pasatiempos* (Pastimes [1894]) and *Novelas y cuentos* (Novels and Short Stories [1895]).

3. Capetillo, a humbly born activist for workers and women's rights, was ostracized by feminists of the bourgeoisie, including Roqué, for her position on free love and women's right to dissolve an unhappy marriage and form a new union (Matos Rodríguez 2004, xix). It is likely that the suffragists viewed Capetillo as a danger to the reputation of their cause because of her radical views. Capetillo's views on free love were also attacked by the editor of the periodical *Brisas del Caribe* in 1917 (Matos Rodríguez 2004, xxiv–xxv).

Knowing the Positivist context of their era, it is not surprising that both women buttress their defense of female desire with the medical opinion of a doctor, one real and the other fictional. Roqué was far more subtle than Capetillo in her campaign for women's sexuality in that she safely hid behind the mask of fiction and was careful to denounce adultery at the same time that she asserted women's need for sexual fulfillment. The fact that Roqué was a civic leader also facilitated her intellectual peers' acceptance of her; she was extremely active in women's advocacy and was responsible for setting up many scholarship funds and programs for women's education and professional development.

In 1894 Roqué started a magazine about women titled *La Mujer* (Woman), which was the only periodical of its kind owned and edited by a woman (Suárez Findlay 1999, 65).<sup>4</sup> This was an important step toward forming solidarity among women of her class and providing a place for them to publish and exchange ideas. Later in her life Roqué founded the women's rights organizations Liga Femenina (League of Women, 1917) and the Asociación Puertorriqueña de Mujeres Sufragistas (Puerto Rican Association of Women Suffragists, 1924). She fought for suffrage throughout her life and lived to see the battle won. Roqué received for her numerous accomplishments an honorary doctorate in literature from the University of Puerto Rico.

Roqué's passionate study of the sciences partly explains her use of medical discourse in *Luz y sombra*.<sup>5</sup> As the first female member of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Roqué likely knew the work of the novelist, poet, historian, and independence activist Salvador Brau and she was a friend of Zeno Gandía's (two men of science who were also authors and politicians). Roqué's scientific and literary orientations are evidenced by her published studies in the natural sciences, as well as her creative writing and editing of five newspapers over the course of her lifetime (Delgado Votaw 1995, 76). A well-informed intellectual such as Roqué was surely aware of the male elite's employment of medical discourse to denounce miscegenation and unwed unions. Such discourse sought to control and objectify female bodies.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the medical doctor, novelist, and social policy reformer

4. Ribes Tovar (1972, 103) sets the date for *La mujer* at 1897.

5. For a discussion of Roqué's Positivism, see Chapter 5 of this study.

6. With the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico in 1873, miscegenation was a particular threat to the "white" peasant population because of racial mingling with freed slaves, primarily in rural areas (Trigo 2000, 6). The medical doctor Francisco del Valle Atilas is one Puerto Rican thinker who expressed the fear of contamination of the white race by Afro-Cubans (whom he believed to be immune to anemia) in *The Puerto Rican Peasant*, published in 1887 (Trigo 2000, 81). For further information on essentialized conceptualizations of women by defining them in terms of

Zeno Gandía's perspective toward women focused largely on their maternal role. He was concerned with female promiscuity, population control, and sanitary conditions for child rearing; that is, his focus was women's biology and behavior as it affected society.<sup>7</sup>

Roqué's work, then, appears to be in dialogue with the Catholic Church's and liberal intellectuals' essentialized representations of female sexuality, as we saw them in the previous chapter. While Puerto Rican men of science made advances in overcoming disease and poor sanitation in a colony neglected by Spain and economically dominated by a small number of families, their treatises and fiction also had the negative effect of presenting an objectified subculture of femininity. It is not fortuitous, then, that Roqué's novel innovatively rearranges and reinterprets traditional gender traits within the female protagonist and dares the transgressive act of presenting the fulfillment of female sexual desire as a biological need in a female character who is a psychological and emotional subject, as well as a physical one.

### Reclaiming the Self: *Luz y sombra*

Roqué navigated the waters of power, legitimacy, and subversion carefully by creating an outward fictional shell that appeared to uphold the status quo ("unfaithful women are punished") while reconstructing the essentialized images of women. She did this by manipulating literary commonplaces already familiar to the reader, such as the reason/emotion dichotomy and

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reproduction (motherhood), see Chapter 5 of this study (the section "Church and Governmental Controls over the Female Body in Puerto Rico from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries"), Barceló Miller 1987 and Suárez Findlay 1999.

7. Looking at a chronology of Zeno Gandía's life, one notes a consistent overlap between literature, medicine, social consciousness, and politics that included focused attention on the role of the female body in national health concerns. The son of Spanish royalist sugar plantation owners, Zeno Gandía was born 1855 in Arecibo. He began writing early, even while attending medical school in Madrid from 1870 to 1875. After graduating and traveling through Europe, he worked as a medical doctor in Ponce. From this point, around 1900, Zeno Gandía dedicated most of his time to politics and writing (Laguette 1978, xviii). He became the president of the Education Committee in the Cámara de Delegados (House of Delegates), was appointed sanitation inspector in Ponce, and later worked in journalism. As I mention in Chapter 5, Zeno Gandía's formation as a doctor and his concern for infant health in Puerto Rico led his interest to women's roles in population control, health, and sanitation. A product of his times, he held an essentializing view of women that equates women with their biological functions. In 1887 he published the prize-winning study *Higiene de la infancia* (Hygiene During Infancy) in which he depicts the female body as a source of disease as well as nourishment, as previously mentioned.

medical discourse. The advent of the Naturalist novel, which took up such unsavory characters as the prostitute, the opium addict, and the alcoholic, laid the foundation for Roqué to be able to talk about female sexuality in a positive way because Naturalism already opened the topic, albeit with a negative emphasis on sexual impulses and deviance (prostitution, promiscuity, and so on).<sup>8</sup> The erotic nature of the prose of some *modernista* writers, such as Julián del Casal (Cuba, 1863–1893), Darío, and Silva also aided in opening the door to writing about female sexuality in the literary circles of Latin America.

