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**Imagination in Novels and  
Autobiography in Letters: The Female  
Presence in Juan Valera's Life and  
Fiction**

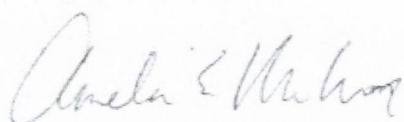
Thesis Submitted to the University of Dublin for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2014

**Amelia E. Mahon**

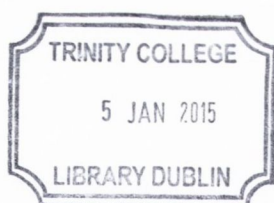
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## Summary

Juan Valera (1824-1905) left behind a substantial epistolary corpus. Some of the author's letters have been destroyed over the years, others lost, but all those penned by Valera which still exist have been painstakingly sought out and compiled by Leonardo Romero Tobar and a team of colleagues in their series, *Correspondencia*, spanning eight volumes and Valera's life from the age of 23 in 1847 to his death in 1905, at the age of 81. The series, published between 2002 and 2009, has created an invaluable opportunity to build upon the research of biographers and scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and indeed, those of the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> who were limited to the study of Valera's letters through more modest collections or, indeed, the elusive and fragmentary collections held by Valera's descendents.

In this thesis, *Imagination in Novels and Autobiography in Letters: The Female Presence in Juan Valera's Life and Fiction*, the author's novels are examined in relation to his personal correspondence to determine the extent to which his own experiences, especially those with the primary women in his life, served as inspiration for the characters and themes which appear in his work. Indeed, what becomes clear is that his relationships with wife, Dolores, and sister, Sofía, were particularly influential. This is not surprising. In "Las mujeres y las academias, cuestión social inocente" (1901) and *Meditaciones utópicas sobre la educación humana* (1902), written at the end of Valera's life, the author reflected upon the significance of a man's relationship with such primary female family members, concluding that they played an essential part not only in motivating and directing him, but in infusing in him a deep sense of self-confidence—conclusions he arrived at following the absence of support he had experienced in the preceding 30 or so years of his troubled marriage to Dolores. Not only did he, according to his own admissions, endure a situation in which his wife was destroying him with her insults and hatred; having chosen Dolores, precluded him from finding another, life-long companion who could offer him the love and encouragement he felt he needed. In their absence, he was forced to resort to extra-marital affairs, as he claimed to his sister. Aside from the self-

confidence these “amoríos” offered him, Sofía would also prove a vital source of comfort and support to him, not to mention a positive, if imperfect, female model upon which he could retain his appreciation for the opposite sex, and indeed, as he did, go on to celebrate women in his novels.

Valera was not a feminist, but his correspondence, critical work and novels all account for a respectful attitude toward women and a perspective which advocates their right to dignity, respect and independence, even if not the degree of independence many would have liked. Valera’s ideal for male-female relations rested upon the concept of the woman embracing a supporting role, which he felt was, as a general rule, most likely to produce the best outcome for Spain’s future (and indeed that of humanity in general), not because women would be destructive working in the public sphere, but because men (and children) would never develop and achieve their full potential without a female devoted to offering her love and a special intuition required for guidance, which he believed men lacked. Valera was fully capable of respecting women who did not adhere to his ideal—we see admiration for Emilia Pardo Bazán and other women writers, many of whom would have dedicated themselves first and foremost to a career, but his novels generally represent his ideal, one which eluded him in his own life: his egoistic, unaccepting wife falling far short of his fictional heroines’ more generous, self-sacrificing disposition.

This thesis also examines an essay, “Altruistic Faith” (1886), written by U.S. former first lady Rose Cleveland, which Valera discovered during his diplomatic posting to Washington D.C. (1884-1886) as Minister for the Spanish Legation. Not only would Cleveland’s discussion of social relationships go on to influence Valera’s literary and social initiatives upon returning to Spain, but they would also impact upon his second period fictional works, of which his novels will be discussed.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

Juan Valera (1824-1905) was not only a novelist; he was a poet, a dramatist, a writer of short stories, a literary critic, a journalist, an academic, a politician and a diplomat. Of all of his pursuits, however, it is probably his novels for which he is most remembered. He produced eight completed works during his literary career, with the first period of productivity spanning 1874 to 1879, in which he wrote *Pepita Jiménez*, *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino*, *El comendador Mendoza*, *Pasarse de listo* and *Doña Luz*. There then followed a sixteen year break, during which the Andalusian native undertook his most prestigious diplomatic postings in Lisbon, Washington, D.C., and Brussels, with his sojourn abroad culminating in his appointment as the Spanish Ambassador to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1893. Shortly after his return to Spain in 1895 he resumed his career as a novelist producing, between a month following his repatriation and 1899, *Juanita la Larga*, *Genio y figura* and *Morsamor*.

Valera was born in Cabra, in the province of Córdoba, on October 18, 1824 to Dolores Alcalá Galiano y Pareja, the Marquise of la Paniega, and José Valera y Viaña, a retired naval officer. He had an older brother from his mother's first marriage, José (also referred to as Pepe), and two younger sisters, Sofía and Ramona, both from his own parents' union. Although well-connected, his parents struggled financially, and following young Juan's early education and university studies in Andalusia, he set out for Madrid with the hopes of gaining renown and financial success in the capital. Unfortunately, life proved more challenging than he had expected. Early into his twenties he abandoned the possibility of a legal career and entered the diplomatic service. Various overseas assignments featured throughout his life, taking him far from his family and from Spain. Aside from these periods abroad, Valera served in several elected and non-elected positions within the Spanish government, including as Subsecretary of State in 1868, following the overthrow of Isabel II, and as Director of Public Instruction in 1872. Literature, however, remained his love. In 1861, he was offered a seat in the Royal Academy for his early work in literary criticism. Not until the age of 50 would Juan Valera truly embark upon the career of novelist, completing his masterpiece, *Pepita Jiménez*, in 1874. Seven novels would follow.

In addition to Valera's novelistic output, the author left behind a substantial epistolary corpus. Some of the author's letters have been destroyed since his death, others lost, but all those penned by Valera which still exist have been painstakingly sought out and compiled in recent years by Leonardo Romero Tobar and a team of colleagues in their series, *Correspondencia*,<sup>1</sup> spanning eight volumes and Valera's life from the age of 23 in 1847 to 1905, when he died at the age of 81.

The series published between 2002 and 2009, has created an invaluable opportunity to build upon the research of biographers and scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and indeed, those of the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> who were limited to the study of Valera's letters through more modest collections (sometimes owing to the incomplete discovery of a body of correspondence and sometimes as a result of a volume editor's deliberate omission of letters deemed repetitive or unnecessary for gaining an "overall view") or, indeed, the elusive and fragmentary collections held by Valera's descendents. It was not until 1974 with the publication of *Cartas íntimas*, for instance, that Valera's relationship and long-standing exchange with his sister, Sofía, was brought to public attention. Although *Cartas íntimas* was an indispensable early source of insight into Valera's private life (indeed it contains the correspondence of other family members also), the work is incomplete, lacking 115 additional letters to his sister which Leonardo Romero Tobar's recent publication offers us.<sup>2</sup> Not until 1989 and 1991, respectively, were *Cartas a su mujer* and *Cartas a sus hijos* published—again, both containing a comprehensive but incomplete offering of correspondence between Valera and his closest of kin; *Cartas a su mujer* is shy of 38 letters to Valera's wife which Romero Tobar's *Correspondencia* provides.