Roqué defends female sexual desire as a normal part of a healthy existence. She converts the dangerously contaminating abject female body into the “clean” or “hygienic” whole identity of the feminine self, thereby reversing the horror of the feminine abject in the Naturalist novel by normalizing, rather than marginalizing, women’s sexuality.<sup>9</sup> *Normalizing* is a loaded term when applied to the feminine because, in the contexts of the novels in the study at hand, it acquires the meaning of “valorizing the feminine traits as its parallel masculine trait,” but *normalizing* also means “equating with the masculine,” where *normal* equals *male*. That is, women authors’ views of equality often follow a masculine standard rather than creating alternative standards. In this sense, early feminists are not yet developing a sense of different but equal; nonetheless, they are clearly placing gender inequality in the center of intellectual ambiances and offering explanations and solutions to remedy the gross imbalance. Roqué’s act of pointing out and rewriting gender inequality vis-à-vis sexuality was an important step for future generations of feminists.

The story of *Luz y sombra* sets up a false dichotomy between two friends: Julia is rational, worldly, Positivist, and materialist, while her friend and confidante is sentimental, maternal, self-abnegating, and domestic. While

8. In Puerto Rico, the primary example of the Naturalist novel is Zeno Gandía’s *La charca*. Zeno Gandía’s concern with the health, nutrition, and hygiene of infants and the mother’s (often poorly executed) role manifests itself in the descriptions of the filthy conditions in which children are raised in *La charca*. While male laborers in the novel are also to blame for moral decline (several male characters are alcoholics and engage in the physical abuse of women), it is the impotent yet seductive female body that is most consistently under Zeno Gandía’s Naturalist gaze. Other Naturalist writers, such as the Argentine Eugenio Cambaceres and the Mexican Federico Gamboa, also focus on the promiscuous and sexualized female body as a cite of barbarism and social decay.

9. I am using Kristeva’s region of the cultural unconscious that comes about when such images are repressed. For Kristeva’s definitions of the term *abject*, see *Powers of Horror* (1982) (as impure organic matter [1–2]; as an individual’s memories [6]; as expressed in that which is considered socially taboo and in writing [16–18]).

Julia is tempted to the brink of adultery—presumably representing the *sombra* of the title—Matilde is the ideal of the spiritual and moral Angel of the House and, one assumes, represents *luz*. The dichotomy is carried into each woman's choices of residence and spouse. Julia is an elite urbanite and Matilde lives on a small farm in the countryside. (Here Roqué seems to convey that rural settings are more spiritually beneficial than the corruption of the city.) Julia marries Sevastel, an older yet handsome and distinguished military general, as a way to acquire a large fortune and social status. Matilde falls in love with and marries her cousin Paco, a man of modest means.

The main plot revolves around Julia's unsatisfying marriage and subsequent near-adultery. Not only is Sevastel significantly older than his wife, but he is also drained of spirit and vigor from carousing in his youth. He is therefore not able to satisfy Julia's need for physical love and passion. This lack in Julia's life sets the stage for her attraction to Sevastel's young, handsome friend Rafael. Despite temptation and a growing sexual awakening, Julia is determined to maintain her honor and resist Rafael's advances. She takes a trip to Spain with her husband, hoping the distance from Rafael will cool her feelings.

The second part of the novel resumes after Julia's stay in Spain, which did not mitigate her desire for Rafael as she had hoped. She finally agrees to meet him for an amorous encounter in his country home. She hesitates to go through with the meeting, but succumbs to Rafael's pleas. Once at Rafael's bachelor residence, Julia decides not to proceed with the affair. Before she can leave, the couple is surprised by Sevastel and two other soldiers. Although the soldiers do not recognize Julia, Sevastel does. He tries to kill her but the other men intervene. Sevastel and Rafael agree to duel over the anonymous "mistress" the following day. The dishonored husband administers a fatal wound to his opponent, who, before dying, assures Sevastel that he never consummated his relationship with Julia.

Julia becomes seriously ill upon hearing of Rafael's death. Sevastel calls on a young, handsome Guatemalan medical specialist to help his wife regain her health. Dr. Bernard (apparently a reference to the real-life French scientist and influence on Zola's Naturalism, Claude Bernard) prescribes a bizarre treatment to cure her. He reasons that, as the patient is dying from lack of love and passion, the only cure is seduction. Because her husband is not able to administer the prescription (implying, as the reader has suspected, that he is impotent), the doctor claims that the only way to cure Julia is for he himself, the doctor, to do the job. Bernard assures an uneasy Sevastel that he is a happily married man and has no impure intentions with Julia. The pseudoseduction/medical treatment is successful; Julia regains her strength, reconciles with Sevastel, and later gives birth to a daughter. (Although the

doctor's seduction is supposed to be based on a performance of courtship, there is substantial suspicion in the mind of the reader about the identity of the baby's father.) Sevastel later dies of a "strange disease," a "general weakening that slowly turned him into a cadaver." Julia then dies of tuberculosis and finally her daughter dies of an unspecified illness (138). I will get back to Dr. Bernard's dubious medical treatments in a moment.

Matilde's is a secondary narrative that supports Julia's plot line; her words mainly express concern for Julia's well-being and voice the joys of simple living in a marriage filled with love and honest work. Matilde's one tragedy is the death of her infant son, Paquín, from diphtheria.