The late publication of such intimate collections has coincided with a trend: the early focus of Valera scholarship upon Valera the public figure and the relative neglect upon Valera the brother, husband, father, son and uncle. When his personal life was

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Valera, *Correspondencia*, ed. L. Romero Tobar et al. Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 2002-2009, vols. 1-8. All references to the *Correspondencia* series will be followed by the abbreviation "C" and the relevant volume and page number(s).

<sup>2</sup> In fact *Cartas íntimas* indicates that Sofía died in 1889 but it is evident from *Correspondencia* that she did not in fact die until the autumn of 1890. *Correspondencia* (volume 5) contains 38 letters to Sofía written in 1890 alone. The last of Valera's letters to her contained in *Cartas íntimas* is dated the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, 1889.

examined, it was often in terms of his salacious love affairs. Valera's relationships with the women of primary significance in his life, wife and sister,<sup>3</sup> were only mentioned in passing, if at all; and indeed, no attempt has ever been made to discern the impact of his experience with these women upon the themes and characterisation in his novels. At the same time a myriad of critics over the years have affirmed their belief, and in some cases have set out to prove, that Valera's life experiences were influential upon his novelistic creation. For Manuel Azaña, "Facultad poderosa en Valera es la memoria, apoyo de su fantasía. Su imaginación nunca fue libre; se pone a guiarla, fantaseando, y más que inventar, recuerda" (*Ensayos sobre Valera*, 37). As Alberto Jiménez Fraud asserts, "En todas o casi todas sus novelas, Valera habla de sí, se copia a sí mismo, pone siempre algo suyo en los personajes que crea, y traslada a ellos sus ideas, las memorias de sus antiguos sentimientos, los fracasos de sus ilusiones, los entusiasmos y alambicamientos de sus exaltaciones amorosas" (*Valera y la generación de 1868*, 124).

And yet the study of such truths has remained incomplete. Alberto Jiménez Fraud's own work (1973) aims to situate Valera in the historical context in which he wrote, as a member of the Generation of 1868, but his efforts to draw links between Valera's life and novels do not extend beyond briefly examining aspects of the author in his work, particularly as they inspired the depictions of his male protagonists. Bravo-Villasante's biography of Valera (1974) is based on her access to collections of correspondence held by the native Andalusian's descendents, but we know she had access to only some of the letters available today. She does not appear to have had at her disposal any of Valera's correspondence to Sofía (or Gumersindo Laverde), and in Chapter 9 of *Vida de Juan Valera*, she refers to the difficulty in establishing biographical sources for certain elements in *Genio y figura*, revealing that her access to Valera's correspondence with others, such as Serafín Estébanez Calderón, may have also been limited. Of the events and characters described in Valera's seventh novel, she remarks:

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<sup>3</sup> In "La importancia de la mujer en el progreso y cultura del linaje humano", Valera indicated a man's wife and sister to be among the most influential female figures in his life—in most cases more so than his mother, he stated (*Meditaciones utópicas sobre la educación humana, Obras completas*, vol. 3, 1411). All further references to Valera's works in *Obras completas* will be followed by the abbreviation "Oc" and the relevant volume and page number(s).

Todos parecen verdaderos, sacados de su propia experiencia o muy próximos a él ... Hasta la descripción del fornido negro Octaviano, hecha con tanto pormenor, tiene todos los visos de ser verdadera. Por desgracia no podemos comprobarlo. Si conservase toda la correspondencia de Valera, es casi seguro que habría rastros de todas estas aventuras, pues la novela y las cartas, en su caso, muchas veces relatan idéntica experiencia. (80)

Actually, letters contained within Romero Tobar's collection indicate very clear sources for the slave character, Octaviano (C 1, 186 & 192). Bravo-Villasante's other attempts to draw links between Valera's life and novels, while insightful, are also limited. As a biographer she had a great task before her: to discuss Valera not only as a novelist, but as a writer of other genres, as well as a man of many professions. From Manuel Azaña we have the biographical *Ensayos sobre Valera* (1971) and *Vida de don Juan Valera* (2005).<sup>4</sup> Azaña makes some links between Valera's novels and life experience, but like Bravo-Villasante, his intention is broader, and indeed, the bulk of Azaña's extant work focuses primarily upon the author's life up to and including 1874, not upon the important years after. As for Cyrus DeCoster (*Juan Valera*, 1974), Andrés Amorós (*La obra literaria de don Juan Valera: la "música de la vida"*, 2005) and José Montesinos (*Valera o la ficción libre*, 1957), these scholars offer us insightful studies of Valera and multiple genres of his literary work and while some attention is given to drawing comparisons between the man's life experience and the material of his novels, such efforts are limited. While Monestinos primarily examines Valera as a literary anomaly, DeCoster and Amorós provide general overviews of the author's life, thought and literary output.

Finally, Manuel Lombardero (2004) wrote a biography examining, as in the case of Bravo-Villasante, a broad view of Valera, but did not focus upon his private life specifically, and certainly makes no attempt to understand Valera's novels through the context of his relationships with the primary women in it. In the case of Carlos Sáenz

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<sup>4</sup> Manuel Azaña's original work, *Vida de don Juan Valera* (1925), was lost before ever being published. *Ensayos sobre Valera* (1971) represents Juan Marichal's effort to gather parts of Azaña's study that had been published as separate articles and essays. In *Vida de don Juan Valera* (2005), Antonio Martín Ezpeleta offers previously unpublished elements of Azaña's original work, based upon drafts of it which remain in archives.

de Tejada Benvenuti, who does offer a brief but insightful “Análisis de esta correspondencia” to *Cartas íntimas*, he makes no attempt to relate the subjects discussed to the material of Valera’s novels.

In this study, *Imagination in Novels and Autobiography in Letters: The Female Presence in Juan Valera’s Life and Fiction*, Valera’s novels are examined in relation to his personal correspondence to determine the extent to which his life experiences, especially his relationships with key women—such as his sister, wife, mother, daughter and nieces, as well as several love-interests—influenced the themes and characterisation in his work. The subject is studied through his correspondence with these women and with male friends.

While some have produced lengthy studies making links between the author’s biography and novels, none have done so with a focus upon such primary familial relationships. Robert Trimble in *Juan Valera en sus novelas* (1998) looks specifically at Valera in his work, concluding that the author is present in an authorial sense and projects his own personality into his fiction more than his contemporaries. James Courtad in *The Letter as Creative Perfection: The Transition from Epistolarity to Fiction* (2002) focuses upon Valera not as a novelist who wrote letters, but as a letter writer who wrote novels as well as short stories and criticism. His study is extremely broad, viewing Valera’s place within a great tradition of letter writing in Europe. He also attempts to analyse all aspects of Valera’s correspondence, with separate chapters on Valera’s “familial letters”, “political letters” and “literary letters”. In the course of his chapter on “familial letters” (which includes the author’s correspondence to close friends as well as family members), he only briefly mentions Valera’s wife and sister. In a relatively modest section examining the transition from correspondence into fiction, Courtad looks at a variety of themes (different to those which this thesis focuses upon) and indeed various genres of Valera’s fiction to determine the influence of his predilection for letter-writing and also biographical elements upon his work.