The epistolary structure of the novel is of utmost importance in the process of subjectivity. The exchange of letters lends itself to a reevaluation of feminine identity because of its intimate tone and the metafictional effect that reading the correspondence between the two women creates. The exchange of missives is mainly between Julia and Matilde, although some letters circulate among the women and their spouses as well. (For example, Sevastel corresponds with Matilde about Julia's health.) In a collection of studies that considers the question of feminine style and themes in the epistolary form in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, Christine Planté finds that letters were an appropriate space for individuals to disregard conventional gender norms; for example, women wrote about politics or men wrote on sentimental themes (1998, 17). This is true in Roqué's novel, as Julia transgresses gender norms by talking openly about her desire for Rafael (permissible for men but taboo for women) and by describing her rational nature in terms considered masculine at the time.

In Roqué's novel the epistle creates an intimate, private ambiance that makes the reader feel as if he or she were spying into private lives of strangers. (I will discuss this voyeuristic effect in more detail later in my analysis.) As the letters progress, the reader becomes familiar with the characters in this personal mode and he or she is drawn more deeply into the plot; we are witness to their innermost desires and conflicts *as the female characters tell them*—not as they are related by the masculine perspective of a third-person narrator. Psychologically, the blurring between fiction and reality that one experiences upon reading a novel composed of letters aids the rewriting of the female identity.<sup>10</sup> That is, the characters/authors of the letters seem to become the reader's acquaintances as the story progresses. The epistolary

10. Vivienne Mylne has noted the epistolary novel's ability to grant verisimilitude to fiction to assuage eighteenth-century France's distrust of the untruth of fiction (cited in Gurkin Altman 1982, 6).

form is a vehicle for convincing the reader that transgressive women like Julia exist in one's society, while it also draws him or her in as a witness or accomplice to this transgression, thus implicating the reader in the feminist rewriting at hand.

In an epistolary novel, then, readers experience the text more interactively than when they read fiction with a central narrator's voice because of the illusion that one is discovering private documents and also because of the added verisimilitude. Setting up the reader's psychological investment in the story is an effective authorial strategy for presenting subversive symbolic material. The theoretical work of Leon Festinger and James Carlsmith, well-known psychologists who investigate cognitive dissonance, aids in understanding the literary strategy of the epistolary style in *Luz y sombra*. The theory of cognitive dissonance aims to explain how the human brain adopts certain ideals in order to maintain consistency between an individual's behavior and his or her belief system, thus eliminating dissonance between the belief and the action; it explores the question "What happens to a person's private opinion if [one] is forced to do or say something contrary to that opinion?" (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, 1). For our exploration of literary strategy, the question could be, What happens when a reader with patriarchal views on gender willingly "spies" on letters in epistolary fiction that defend transgressive behavior for women? According to the theory of cognitive dissonance, "the private opinion changes so as to bring it into closer correspondence with the overt behavior the person was forced to perform" (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, 1). So, one may argue that a reader who becomes a party to fictional transgression, as is the case in the epistolary novel, begins to sympathize with the feminist sentiments contained in the letters.

As I have mentioned, an important function of the epistolary structure of *Luz y sombra* lies in most of the textual voice coming from the female characters Julia and Matilde. In Roqué's novel, *women are the subjects of their own narratives*; they present and analyze their own problems and one another's dilemmas, provide comfort to one another, and criticize oppressive aspects of their society. In Roqué's novel women author their own lives and create their own symbolic selves. They are authors of their own identities. By using their agency to fulfill their desires (albeit accompanied by negative consequences, in the case of Julia), they are engaging in their own subjectification.

Although *Luz y sombra* includes an omniscient narrator in the second part of the novel, Roqué's narrator often speaks in the first person plural to

continue the intimate textual voice from the letters. The narrator's use of *we* continues the invitation from the first part into the private sphere of the two female characters and is an extension of the familiar tone of the epistolary structure. The narrative voice is an important addition to the letters, because it serves as a sympathetic voice of authority that judges and emphasizes what the various characters in the novel have to say.

Roqué's disassembly of gender stereotypes is channeled through two literary mechanisms: a redistribution of male and female characteristics and defense of women's sexual desire and sexual agency. The mixing of masculine and feminine characteristics mainly concerns male objective logic versus female romantic sentiment and masculine sexual love as opposed to feminine emotional love. Comparable to a typical educated male's outlook (the example of *La charca's* grounded, somewhat jaded Juan del Salto comes to mind), Julia faces life with a clear, rational, analytical outlook. She says of herself, "Creo soy yo la que estoy en el terreno firme de la vida; pues con mis diecisiete años precoces, me inclino siempre a lo práctico, a lo que me reporte utilidades positivas; y dejo o ahogo los sueños vagos" (31) [I believe I am the one on life's firm ground; at the precocious age of sixteen, I am always inclined toward that which is practical, those things that bring me positive gains, and I abandon or smother vague dreams]. Julia determines, in her rational and dispassionate way, to follow society's example and marry the wealthiest and most prestigious suitor.<sup>11</sup> Roqué's use of language that rings of Positivism and progress is not fortuitous; her own great interest in Positivism, outlined in Chapter 5, links her sympathetically to the character of Julia, despite the latter's shortcomings. Julia's goal is to lead a comfortable and luxurious life and hold a high position in society; she is not concerned with what she considers ephemeral and sentimental love. She disdains the "feminine" language that Matilde uses in her letters; in response to her friend's flowery proclamation of love for her cousin Paco, she writes: "¡Oh, qué idilio, amiga Matilde, es tu carta de ayer! ¡Cuánto me he reído al pensar de que manera tan tonta te has enamorado de . . . el amor!" (39)

11. Although Julia is somewhat similar to Cabello's character Balanca Sol in her rational way of following society's example in regard to marriage, there are some significant differences. Julia is not interested in social climbing; she is already a member of society's elite. Also, Julia marries an elegant man and harbors hope for a romantic awakening toward her husband, while Blanca Sol's husband is a buffoon. Julia admires Sevastel but feels frustrated by his cool attitude toward her, whereas Blanca Sol is more malicious toward her clumsy bourgeois mate, her malice being the fault of the superficial society that misguided her. Julia is dispassionate about the prospect of love; Blanca Sol disregarded a love she had in favor of social climbing, which leads her to resent Serafin and Lima society in general.

[Oh! How idyllic, Matilde, my friend, is your letter from yesterday! How I have laughed upon thinking in what a silly way you have fallen in love . . . with love!]. Another time she gruffly taunts Matilde for “hacer el oso” (62) [engaging in traditional courtship] with her fiancé.

This objective, logical outlook and derisive stance toward the weak, emotional response is not unlike the response of conservative literary critics of the era to the so-called effeminate *modernista* poetry of del Casal or Darío, calling their writing *precioista* and criticizing them for being overly focused on aesthetics, rather than attending to practical nationalist themes. While it is not my goal here to develop such a comparison, I use this example to show that Julia describes herself and interacts with Matilde in terms that were considered virile for the times, as opposed to the artful and artificial prose of the *modernistas* or the sentimental style of Romanticism.<sup>12</sup> Thus Roqué’s creation of Julia’s rational, Positivist character was likely an attempt to enfranchise women into the ruling class’s ideal of masculine power.

### Renouncing Angelic Self-Abnegation: Roqué’s Claim on Female Sexual Desire

In addition to logical intellect and disdain for the sentimental, sexual desire is another typically male-dominated sphere that Julia boldly enters. Choosing women’s sexuality for her critical redefinition of gender norms put Roqué in dialogue with a significant issue of her time; as I discussed in the previous chapter, heavy emphasis was placed on chastity for women as Angels of the House, to the point of restricting women’s social movement and limiting women to modest styles of clothing.

Roqué uses her descriptions of nature to buttress social messages in the novel. In *Luz y sombra* nature reflects Julia’s awakened sexual desire. The chapter preceding Julia’s rendezvous with Rafael closes with references to Julia’s sexual frustration. It describes her desperation, rapidly circulating blood, and fiercely beating heart that “wastes her organism” (110).<sup>13</sup> At the

12. For example, the pages of José Enrique Rodó’s 1900 book-length essay *Ariel* (1968) are filled with references to the importance of rational judgment and virility for the future of a strong Latin America. The Mexican Positivist Barreda’s (1991) essay on women in the early twentieth century (addressed in Chapter 1 of this study), in turn, seriously questions women’s capacity for intellectual (masculine) thought.

13. The following segment opens with a description of the dark night, with resplendent stars gleaming behind black clouds that would not yield drops of rain. This imagery reminds the reader

same time, a storm is brewing and threatens to erupt but maintains itself on the threshold of fruition:

Ese cariz tempestuoso es muy común en nuestros veranos. Mas la tempestad suele resolverse en relámpagos sin ruido, a las que acompaña un calor asfixiante que hace decir a los más: “¡Oh y qué cargada está la atmósfera!” cuando lo que pasa es que está demasiado enrarecida a causa de la absorción del vapor de agua por las nubes, y la respiración se hace difícil, sintiéndose una anhelosa sensación de angustia. (111)

[This tempestuous atmosphere is very common in our summers. Moreover the storm tends to dissolve in silent lightning, which is accompanied by an asphyxiating heat that makes everyone exclaim “How stuffy it is!” when what is actually happening is that the air has expanded owing to the clouds’ absorption of the water vapor, and this makes one experience difficulty breathing and a breathless sensation of anguish.]

While this passage reflects Roqué’s great interest in the natural sciences, it is not difficult to read the metaphor beneath the thin veneer of *costumbrismo* writing (a form of writing in the nineteenth century in Latin America that described local customs or ambiances). The analogy is between the natural phenomenon of the suffocating summer heat, produced by a brewing storm whose energy is held prisoner within the clouds, and Julia’s physical decline and anguish produced from her brewing passion.

There are many passages in which Julia’s need for sexual fulfillment is expressed in a direct manner. While after 1900 some Latin American male writers acknowledged female sexual desire in their fiction (although they rarely used a bourgeois housewife to exemplify this), women writers avoided the topic to save their reputations and good standing in the literary

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of the soiled-dress metaphor that marked the deconstruction of the light/shade dichotomy; the dress was white with a dark spot, but here the black cloud is sprinkled with white stars. The mixing of black and white is repeated to emphasize the mix of virtue and vice within everyone. A reading of the deconstruction of the dichotomy between black and white obviously lends itself to a racial reading of the symbolism as well. This would be particularly relevant given Roqué’s fight for humane treatment of the slaves on her husband’s plantation in 1872 and her support and celebration of their emancipation in 1873 (Paravisini-Gebert 1994, 154).

community.<sup>14</sup> In one often-quoted passage of *Luz y sombra*, nonetheless, the narrator plainly states Julia's right to physical satisfaction within her marriage:

Dios y el mundo le habían concedido un esposo para que satisficiera los sueños de su mente, las aspiraciones de su alma, y los impulsos de su ardiente temperamento. Tenía, pues, derecho al amor, tenía a los goces legítimos de su estado, y de casi todo eso estaba privada por una burla sangrienta del destino. . . . La esposa se abrasaba de pasión mientras el marido dormía como un bendito. (76–77)

[God and the world had granted her a husband to satisfy her mind's dreams, her soul's aspirations, and her burning temperament's impulses. She had, then, the right to love, she had the right to the legitimate enjoyment of her married status, and she was deprived of almost all of this because of a cruel hoax of destiny. . . . The wife burned with passion while the husband slept the sleep of the just at her side.]

The narrator blames Sevastel for denying his wife her “right to love,” which, to add legitimacy to the narrator's words, is sanctioned by God. The word choice (“right”) lends a legal tone to a woman's privilege to sexual satisfaction within marriage, which minimizes Julia's responsibility in her stumble with Rafael in the moral economy of the novel.