As for Valera’s fictional heroines, while they have been much studied, there has been little to no examination of biographical sources for Valera’s female characters through the use of his correspondence. While Luis González López in his early study, *Las*

*mujeres de don Juan Valera* (1933), offers literary sketches of Valera's fictional heroines, with a separate chapter devoted to each of the author's novels, Francisco Arias Abad in *Las mujeres de don Juan Valera* (1935), critically examines the depiction of Valera's female protagonists and their respective roles within their novels. However, neither author relates his study of Valera's fiction to the author's life. Nor have more contemporary examinations of Valera's fictional heroines, such as *Valera, ingenio y mujer, el imaginario femenino en las novelas de Juan Valera* (2009) by María Remedios Sánchez García and *The Representation of Women in the Novels of Juan Valera: A Feminist Critique* (1997) by Teresia Langford Taylor, made use of Valera's personal correspondence to any significant degree. In fact, Sánchez García's work reads much like a very detailed general study with initial chapters exploring Valera's life, his aesthetic ideas, the role of the narrator in his fiction and the socio-historical context in which his novels unfold. It is not until the last chapter that Sánchez García narrows her focus to examine Valera's fictional women, offering basic commentary, with substantial quoting from the primary texts. Of her study in general, she comments: "La aportación fundamental viene en el estudio sistemático de las novelas y su origen, de las temáticas y su origen, de las figuras femeninas y su origen; en sustancia: del origen de la novelística valeriana" (11). Sánchez García makes minimal use of Valera's correspondence in her efforts to discover the basis for Valera's fictional heroines and thematic material within his novels; indeed, she only cites the first three volumes of Romero Tobar's *Correspondencia* (those published between 2002 and 2004) in her bibliography, even though subsequent volumes had been published before the 2009 publication of her book.

Teresia Langford Taylor, in contrast, interests herself specifically in the examination of Valera's fictional heroines through a feminist lens, as the product of patriarchal ideology, stating: "Juan Valera's female characters are objectified within a phallogocentric society so that they are always signified—never signifier, always marginalized" (5). While she claims that "Valera's female characters are not cited as examples of "mistreated" women, nor is Don Juan labeled as a "closet" nineteenth-century misogynist" (ibid.), she appears to justify her study arguing that the application of feminist theory to Valera's work is legitimate, because it has never systematically been done before, and because it offers us another perspective on his

work: “[S]cholarship demands that the major fictional contribution to the canon by this important nineteenth-century Spanish author be reexamined” (3-4).

Lou Charnon-Deutsch in *Gender and Representation: Women in Spanish Realist Fiction* (1990) takes a similar interest in the influence of patriarchy upon Valera’s heroines, claiming that “Literary characterizations tend to apotheosize women into bigger-than-life (aggrandized or depraved) figures” (13), and that “it becomes necessary to to understand male perceptions of female nature and how these projections structure or reflect their apprehensions in order to understand the basis of the distortion....” (ibid.). It is Charnon-Deutsch’s contention that Valera, much like his contemporaries, was not familiar enough with women to write accurately about them:

If one holds that an author describes most convincingly what he or she knows best, we can only conclude that the peculiarly distorted view of the Spanish woman in nineteenth-century fiction is the product of ignorance and the popular misconceptions of the day, whether manifested in the form of an exalted admiration or idealization of women, as in nearly all of Valera’s novels, or a radically opposite representation, as seen in much of Clarín’s fiction. (13-14)

There is no evidence from Charnon-Deutsch’s work that she had any knowledge of Valera’s personal life or his relationship with the primary women in it. Thus, while offering a very thoughtful and interesting study, Charnon-Deutsch has insufficient background knowledge to justifiably and definitively attribute the depiction of Valera’s heroines in their entirety to “the ignorance and the popular misconceptions of the day”. Indeed, the present study, *Imagination in Novels and Autobiography in Letters: The Female Presence in Juan Valera’s Life and Fiction*, in contrast, avoids imposing any particular theory upon Valera’s work, feminist or otherwise, but instead endeavours to discover who Valera really was from his own accounts, what he valued, and what were among the most pivotal events and relationships in his life, with a view to determining any possible link between his lived experience and the material of his novels.

Another scholar taking a feminist position on Valera's work, and seeking to group him among his contemporaries, is Jeanne Maurer Chew, who, in *The Portrayal of Feminine Life in the Novels of Fernán Caballero, Alarcón, Pereda and Valera Viewed Against the Background of Woman's Position in Nineteenth Century Spain* (1958), justifies classifying Valera among others who were conservative and traditionally-minded, by refusing him credit for certain very liberal attitudes and ideas he indisputably held (discussed at length in chapter 1 of the present study), not to mention by neglecting the nuance behind his heroines' representations. She claims, for instance, that what unites the novels of Fernán Caballero, Alarcón, Pereda and Valera is that the "contemporary struggle between the old and new is manifest throughout, and [that] these authors customarily choose to depict and uphold the *status quo* for womanhood" (158). An examination of Valera's novels will demonstrate that such a claim does not do justice to Valera's depiction of his heroines, and importantly, where Valera does appear to be celebrating traditional gender roles, it does not take into account the role that Valera's particular life experience, temperament and beliefs had in shaping his fiction.

Finally, Joaquín Oltra Pons, author of "Valera y la mujer norteamericana" (1979), argues that Valera was indisputably misogynistic. Importantly, he appears to have reached this conclusion from both a pre-conceived idea of how Valera was likely to have thought as a nineteenth century Spanish male, but also from his access to a limited collection of Valera's personal correspondence from Washington, D.C. His article solely examines the author's correspondence from the U.S. capital, attempting to discern Valera's attitudes about American culture and its women, and he makes no reference to the depiction of women in Valera's fiction.

Although each of the above studies represents a unique and interesting contribution to a better understanding of the life and work of Juan Valera, the recent publication of Romero Tobar's *Correspondencia* offers an invaluable source of autobiographical material, which ideally positions the current researcher to make better-informed appraisals regarding Juan Valera's beliefs, values and key life experiences, which had a profound influence upon the material of his fiction.



Earlier scholars did not have at their disposal the wealth of correspondence available today, while others did not have the necessary scope available to them for thoughtfully and comprehensively evaluating Valera's complex ideas and character, not to mention their impact upon his novels. As this study is not a comparative one, but one which instead seeks to find the truth from an in-depth study of his fiction and correspondence primarily, but with reference also to his criticism, it is well-poised to offer a much-needed reassessment of Valera's heroines at a time when previous scholarship has fallen short of answering questions with the full context in mind of who our author really was, what he valued, and how he viewed the world and others.

Finally, previous research has left us with a good understanding of Valera the critic, the stylist, the politician, the diplomat. Aside from illuminating sources of characterisation and themes in his novels, this study will contribute to the as yet limited scholarship concerning Valera the brother, husband, son, father, uncle: in sum, Valera the family man, but no less so, Valera the lover, and in turn, Valera the disillusioned, frustrated and scorned husband and how his marital troubles, as well as other experiences, influenced the material of his novels.

**Chapter 1** will begin by exploring Valera's own comments about his fictional heroines, as well as the author's tolerance, liberal-mindedness and circumspection revealed in his correspondence and criticism, and how such tendencies influenced the themes and characters in his novels. This chapter will also explore the influence that his experience of his wife, Dolores, had upon his fiction, showing that Valera did indeed deal with themes of personal challenge and frustration, as he experienced them in life.