14. Several novels by male writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries explore female sexuality directly. Federico Gamboa published the novel of the prostitute *Santa* (Mexico, 1901), while Silva's *De sobremesa* (written 1895–96, published 1925) presents a disdainful view of female promiscuity in the lovers of the decadent protagonist Fernández. The Guatemalan *modernista* writer Enrique Gómez Carrillo is one of few authors who unambiguously present proper bourgeois women as agents of sexual desire (although with some degree of sensationalism, in decadent style) in his collections of short fictions *Almas y cerebros* (1898) and *Del amor, del dolor y del vicio* (1898; revised edition 1901), to offer two examples. His wife, the Peruvian writer Zoila Aurora Cáceres, in 1914 explores an affair of a proper bourgeois woman in her novel *La rosa muerta*. Roqué, then, was an early female advocate of a woman's right to sexual fulfillment within marriage. Rather than present this desire as a decadent urge (Gómez Carrillo) or as a symptom of a marginalized character (such as a prostitute or a female stage performer), Roqué writes this desire into a female character who is otherwise recognizable and not terribly unusual in the eyes of her reader. As I discuss in Chapter 5, her defense of female sexuality is partially in line with her contemporary and fellow Puerto Rican Luisa Capetillo (although Roqué disagreed with Capetillo's advocacy of free love for women outside marriage).

In another scene, Julia is the subject of this legitimating narrative. She intimates to Matilde the frustration she experiences in Sevastel's bed:

Las caricias frías y convencionales de mi esposo me exasperaban, me enardecían: me abrasaba, una desesperación sin nombre se apoderaba de mí, y después de dar vueltas en mi lecho solitario, y de despedazar a mordiscos los encajes de mis almohadas, o de mi pañuelo, . . . por fin el sueño, sobreponiéndose sobre mi naturaleza exuberante de juventud, rendía mi materia. (65)

[My husband's cold and conventional caresses exasperated me, they enflamed me; I was burning up, an unknown desperation took hold of me, and after tossing and turning in my solitary bed and biting the lace on my pillowcase or handkerchief to shreds, . . . finally sleep, overcoming my exuberant and young nature, subdued my flesh.]

In this scene Roqué overtly represents a young woman of the dominant social class as the subject of sexual desire. In this way, the narrative reverses the suppression of extramarital, or even extrareproductive, sexual behavior advocated by the Catholic Church.<sup>15</sup> Roqué embraces female sexual pleasure that social policy has suppressed, prefiguring by more than a half century this discursive gesture in Cixous ("Laugh of the Medusa"), Irigaray, and Kristeva. Like later thinkers, Roqué employs sexual awakening as an integral part of the character's development of the self.<sup>16</sup>

The narrative strategy in the passage above is noteworthy. Roqué leads the reader three levels deep into the text. The first level is the narrator's

15. For more information on the governmental and clerical suppression of the female body, see Chapter 5 of this study.

16. For Kristeva the concept of *jouissance* is part of the subject's becoming: "The overt expression of jouissance, a pleasure emerging outside the structures of the social order, is . . . a sign of woman gaining her own identity and entering the sphere of the subject as opposed to that of the passive object" (Kristeva 1974a, 138–52). Similarly, for Irigaray the female libido is "one symptom of something outside that threatened the signs, the sense, the syntax, the systems of representation of meaning and a praxis designed to the precise specifications of the (masculine) 'subject'" (1985, 43). The "story" to which Irigaray refers here is Freud's Oedipal myth to describe the process of adult heterosexuality. One of the many aspects of the Oedipal model that Irigaray critiques is the absence of focus and explanation of the female libido: "Woman would thus find no possible way to represent or tell *the story of the economy of her libido*" (43). For Irigaray, Freud's idea of the libido may be neuter or masculine, but never female (43).

observing from outside, the second is the first-person stories of the letters, and the third is Julia's narration of a scene within the epistle. The reader is a voyeur to this scene not only because he or she is allowed to "spy" on Julia's letter, but also because the reader gains entry into the intimate area of her bedchamber. Rather than reading a scientific narrator's account of aphasic women who are continually victimized and sexually violated, as in *La charca*, the reader is the witness to a woman's expressing her need for passion. Roland Barthes, who likens the reader to a "spectator in a nightclub," recognizes as an authorial strategy the act of rendering the reader voyeur: "The text is a fetish object, and this fetish desires me. The text chooses me, by a whole disposition of invisible screens . . . : vocabulary, references, . . . etc. and, lost in the midst of the text . . . there is always the . . . author" (1975, 11, 27). As participatory witnesses to this desire, the reader, to quell the cognitive dissonance between accepted social norms (women are self-abnegating and men are desirous), may begin to sympathize subconsciously with the subversive message and begin to believe, in fact, that women are as desirous as men. He or she is lured into the spectacle of the text and is thus psychologically invested in its content.

Julia gives voice to her physiological sexual lack, which is causing her health to deteriorate visibly: friends and acquaintances comment upon her sickly appearance (65–66). Her apparent symptoms of frustration are dark circles under her eyes, pallor, and weight loss. While a strong sex drive in a woman is portrayed as aberrant in male-authored texts of the period, lack of sexual fulfillment is unhealthy here. By assigning visually detectable evidence to Julia's problem, Roqué is "rendering the invisible visible," to use Fernando Feliú's phrase; the protagonist's problem takes on greater importance when it seems to fall under a label created by and maintained by medical doctors (2002, 154). The terms "enardecer" (enflame) and "abrasar" (burn) clearly suggest the physical nature of her dissatisfaction with Sevastel, and if that is not clear enough she states that sleep finally conquers her "materia" (matter), the physical source of her suffering. The chaste Angel of the House Matilde, rather than dismissing Julia's problem, is devastated to hear of such suffering, when she herself experiences all the pleasures and comforts of love with Paco (69). The epistolary style implicates the reader in this exchange as a third-party confidante to these problems; he or she gravitates to sympathize with Matilde's compassionate position toward Julia, since she, after all, is the shining example of virtue.