**Chapter 2** will explore two novels with a particularly strong direct link to Valera's life experiences, *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino* and *Pasarse de listo*, and will show how not only did the author's personal experience of hardship affect his novels on multiple levels, but how this was the case in spite of his edifying mission for art. The consequent depiction of women in these novels of bleaker themes will also be discussed.

As Chapter 1 has already explored the influence of Valera's relationship with his wife, Dolores, on aspects of his fiction, **Chapter 3** will look at the impact of the author's relationship with another key woman, his sister Sofía, upon themes and characterisation in his novels.

**Chapter 4** will continue to shed light on the provenance of themes and characterisation in Valera's novels, with a shift to considering Valera's extraordinary heroines, as opposed to his heroines of more ordinary moral stature discussed in Chapter 2. Valera's most extraordinary heroines all, interestingly, appear in his later-period works, owed in large part to the influence of an article "Altruistic Faith" upon him, which Valera read during the sixteen-year break he took from writing novels. Although it is in fact his last four novels which depict his heroines as civilisers, it is only in his last three novels that Valera's female protagonists's become practitioners of "altruistic faith". "Altruistic faith", discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4, is a concept Valera admired greatly, as is evident from his references to it in his critical works, fiction, and from his own social and literary initiatives, which embrace Rose Clevelands's ideals about how individuals should relate to and encourage others. Valera had a particular interest in such ideals because of the disappointing way in which he had been treated by his wife. This thesis will come full circle by looking once again at Valera's relationship with his wife and its impact on his fiction, to conclude Chapter 4.

## Chapter 1

### Valera in his Novels and the Women he Imagined

This chapter will begin by introducing the subject of Juan Valera's fictional heroines, his intriguing views on the role and position of women in society, and aspects of his particularly tolerant and liberal-minded disposition, which are reflected in the portrayal of themes and characters in his fiction. Next, we will look at the influence that his troubled marriage to Dolores Delavat had on the material of his novels.

Despite the existence of an extensive collection of personal letters, trying to establish a connection between Juan Valera's real-life experiences and fictional creations is not straightforward. He rarely mentioned his novels in his correspondence, and rarely wrote substantively about the specific inspiration for his many stories and characters.<sup>5</sup> While most of Valera's novels carry with them dedicatory letters or postscripts, in which the author often addresses questions pertaining to the sources of his characters and other elements, his remarks generally aim to dispel the notion of there being any biographical influence on his fiction. For many Valera scholars, however, such denials have seemed disingenuous, leading a good number to persist in their endeavour to identify biographical sources, assisted as they have been by the thousands of letters which survived Valera, following his death in 1905.

Frequently commented upon have been the perceived correspondences between people Valera knew and his characters, with his heroines drawing particular focus and attention—not least because female characters represent the central protagonists in several of his novels. Even in novels where the central figure is male, Valera seems unable to resist surrounding his hero with strong women, who in many cases eclipse their male counterparts for their brio and self-possession.

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<sup>5</sup> His introduction to the Appleton edition of *Pepita Jiménez* is one of his most elaborate, and certainly his most famous, attempts to share the source of inspiration for any of his novels. Referring to the Revolution of 1868, and the tumultuous period following, he wrote of *Pepita*: “Yo la escribí cuando todo en España estaba movido y fuera de su asiento por una revolución radical, que arrancó de cuajo el trono secular y la unidad religiosa. Yo la escribí, cuando todo en fusión, como metales derretidos, podía entrar en el molde y amalgamarse fácilmente. Yo la escribí cuando más brava ardía la lucha entre los antiguos y los nuevos ideales. Y yo la escribí en la más robusta plenitud de mi vida, cuando más sana y alegre estaba mi alma, con optimismo envidiable, y con un *panfilismo* simpático a todos, que nunca más se mostrará ya en lo íntimo de mi ser, por desgracia” (*Pepita Jiménez*, 61).

Other qualities common to his heroines, aside from their natural beauty, is their fastidious attention to grooming and personal care, their strong will and independent nature—all born of an innate pride. They also tend to be highly intelligent, shrewd, and are frequently curious, in the intellectual sense. As such, they are quick to learn; even Valera's heroines from the lower strata of society, partly due to intrinsic grace, partly through attention and assimilation, attain a level of refinement well above their original station in society.

What Valera's heroines are not is always pure and virtuous in a conventional sense. Valera addresses this, and what he regards as the harsh judgments of certain critics, in a rather striking authorial intrusion, at the start of Chapter 16 of *Pasarse de listo* (1877). He writes:

Entre las muchísimas faltas que me ponen ... nada me aflige tanto como que me acusen de pintar siempre mujeres algo levantiscas y desafortunadas. ¿Con quién se trata el autor?, dicen. ¿No ha conocido sino mujeres livianas? ¿Por qué no nos presenta en sus historias a las honradas y puras, a las que cumplen siempre con su deber, a las que pueden y deben servir de modelo? Este autor, añaden, odia a las mujeres o tiene malísima opinión de ellas. En contra de tan injusta acusación me toca decir que ni Clara ni Lucía, en *El Comendador Mendoza*, ni menos aún Irene, en *El Doctor Faustino*, carecen de todas aquellas prendas y requisitos que pueden y deben hacer de la mujer una criatura angelical. No negaré, en cambio, que doña Blanca había pecado, y que la ferocidad de su penitencia era peor que el pecado mismo: que Pepita Jiménez fue demasiado coqueta y más apasionada de lo razonable, y que una vez enamorada no sabía contenerse ... ; que María, la inmortal amiga, se abandonó a su pasión, como si no hubiese tenido libre albedrío, como si hubiese sido impulsada por una fuerza irresistible; que Constancita era interesada, calculadora y caprichosa, y que Rosita no reconocía más ley divina o humana que la de su antojo; pero en todas estas mujeres (nadie sostendrá lo contrario) se advierten en medio de sus mayores extravíos tal anhelo de infinito amor, tan dulce ternura y tan fervoroso ahínco de hacer el papel de salvadoras y de redentoras, de proporcionar la bienaventuranza o un asomo de bienaventuranza para el hombre

querido, aun a costa de la propia condenación, que las perdonamos sin esfuerzo y nos parecen simpáticas.<sup>6</sup>

Implicit in the critics' negativity toward Valera's heroines is the idea that they are licentious. Valera recognises this in his response, arguing assertively that the "extravíos" of these women are forgivable because of the reasons for which they were committed. According to Valera, each woman's behaviour should be understood in a positive light, born as it is out of a desire for love, out of a devotion to their man, and even, in pursuit of his ultimate well-being. For the author, not only because of these circumstances should his heroines be forgiven; they should be admired for the self-sacrifice implied.

Valera's ease in defending his heroines must also arise from the fact that while he may have regarded modesty and restraint in the conduct of unmarried women as an ideal, he was nonetheless inclined towards forgiving lapses. Writing on the subject in *Meditaciones utópicas sobre la educación humana* (1902), he states,

Sin duda, el recato, la honestidad y el pudor son virtudes que deben resplandecer más en la mujer que en el hombre. La valentía, la entereza, el sufrimiento en los trabajos y fatigas y el denuedo para arrostrar los peligros son virtudes más varoniles. Esta distinción, no obstante, no debiera llevarse como se lleva en el día hasta el más vicioso de los extremos. Aplaudimos y tal vez hallamos graciosa y hechicera la timidez o la cobardía de las mujeres. En el hombre, nada más vergonzoso que la nota de cobarde. En cambio, la mujer sobrado amorosa, desenvuelta o lasciva, pierde su crédito y llega a deshonorarse, mientras que el hombre adquiere celebridad, es objeto de admiración y de envidia y pasa por un portento que estimula a la imitación si logra muchos favores de las mujeres y las enamora, las seduce y las pierde. (*Oc* 3, 1416)

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<sup>6</sup> (133-134). Valera's sensitivity to criticisms of his heroines and his work in general is witnessed on other occasions also. Around the time of *Pepita Jiménez's* publication by Appleton in the United States, the author wrote to his nephew, José Alcalá Galiano, of the novel: "Los periódicos hablan no poco de ella, unos bien y otros mal. Ahora, como aquellos tunos son tan hipócritas, han dado en calificar de inmoral, impura y escandalosa mi novela ... me duele de un modo atroz en el fondo del alma que aquella canalla, que no tiene más Dios ni más moral efectiva que el dollar, me maltrate y ofenda a la buena, candorosa y apasionada heroína, y todo porque se lo larga a don Luis, como si los yankees no se lo largasen nunca a nadie" (*C* 4, 547).

It is very evident that Valera disapproves of this double standard. Referring to the hypothetical case in which a young woman of 24 has a single slip-up, “un desliz”, he writes, “esta muchacha está perdida. Y, en cambio, si un hombre, al llegar a los venticuatro años ... conserva incólume y sin ningún menoscabo su pureza, la rechifla, la burla, la chacota, es el premio de su virtud; apenas queda alguien que no la suponga hipocresía, o que no la atribuya a deplorable defecto físico, o que no la mire como falta grotesca y risible. ¿Qué culpa tienen las leyes y las instituciones de esta lamentable aberración de nuestro sentimiento?” (ibid.).

In fact Valera goes as far as to argue for not only greater leniency toward the woman who finds herself in such a position, but to suggest that greater moral scrutiny also be faced by men who, allowed an excessive degree of freedom, are also in part to blame for the very behaviour they participate in censuring: “Yo pregunto, pues, sin atreverme apenas a darme contestación: ¿no sería mejor que fuésemos menos benévolos o menos indulgentes con los amorosos extravíos de los hombres, y algo menos severos también con las mujeres, que no incurrirían en tales extravíos si los hombres no las sollicitasen?” (ibid.). Considering Valera’s comment, his depiction of Fadrique and Blanca in *El comendador Mendoza* (1876) is interesting. While Blanca is described as having entered into an affair with Fadrique of her own free will and according to her own desires, Valera’s male protagonist is depicted as having pursued her energetically, blind to and uncaring about the potential pain he could cause, and knowing that she is a married woman, and fervently religious to boot.

Once their relationship has terminated, Blanca is ridden with the guilt of her sin, so severe it tortures her for seventeen years, eventually leading to debilitated health and death. Valera does not leave Fadrique indifferent to the pain he has caused. On more than one occasion the man is said to express remorse, although importantly, not because of any belief that he has sinned against God (Fadrique is an atheist), but because of the pain he has caused a fellow human being. In a soliloquy of Chapter 26, following the news that Blanca has fallen ill after their confrontation, he reflects with shame on how her piety had spurred him on, her resistance representing the “sal y pimienta que haría más picante y sabroso el logro de mi deseo” (*Oc* 1, 438). And yet

Valera wants us to like Fadrique. In Chapter 29, following Blanca's death, Valera shows the Commander full of anguish. Having closed Blanca's eyes, Father Jacinto turns and says, "Te ha perdonado," to which the Commander replies,

¡Ah padre! Yo no me perdono... Me sería menos insufrible en la memoria el recuerdo de una afrenta no vengada ..., de una vileza en que hubiese incurrido, de una mancha en mi honor... En cualquier otro caso me sería más fácil con conciliarme conmigo mismo. Aunque Dios me perdone..., yo no me perdono.  
(448)

In this way, Valera ends the episode with his character's powerful message of contrition. Of course the ultimate demonstration of Fadrique's responsibility comes when the man gives away his life savings in order to secure the freedom of his biological daughter, Clara, to marry whom she wants. He has already taken responsibility for the emotional aftermath of his affair with Blanca, but with this next step he also accepts responsibility for something even greater: the child born from it, whom Fadrique essentially adopts as his own upon discovering her existence. This upstanding gesture contrasts sharply with the behaviour of Juan Maury in *Genio y figura* (1897), an aristocrat and the biological father of Lucía, who refuses to recognise his paternity even though his ex-lover, Rafaela, has devised a strategy to protect his good name from being tarnished by association with her.

Valera's approval of Fadrique is clear: the Commander Mendoza is among the author's most fervently admired characters. He is described in youth as having been "jocoso" (365) and disposed toward seeing "lo ridículo y lo cómico en todo," so that "nada o casi nada respetaba" (ibid.), traits which would have harmful consequences for Blanca. And yet not once does the reader detect the author's disapproval of the man, depicted at 50 and reflecting with guilt upon the "ligereza" of his character (403) and the hurt it has caused others. Instead Valera's praises are endless: commending his good humour and cheerful nature, his honesty, caring qualities and the manner by which he conducts himself honourably, in even the most intense, heated situations. Even Blanca who is said to despise him, because of his lack of piety and his role in destroying her virtue, at one point concedes that he is too much a gentleman to carry

through with the threats he has made to expose their past affair—threats Fadrique has been forced to make, given the tyrannical woman's intention to destroy their daughter's life in order to relieve her own guilt. Valera may have believed in the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions, but he did not abide by rigid moral precepts as established by institutions such as the Catholic Church. Fadrique is shown to be even more moral than Blanca in spite of his being an atheist; while she, on the other hand, a devout religious woman, is depicted as a hypocrite willing to sacrifice her daughter's happiness in the name of morality, even though the person who stands most to benefit from the correction she insists upon is herself and her own tormented conscience.

### **I. Tolerance, Liberal-mindedness and Circumspection in Valera's Correspondence, Criticism and Fiction**

As the themes of *El comendador Mendoza* and Valera's critical essays would suggest, the author was remarkably independent-minded, his liberal disposition being evident in comments he made specifically about religion and the Catholic Church. Writing to his friend, Gumersindo Laverde, in 1867, he states:

Creo que tengo, a mi manera, un espíritu profundamente religioso, si bien cada día me separo más, allá en el fondo de mi conciencia, de la religión católica. Sólo una revolución completa, una verdadera transformación en el seno de esta religión misma puede llevarme a ella de nuevo ... Se ha divorciado de la civilización, ha excomulgado el movimiento progresivo de la humanidad...

... Tal vez importe que haya una religión positiva para los que no filosofan. Espero, con todo, que la moral de mis hijos, si los llego a tener, repose sobre otros fundamentos independientes y más sólidos, ora sean ellos católicos, ora no lo sean.  
(C 2, 331)

This statement appears to contradict other comments Valera made suggesting that he did in fact identify with Catholicism; however, as Arturo García Cruz asserts, when Valera embraced the Church, his patriotism is what led him to do so: "Valera es católico, ya sin adjetivos, cuando tiene que afirmarse español ... Si habla de la Historia, de literatura, de religión, adopta lo que él cree más español. Este sentido



suyo de lo patriótico le impulsa a radicalizar sus posiciones hacia los términos incluso del tradicionalismo más recalcitrante ...” (*Ideología y vivencias*, 33).