A Woman Writes the Doctor: Medical Justifications  
for Female Sexual Desire

To make her case to the bourgeois readership of Puerto Rican society, Roqué has various unlikely characters in the novel rally for the legitimacy of Julia's physical desire. Rafael, the doctor, Matilde, the narrator, and even Sevastel all recognize in some way that Julia's unreleased passion is unhealthy and morally debilitating. Rafael is the least convincing of the group to defend Julia's sexuality, because he has selfish motives for his argument (he would be the fortunate recipient of Julia's passion). However, the dialogue between the two as he is trying to convince her to submit seems to serve as a general message to the reader. This is suggested through an interesting use of italics in the dialogue between Julia and Rafael:

[Julia, hablando de Sevastel] No puedo amarle a él, pero tampoco *debo* amar a otro.

—¿Y por qué? ¿No sabe Ud., señora, que la naturaleza tiene sus leyes, y que *nadie* puede contravenirlas sin que le traicione su propio corazón? (101–2)

[(Julia, about Sevastel) “I cannot love him, but neither *should* I love another.”

“And why not? Do you not know, Madame, that nature has its laws and that *nobody* can contravene them without cheating one's own heart?”]

The italics on *nadie* draw the reader's attention to it for a closer analysis of the statement. *Nobody* is a relevant choice for emphasis because it is genderless, implicating both men and women. When Rafael says that *nobody* can go against nature's laws, he is equalizing women and men. While we cannot assume that Roqué was condoning adultery, for either men or women, in the context of the novel the reader gets a clear message that when women are tempted by adultery, it may be because they are not sexually fulfilled in their marriage, rather than because they are deviant or malicious. As I mentioned earlier, women were punished for sexual transgression; local law called for prison terms of up to six years for elite women who were convicted of adultery, but this was not the case for men (Suárez Findlay 1999, 27).

Thus Roqué's message could be read as a way of bringing this injustice to the attention of her readers.

While the idea of sexual equality is implicit above, the narrator is daring in her explicit communication of this view. The narrator's use of the word *angel* below is ideologically loaded; it is a deliberate attempt to wipe away the artificially pure and perfect façade of the Angel of the House, acknowledging that this model is the basis for gross inequality between the sexes:

Hay que convencerse de que *la mujer no es un ángel; es un ser lleno de pasiones lo mismo que el hombre*; y no basta a veces la buena educación moral que en teoría se les da, para preservarlas del desvarío que le imponen sus propias pasiones. . . . Y no atendiendo a estas leyes poderosas que dominan nuestro organismo . . . se las expone a todos los peligros de la imprevisión, a luchar como heroínas, *y pocas llegan a la cúspide sin mancharse en el camino, aunque sea con una leve sombra, su blanca vestidura*. (103; my emphasis)

[One must convince oneself that *women are not an angels; they are beings filled with passions just like men* and at times the proper moral education that, in theory, we give them is not enough to save them from the whims their own passions impose upon on them. . . . And ignoring these powerful laws that dominate their organisms . . . they are exposed to all the dangers caused by this lack of foresight, abandoned to struggle like heroines, *and few arrive at the cusp without soiling their white dresses on the way, even if it is with a trivial spot.*]

The metaphorical soiled white dress that nearly every woman must wear is a deconstruction of the dichotomy of the virginal white of a wedding gown and the marring spot of the moral slip, light and shade, or female virtue versus deviance. The emphasis is on the inhuman standard inherent in the Angel of the House. Here the dichotomy is deconstructed; light and shadow are inextricably mixed within women, as in men. The narrator stresses the moral equality of men and women and that it is just as difficult—and unrealistic—for women to maintain impeccable moral conduct as it is for men.

This is a groundbreaking statement for early feminism for two reasons. First, it takes away the ideological crutch of female moral superiority—a claim that many educated women used or implied in order to lobby for

power and rights in the 1800s across Europe as well as in the Hispanic world (Groneman 1995, 226). Second, it is performing reversals of masculine discourse, while giving place and prominence to female sexuality, much as French poststructural feminist critics perform in the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> As Paravisini-Gebert (1994) points out, Roqué is innovative in Spanish American early feminist fiction in that she recognizes that writing female sexuality as a healthy component of human existence forcefully undermines patriarchal control, by removing women from the Virgin Mary pedestal and placing them on equal moral footing with men.

To buttress this stance, the angelic Matilde, who is idealized as a perfect nurturing wife, mother, and friend, reiterates it. When Julia becomes ill after Rafael's death, Sevastel is shocked to learn of her passionate nature, thinking that her "proper upbringing" would have dampened her desires. To this the Angel of the House, Matilde, replies:

Eso sucederá, le repliqué yo, si la mujer fuera un ser distinto de los demás seres, y la educación pudiera sustraerla a las leyes propias de nuestra naturaleza imperfecta. *Pero desgraciadamente estamos formadas de la misma sangre y con los mismos vicios de organización que ustedes.* No somos seres distintos de los demás, y por lo general se nos exige que seamos como las conveniencias sociales nos quisieran, *y no como Dios o la naturaleza nos han formado.* (122; my emphasis)

[That would happen, I replied to him, if Woman were a different being from the rest of the beings, and education could separate her from the very laws of our imperfect natures. *But unfortunately we are formed from the same blood and with the same physical organization as you.* We are not beings different from the rest, and in general we are required to be the way social conventions want us to be, *and not the way God or nature have formed us.*]

17. For example, in her 1974 *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray (1985) reclaims female sexuality by deconstructing Freud's theory that all sexuality is masculine. However, it is important to note that, unlike the poststructural feminist Irigaray (and Hélène Cixous [1981] in "Laugh of the Medusa"), Roqué does *not* celebrate what masculine discourse sublimates as the abject. That is, while these twentieth-century feminists celebrate women's reproductive bodies as a way of reclaiming them from the marginalized spaces into which masculine discourse projects them, Roqué's novel provides a new discourse of women's sexuality for her time, that *omits*, as a political gesture, the essentialized representations of masculine notions of female reproduction.