And yet, Valera’s sensibilities were not uninfluenced by his upbringing in a Catholic country. He wrote with shock of the behaviour of German common women to friend and boss, Leopoldo Augusto Cueto, from Berlin in 1856, stating,

Si bien en Alemania tienen las damas costumbres bastante arregladas, más por el respeto que se deben a sí mismas y por orgullo de raza que por escrúpulos de conciencia, todavía las mujeres de la plebe, careciendo por fortuna del mencionado orgullo y no creyendo que sea un pecado la fornicación, lo cometen todos con la mayor sencillez y naturalidad imaginables, y asimismo reciben muy naturalmente el dinero o los regalillos que uno les da, si uno es más rico que ellas, para lo cual se necesita poco... Todas estas muchachas se casan luego con artesanos honrados y son tan excelentes y ejemplares madres de familia ... Yo entiendo que esta nación es pagana aún y que nunca fue cristianizada perfectamente. Así me explico ... mil cosas más altas y harto difíciles de explicar por otro medio. (C 1, 327)

Valera’s astonishment at the women’s behaviour in youth and the same women’s transition into exemplary motherhood is not surprising, for it reflects, indirectly, the gulf in mores between the nineteenth-century Spain he comes from—where such a transition, from a habitual behaviour associated with sin to a role associated with virtue, would not be allowed—and the Germany in which he finds himself. Most interesting, however, is his lack of personal condemnation; rather than seeming scandalised by the women’s sexual practices, it is clear from Valera’s comments that he is instead amused and puzzled by it (and from “por fortuna” one can surmise grateful also), his declaration that these women could become “excelentes y ejemplares madres de familia”, revealing an acceptance of their conduct in early life and later transition into spouse and motherhood. Valera could have argued that although these women later become mothers, their early behaviour naturally precludes them from being “excelentes y ejemplares”. The fact that he does not do this is very significant, and reveals him to be a thinker well in advance of many of his contemporaries on this issue.

Valera's open and liberal-minded perspective is reflected in the depiction of several of his heroines. Pepita, María, Costanza, Rafaela and Juana all conduct themselves before marriage in a manner inconsistent with conventional notions of purity and virtue (in the cases of Costanza and Rafaela during marriage also), and yet Valera still portrays them as good mothers. If Blanca of *El comendador Mendoza*, is portrayed as a less than exemplary mother, it is only due to the guilt over her past affair with Fadrique, which leads her to being overly stern and controlling, inhibiting her daughter's freedom and confidence in a paranoid attempt to save the girl from making her mother's mistakes. However, it is not the sin that impedes Blanca from caring more reasonably for Clara, but the punishment itself. In effect, Valera demonstrates that being too repentant is worse for everyone than behaving badly and accepting it.

### **Rafaela, la Generosa**

Years later, in *Genio y figura*, Valera will challenge conventional notions of goodness and morality even further with his story of Rafaela. Valera's seventh completed novel and his first to be set outside Spain, depicts the character, experiences and reflections of a woman and the transformation she undergoes from one stage of her life to another. Born to a prostitute in Cadiz, after a childhood "tratándose con majos, contrabandistas, chalanes y otra gente menuda" (75), Rafaela moves to Lisbon to join other Spanish girls of her circumstances and work as a courtesan. Although she is relatively successful for a while, eventually the extreme generosity for which she has made herself famous leads her into financial straits. She is thus forced to consider a major change in order to resolve the encroaching poverty: a male friend offers her the opportunity to go to Brazil and present herself as a singer and dancer.

Rafaela's performance in Brazil does not bring her triumph, however; the crowd—unfavourably disposed towards her, given her ties to the publicly detested Señor de Figueredo—boos and hisses her off the stage. Yet, success does not evade her for long. Figueredo, the man to whom she has been sent for introduction to Rio society, develops a profound affection for her and she for him, given her strong didactic urges and his dire need for self-improvement. Thus, a mutually beneficial relationship results; she is provided for materially and he, spiritually, receiving the guidance only the young, patient, altruistic Rafaela can provide. This arrangement leads to marriage;

and, before long, her natural distinction, the fortune that the Señor de Figueredo's wealth provides her and her extremely generous nature combined, have won her esteem among many. Thus Rafaela remains in Brazil, living as the Señora de Figueredo, hosting *tertulias*, and having extramarital affairs with various men. After her husband dies, she moves to Paris.

Twenty years elapse, during which almost nothing is known of Rafaela, for her diplomat friend and our main source of information, the Viscount of Goivo-Formoso, has not seen her during this period, having been re-posted to Europe a year before Figueredo's death. Although she also moved back to Europe, following her husband's passing, she settled in Paris. Thus, it is only when the Viscount is reunited with Rafaela—during a visit to the French capital, at the home of the Señora de Pinto—that we learn what became of her during this long, mysterious period. In her “Confidencias”, which comprise the last two-fifths of the novel, taking the Viscount once again as confidant, Rafaela reflects on her past and what she sees as her future, also filling him in on what has happened during their time out of contact. In it, she reveals her fear of dying alone and a belief that her past indiscretions have made it impossible for those she has loved most to accept her. The novel concludes with a brief chapter confirming Rafaela's final act: her suicide, and the Viscount's arrival at her house, too late to prevent it.

To say that *Genio y figura* stirred controversy would be an understatement. It was perhaps the most polarising of any of Valera's novels. Of critics who were positively disposed toward it, they were more flattering about it than of any of Valera's others. Rafael Altamira, an early critic, for instance, raved about it on multiple levels, declaring: “Solo alabanzas merece *Genio y figura*. Quizás en ninguna otra obra han brillado más las cualidades de cuentista que posee Valera: el color de las descripciones, la discreción en los diálogos y en los materiales regalos dulzuras”.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Havelock Ellis highlighted its singularity, deeming it “the last in date of Valera's great novels, the most mature, the most daring, perhaps the finest” (*The Soul of Spain*, 267). And the contemporary critic, Robert Trimble, went even further with his declaration that the novel “debe ser considerado su mejor obra de arte” because of

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<sup>7</sup> “*Genio y figura*, por don Juan Valera”, *Revista Crítica de Historia y Literatura*, II (1897): 146-148. Quoted in Cyrus DeCoster's introduction to *Genio y figura*, 34.

the extent to which Valera takes his ideal the furthest with its main protagonist, Rafaela, and her generosity (*Valera en sus novelas*, 161).

Not all critics were so kind, however; it was sharply criticised by others, particularly on the grounds of being immoral. Following its appearance in 1897, for instance, an anonymous critic complained in *La Correspondencia de España* of the “color verde más subido y las desnudeces más alarmantes en el relato minucioso de las liviandades y en la lista grande de los amantes”.<sup>8</sup> Weeks later, an equally scandalised, although little known critic, Luis Siboni, declared that Valera should have warned his readers by putting “Sólo para hombres” on the cover.<sup>9</sup>

For Valera, this reaction, if disappointing, was not entirely surprising. Whilst working on *Genio y figura*'s final chapters, he had written to a Francisco Rodríguez Marín, expressing concern about how his novel would be received:

*Genio y figura* sigue adelante; pronto estará terminada esta novela, que me parece muy original, pero la originalidad es tanta que me tiene asustado, y temo aburrir o enojar al público en vez de divertirlo o interesarle. Esto, sin embargo, no puedo saberlo yo si el público no me lo dice, de suerte que a fin de que me lo diga, echo pecho al agua y me aventuro. (C 6, 240)

What seemed to irk critics most was Valera's portrayal of Rafaela as a licentious woman who, even after she has quit prostitution and married Don Joaquín de Figueredo, continues having extramarital affairs with a number of men. No doubt what upset so many was her nickname, “*la Generosa*”, earned in large part as a result of her willingness to give herself to seemingly anyone interested; however, the fact that, as DeCoster recognises, Valera appears to sympathise with his heroine (*Juan Valera*, 141) was also a likely source of contention. After all, the Viscount and main narrator—two characters considered to reflect the author's values—both excuse her conduct. The narrator, for instance, claims that in spite of everything Rafaela is “la

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<sup>8</sup> “*Genio y figura* por D. Juan Valera”, *La Correspondencia de España*, 13 March, 1897. Quoted in Cyrus DeCoster's introduction to *Genio y figura*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> *Plaza partida*, Madrid, 1897. Quoted in Cyrus DeCoster's introduction to *Genio y figura*, 33.

bondad misma” (*Genio y figura*, 122), while the Viscount argues for a compassionate attitude toward the woman. In Chapter 4, her old friend thoughtfully explains:

Como yo soy ferviente admirador de Rafaela, no se ha de extrañar que vea y note cierta bondad ingénita hasta en aquella parte de su alma que la induce e impulsa hacia lo malo. Si ella peca, según se murmura, a pesar del honesto recato con que lo encubre su pecado, en mi sentir, nace de ciertas virtudes originales. Su generosidad y su piadosa misericordia son tan grandes que a veces no sabe decir que no a quien ella cree verdaderamente necesitado y a quien le pide con ahínco. (88-89)

Notable both from this passage above and from Valera’s comments about Pepita, Blanca, María, Costanza and Rosita is a lenience of attitude regarding the morality of the behaviour itself. The essential message seems to be that if “lo malo” originates from good intentions, then it is forgivable. Of course, it is questionable whether or not Valera genuinely considered such behaviour wrong at all.

In letters written from his Washington, D.C posting (1884-1886), Valera documents the peculiar freedom available to the young American *misses* and their resulting antics, as they appear to be less constrained and inhibited, given the laxer nature of American customs, than were their Spanish counterparts. In one letter Valera equates the freedom of young women in regard to movement and social activities to that of the men (C 4, 109). In another he suggests that their incessant flirting is related to their having too much time on their hands, aided as they are by modern conveniences in completing household tasks.<sup>10</sup> He also marvels that “Las señoritas solteras son bastante desafortunadas, traspasando los límites de la *flirtation* y llegando a los mayores extremos del sobamamiento...” (C 4, 59). And in another letter: “Su libertad es omnímoda, y cuando tienen algún capricho o pasión, no aguardan a que las busquen, sino que buscan ellas. De aquí que toda la culpa que le pueden echar a uno es la de haber imitado al casto José” (C 4, 302). In fact it becomes clear very quickly that

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<sup>10</sup> “Contribuye ... el que todo se hace mecánica o químicamente, por medio de artificios o invenciones sutiles. Así es que se desconoce aquí lo que llamamos por ahí una mujer casera y hacendosa. Ninguna cose aquí, ni borda, ni plancha, ni hace randa, ni hacer guisos, peores o mejores que los que hacen las mujeres andaluzas y que yo tanto encomio. Así es que como una *miss* de aquí, y aun una casada, nada tiene que hacer y no sabe qué hacer de su tiempo” (C 4, 304).

contrary to his claims to Menéndez Pelayo about his relationships with the young ladies being restricted to “amistad pura e inocente ... propios de mi edad y estado” (C 4, 109), he has indeed allowed himself to fall victim to their “caprichos”. In April of 1885, he writes to his sister Sofía of how “Una solterita me hizo ir a Nueva York para estar con ella cuatro o cinco días...” (C 4, 290).

According to Joaquín Oltra Pons, author of “Don Juan Valera y la mujer norteamericana”, Valera did not like American women and was not impressed with their culture. He cites comments Valera made about their incessant flirting and lack of domestic activity, going on to conclude: “No le gusta por razones fáciles de comprender: porque la compara siempre con la mujer española, tal como un hombre de 60 años de su tiempo la entendía: sumisa, casera, un poco tonta. Y la mujer americana de aquella época, tal como Valera la ve, goza de demasiada libertad, no sabe cocinar ni hacer calceta y es—en palabra despectivamente utilizada por él mismo—*marisabidilla*” (71). While it is true that the author had particular admiration and affection for Katherine Lee Bayard, daughter of the then U.S. Secretary of State, because of her more serious nature—“Esta señorita, aunque tan eléctrica y tan excéntrica, no anda, ni con mucho, tan suelta ... y gusta más que de flirteos de tratar asuntos graves” (C 4, 281)—Oltra Pons’ assertion that Valera looked upon the rest of Washington women with disdain, referring to “este mundo valeriano de hostilidad hacia la mujer de los Estados Unidos” (73), seems unnecessarily extreme and is not born out by the more extensive collection of correspondence available today than would have been available to Oltra Pons in 1979 when he wrote his article. (The scholar does not refer, for instance, to a single letter directed to Valera’s sister, Sofía, perhaps owing to the fact that Cyrus DeCoster’s *Correspondencia*, the scholar’s sole source of consultation for Valera’s Washington letters, contains none.) The letters which are available today, and indeed Valera’s critical essays also, attest to a man who was not a feminist, but did value women and advocated their right to independence and respect, even if he advocated a role for them in society which was more limiting than many would have liked.

## Valera's Role for Women in Society

Responding to the debate over Emilia Pardo Bazán and other women's potential admittance into the Real Academia Española, for instance, Valera argued against the inclusion of women as "académicas de número", among other reasons, claiming that men and women, while complementary, were not identical, and as such, ought not to occupy the same roles and positions in society. He does not suggest in "Las mujeres y las academias, cuestión social inocente" (1901) that women should desist from pursuing intellectual interests, but that rather than seeking an outlet for the expression of those interests with a seat in the Academy—he does grant that worthy candidates may be made "académicas honorarias"—they should instead influence the tone and atmosphere of salons, "donde ellas presiden e imperan" (*Oc* 3, 867):

Desde allí, y sin ser académicas, pueden y estoy por decir que deben ellas designar y casi elegir a quienes lo sean ... El divorcio entre nuestra literatura nacional y las señoras que, por lo común, leen libros franceses o no leen nada, no se remediaría con elegir tres académicas de número. Y ¿cómo desconocer que este divorcio existe y que es deplorable este divorcio? No desde las Academias, sino desde sus casas, pueden las mujeres dictar leyes estéticas, acrisolar el buen gusto, y, al interesarse por la literatura, poner en ella el perfume de la distinción aristocrática, la urbanidad y la limpieza de la chiste, el decoro y la medida del estilo y la noble delicadeza de los sentimientos y de las ideas. (*ibid.*)

There is little doubt that Valera admired learned women—above he calls for the greater appreciation of literature, particularly Spanish literature, by them. Why not admit it, he continues: "Lo que yo deploro es que las damas elegantes ... salgan en el día al mundo desde muy temprana juventud; y lanzadas en el incesante torbellino de bailes, paseos, tertulias, toros y teatros, no tengan tiempo para nada serio y se hagan algo frívolas" (*ibid.*, 872). Valera also praised the intelligent, intellectually hungry type in his correspondence. María Isabel Duarte Berrocal cites the following passage from a letter Valera wrote to Cueto from Russia, in which the author compares the ladies of Spain with those whom he has met in St. Petersburg, stating: "Las mujeres de esta tierra, en punto a estudios, les echan la zancadilla a la españolas. ¡Válgame Dios y

lo que saben! Señorita hay aquí que habla seis o siete lenguas, que traduce otras tantas y que diserta, no sólo de novelas y de versos, sino de religión, de metafísica, de higiene, de pedagogía y hasta de litotricia, si se ofrece”.<sup>11</sup> And there are numerous other examples of this nature throughout Valera’s correspondence. In a letter to his daughter Carmen from Washington, D.C. he praises knowledgeable American women, encouraging her to study hard, “a fin de que no me parezcas poco sabia cuando yo vuelva por ahí y nos veamos” (*C* 4, 296). This value translates into his novels, too, with virtually all of his heroines reflecting an interest in learning and intellectual pursuits at some level.