Although the words are subversive because they equate the sexual physical needs of the sexes, they are tempered because they are spoken by a character who upholds all the most highly valued patriarchal qualities of female citizenship and motherhood. Matilde is self-abnegating, adores her family, and works diligently on her small farm—but she also happens to believe that women have the same temptations and urges as men. For Roqué's character and the narrator, God and nature are the authors of this equal desire; the reader may thus infer that the ruling class (social conventions) is *unnatural, unhealthy, and ungodly* to deny this truth.

Taking an elite discourse used to legitimize the words of characters in Naturalist writing, Dr. Bernard (the doctor Sevastel calls upon to cure his wife) justifies Julia's suffering from a medical standpoint.<sup>18</sup> As we saw in Chapter 5 of this study, the figure of the medical doctor and medical discourse held a privileged place in a Puerto Rico poised for Positivist-style modernization. Therefore it is not fortuitous that Roqué chooses Dr. Bernard as the mouthpiece for her early feminist messages. Although the appearance of Bernard and his unusual treatment may seem an "artificio . . . que le quita fuerza y verosimilitud del relato" (Saldivia Berglund 2000, 201) [an artificial plot element . . . that detracts from the strength and believability of the story], it has clear basis in Roqué's historical context. While medical discourse in both medical and nonmedical settings was used at the turn of the century to uphold patriarchal ideology, here Roqué employs it in the service of her subversive character: "Bien dice el sabio doctor: 'Había mucho fuego en los ojos de Julia, y no había rendido aún tributo a las leyes naturales, gozando de la vida del amor con la fuerza de sus veinte años, para que estuviera ya hastiado de todo'" (122) [So says the wise doctor: "A fire burned in Julia's eyes and, not having yet rendered tribute to natural laws by enjoying life's love with the force of a twenty-year-old, she was now completely weakened"]. The doctor repeats this diagnosis, emphasizing the biological reasoning behind Julia's behavior: "Esta joven no ha tenido expansiones en la edad en que la naturaleza impone como ley ineludible los dulces goces del amor" (131) [This young woman has not had experiences at the age when nature imposes the sweet pleasures of love as an ineluctable law]. Despite its Romantic tone, the message is expressed in medical but also

18. A popularized form of medical discourse started to appear at the end of the nineteenth century and was used to diagnose the illness of the marginalized classes and contained as part of its subtext a transfer of contemporary bourgeois values (Trigo 1995, 134). As I discussed in the preceding chapter, female chastity was one of these values.

legal terms ("law"), likely to speak to the two areas of expertise of the ruling class: law and medicine.

Given, then, the numerous voices sympathetic to Julia's plight and the messages, both embedded and explicit, regarding women's human and imperfect character (which is even tolerated by God), she is not as guilty as she may appear on a superficial reading of the novel. Sevastel, however, does not escape as unscathed. He is arguably a better candidate to represent *sombra*, or punishable vice, than is Julia. It is because of his promiscuous past that he is unable to satisfy his wife:

Si Sevastel hubiera sido un hombre apasionado, que hubiese podido apagar la sed de goces de aquella naturaleza sensual, al menos, dominada la materia, sólo el espíritu divagaría falto también de satisfacciones. (76)

[If Sevastel had been a passionate man who had been able to quench that sensual nature's thirst for pleasure, at least, with the body sated, only the spirit would wander lacking satisfaction.]

This quotation is emphasized by the image of Sevastel's saintly (*bendito*) *sleep*, while his wife "burned with passion" by his side—with an ironic usage of biblical moral imagery, here used to represent a former carouser (77). His punishment is emasculation: Sevastel is sexually impotent, at least to the extent of not carrying out his husbandly duties of attending to Julia's desire. He is also emasculated by Rafael's conquest of his wife (although he does clean this stain on his honor with Rafael's blood) and by Dr. Bernard, who literally must publicly court his wife back to life, as Sevastel is incapable. This scene, perhaps the most perplexing of the novel, is worth a closer look:

[Dr. Bernard a Sevastel]:—Para despertar esa alma dormida, aletargada, es necesario hacerla sentir, y yo voy a intentar la prueba.  
—¡Ud.!! Dijo aún más admirado Sevastel. ¿Se va Ud. de enamorar de mi mujer?  
—Enamorarme, no. Voy a curarla. . . . voy a hacer el amor a Julia . . . a fin de conmover las fibras más sensibles de su alma enferma.  
. . . Sevastel bajó la cabeza hondamente preocupado. (132)

[(Dr. Bernard to Sevastel): “In order to awaken that sleeping, benumbed soul it is necessary to make it feel, and I am going to carry out the experiment.”

“You!!” said Sevastel, even more bewildered. “You are going to fall in love with my wife?”

“No, not fall in love with her; I am going to cure her. . . . I am going to make love to Julia . . . in order to stir her infirm soul’s most sensitive fibers.”

. . . Sevastel bowed his head, deeply concerned.]

This must have struck a very sensitive chord with contemporary readers; to have a medical doctor, a pillar of society, engaging in one of the most condemnable acts among gentlemen—dishonoring an elite officer by seducing his wife—and justifying it medically! In the novel the doctor and Sevastel must devise a plan to fool society so that the husband is not publicly humiliated; however, the reader has already witnessed Sevastel’s double dishonor. Here Roqué reverses the usual role of doctors and science in literature, as the scientist and literary critic Laura Otis has recognized them. Otis identifies a scientific fear of the penetrability or corruptibility of cells (which she terms “feminization”)—and a literary fear of corruption of ideologies. Female sexuality plays an important role in maintaining national purity: “The sexual paranoia inherent in the membrane model . . . has its basis in two interrelated cultural prejudices: (1) depreciation and misreading of female sexuality as passive penetrability, and (2) exaggerated esteem for the intact hymen, whose rupture initiates one into the realm of the passive, the penetrated, and the impure” (Otis 1999, 7). This doctor-of-love tangent in *Luz y sombra* is a daring tactic that positions the doctor as the advocate for lovemaking, toying with the reader’s expectations of morality of the elite and rewriting a more realistic notion of sexuality and womanhood.

### Conclusions

The ending of *Luz y sombra* may seem anticlimactic for contemporary feminists because Julia, her baby, and Sevastel all die, while the traditional female prototype Matilde is exalted. However, the early feminist messages lie in the treatment of Julia’s character and others’ positions in relation to her. This circuitous manner of questioning ruling-class ideals was one way in

which criticism was executed in Roqué's time.<sup>19</sup> Although Matilde is the ideal domestic Angel of the House, she changes and molds national discourse about women from within this superficial shell of the "perfect" hard-working, modest, self-sacrificing woman by defending female sexual desire, rather than condemning Julia. The wayward protagonist is forgiven by her husband, who blames himself for her moral slip. In light of these major rewritings of hegemonic identity politics on women's sexuality, Roqué's novel challenges the power structure by encouraging women to attend to their happiness rather than maintaining wealth through marital ties.

Another question to consider is that, if the death of Julia's child is meant as a punishment (Chen Sham 1999, 174–75; Saldivia Berglund 2000), then why does Matilde's child also die, seeing that she is blameless of any transgression? One explanation for the deaths of Julia and her family could be that Roqué was borrowing a standard plot of Naturalism, which incorporated death (often vividly and medically depicted) as one more part of life, just like birth, eating, working, and loving. A Naturalist depiction of death generally differs from a Romantic demise in that the latter typically appeals to emotions, is sanitized, is described with spiritual language, and is much further removed from the way fatal illnesses or accidents look in the real world, whereas death in Naturalism is studied as the result of hereditary illness, accidents caused by poor working conditions, or socially derived disease. Death is a very common physiological (rather than spiritual, or moral) phenomenon in the works of Zola, Zeno Gandía, Brau, the Spaniard Emilia Pardo Bazán, and many other Naturalist writers of the era, in which characters' deaths are common. It does not necessarily indicate that a character is being punished, but rather that he or she is the victim of a violent society,

19. Zavala recognizes the act of building upon accepted literary norms to voice opposition to traditional ideology as a common strategy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors: "It is important to identify the oppositions used to organize the . . . discursive field, the politics behind a style of writing . . . the reverse discourse, the polymorphous exploits of tropes to exercise critical power. . . . The already spoken and already written triggers the imaginary to re-write the same narrative, with different images, portraits, expressions, idiolects" (1992, 179). Zavala identifies how authors write against an existing power structure by taking literary commonplaces from it and using them in an altered form to make a statement, to "ring changes" (179). Molloy has recognized that women authors engage in critique by appropriating male language and using it to lend authority to their discourse: "More than excluding women, that [phallogocentric] language assigns women to a subordinate place, and, from that position of authority, deauthorizes woman's word. That is, it includes that word but in a position of weakness. . . . What women can do and, in fact, have done is establish a new praxis, subverting the authoritarian language that puts them 'in their place' dislocating it in different ways depending on the time period" (1991, 143; my emphasis). In Roqué's novel using a medical-doctor character and medical discourse to voice her social critique is a sort of pirating of male discourse for a feminist cause.

hereditary illness, environmentally caused accidents, or poverty. Another explanation could be the many deaths in Roqué's immediate family (which was common for the times): her mother died when she was a child, and two of her own children died at a young age.

If the language, characters, and structure of the novel are studied in the context of contemporary texts and how women were written into fiction, and if we consider Roqué's intent and constant advocacy of women's rights throughout her life, we cannot read Julia's death as a poetic punishment. Based on the text, in which Julia's error is blamed on social norms and Sevastel's frigidity by three different legitimizing voices (the omniscient narrator, the virtuous Matilde, and Dr. Bernard), we can hardly conclude that Julia dies because she "soils and distorts the sacrosanct institution of marriage" or that the ending "figures perfectly into a patriarchal logic: the defense of matrimony and the condemnation of adultery" (Chen Sham 1999, 175–76) or that "este castigo tiene un fin claramente moralizador porque se apega a los valores morales y religiosos sin cuestionar sus bases" (Saldivia Berglund 2000, 202) [this punishment has a clearly moralizing end because it clings to moral and religious values without questioning their bases]. On the contrary, the reader sympathizes with Julia and understands her actions as the consequences of patriarchal social rules that limited women's options for financial support and their ability to find a true and equal love. As I have mentioned, the character who represents *sombra* is most likely Sevastel.

In *Luz y sombra* Roqué presents a logical, intelligent female character who is both sexually desirous and justified in her sexuality by several supporting characters and the narrator. In so doing, she is rearranging in a new way the traditional scripts of scientific discourse that presented women as passive objects requiring society's protection. The narrative strategy, similar to the comparative literary critic Katie Arens's reading of Cixous's strategy in "The Laugh of the Medusa," engages in critically "violating 'customary' assumptions of her culture rather than exploring two 'natural' categories [male and female]" (1998b, 238–39). Thus Roqué's Julia "renders herself visible; she is no longer engaged in the mimicry of disguise," but is poised to make her own mark in the symbolic (244). Casting female sexuality as a necessary part of an intelligent and vocal woman's mental and physical health was an answer to literary texts such as *La charca* that were densely packed with dangerous and oppressive stereotypes. This was a step in the right direction to gain ground for the social change, to attempt to redefine gender boundaries, and in so doing, equalize women's right to social freedoms and agency with those of men.