Valera believed that women should occupy themselves with learning, since their learnedness and appreciation for culture would be transmitted to and enrich those whom they cared for, most notably their children. In this regard, Valera viewed the education of women as vital, and women themselves on a plane of importance perhaps even above that of men—“Sin duda la mujer vale tanto o más que el hombre” (“Las mujeres y las academias”, *Oc* 2, 865). He declared their role as key to humanity’s future progress and credited them for its past achievements.<sup>12</sup>

Valera argues other points also to support his position against women in the Academy and it is precisely these which appear to have influenced Cyrus DeCoster’s assessment of “Las mujeres y las academias” as a “very sexist retort” (“Pardo Bazán and her Contemporaries”, 124). He refers specifically to Valera’s argument that women would prove a distraction in the Academy and that “male academicians would perforce gallantly elect all females before considering male candidates” (*ibid.*). Valera also

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in “Valera y la mujer finisecular”, 143; see also *C* 1, 425.

<sup>12</sup> He credits women, for example, for civilising men and for creating art: “La mujer bien se puede asegurar que ha creado la hermosura y el arte, creándose a sí misma. Porque si no tomamos en cuenta los breves momentos paradisiacos, anteriores a la culpa, la mujer al principio era sólo hembra, animal feo y sucio, más débil que el hombre, el cual, feísimo y sucio también, cuidaba y se engreía de su agilidad y de su fuerza, como los grandes cuadrumanos. Pero la mujer, por revelación interior, por instinto, por diabólica inspiración o como se quiera, fué inventando, para su uso y provecho, mil sutiles artes ortopédicas, cosméticas e indumentarias, con las cuales, y sobre todo por el plasmante impulso de su decidida y firme voluntad, después de forjar como molde un ideal de belleza allá en el fondo del alma, se derritió y fundió en él, y acabó por realizarse y mostrarle en su cuerpo, limpiándole y puliéndole y esmerándose en poner ritmo y suavidad en los gestos, miradas, movimientos y ademanes. Yo tengo para mí que la mujer bella no fué natural, sino creación del espíritu ... Ni la Poesía, ni la Pintura, ni la Escultura, hubieran jamás nacido si la mujer no se hubiera hecho antes hermosa. Toda cortesía, buena crianza, aseo y finura del hombre provinieron de la belleza de la mujer. El hombre, desgreñado y asqueroso, vagaría tal vez por las selvas, brincando aún como los monos, si la mujer no le hubiera humanizado” (*ibid.*, 869-870).



suggests society would be better served were women to focus upon that for which they were created: “En la mujer quiso Dios dar al hombre una ayuda semejante a él”, going on to claim that the female sex is the indispensable complement to the male one.<sup>13</sup> The significance of women’s support appears to be largely situated within the special powers he attributes to them: “Como obra última de Dios, remate y corona de la Creación, y como hecha, además, de más alambicada sustancia, puede afirmarse que la mujer está más en inmediato contacto con las cosas divinas. Así, descubre y percibe con rápida visión mil verdades a que tal vez no llega el hombre ni después de prolijas cavilaciones y de intrincados discursos” (ibid.).

It is no doubt the positive spin Valera puts upon his arguments for women’s supporting roles in society, albeit with dubious appeals to “Divine Creation”,<sup>14</sup> which leads Duarte Berrocal to conclude Valera’s piece as “pacífico, razonado aunque con unos presupuestos extraños a la realidad y anacrónicos, pero inteligente, pues consigue adular a la mujer asignándole altas misiones un tanto etéreas y tratando de convencerla de la mezquindad de las tareas sociales de los hombres” (“Valera y la mujer finisecular”, 140). As Duarte sees it, Valera believed that enabling women to become members of the Academy for their achievements and expertise in literature, law and history, “que él reconoce y aplaude”, was problematic because it implied a destruction of the differences between the sexes: “lo que para ellas era un derecho y un logro social para Valera suponía una pérdida humana, pues él abogaba por el mantenimiento de las diferencias que enriquecían a la Humanidad”.<sup>15</sup> For Duarte, Valera’s position on women must be taken with a certain context in mind: “Como hombre profundamente identificado con el idealismo, concebía a la mujer con los

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<sup>13</sup> (“Las mujeres y las academias”, *Oc* 2, 868). Importantly, Valera did not believe a woman had to be married to fulfill her helping role. He maintained that women could offer support to their male counterparts through a variety of different relationships: “La que hace el prodigio benéfico, la que es para el hombre genio inspirador, energía viviente, musa o ángel de la guarda, ya es su hermana, ya su amiga, ya su esposa....” (ibid.).

<sup>14</sup> Valera’s reference to Creation represents one of his many allusions to a belief in God in his writing for the public and seems disingenuous to one familiar with his private correspondence, as, throughout it, are admissions about his scepticism and lack of faith.

<sup>15</sup> (ibid., 141). Indeed, on this very subject, Valera wrote: “El espíritu de la mujer no es neutro, es femenino. No es inferior, pero es diferente del espíritu del hombre. Si traemos a la mujer a las Academias de hombres, tal vez encadenemos y amoldemos su espíritu al nuestro, despojándole de originalidad y esterilizándole. Lo mejor, pues, es crear Academias de mujeres, donde ellas inventen nueva ciencia o, mejor dicho, completen la nuestra, que no es más que la mitad hasta ahora” (“Las mujeres y las academias”, *Oc* 2, 874).

moldes clásicos que la sublimaban, la convertían en inalcanzable y poética y la hacían ocupar un lugar sacralizado en el ámbito humano de su existencia” (138).

Not all have been so generous and able to avoid cynicism in their appraisal of Valera’s position; and yet highly significant is Pardo Bazán’s own tolerance of the very man who thwarted her chances of gaining professional recognition with a position in the Academy, which she felt was her due. While DeCoster notes that Pardo Bazán did not appreciate what she regarded as Valera’s “anti-feminist” views, he claims that she was nonetheless fond of him, and that the two were indeed friends. It is also very evident that while not supportive of her position in the Academy, Valera nonetheless respected Pardo Bazán as a writer and intellectual; Cyrus DeCoster commented upon Valera’s “genuine appreciation of Pardo Bazán, the woman of letters” (“Pardo Bazán and her Contemporaries”, 124), following his review of a laudatory letter Valera wrote to Menéndez Pelayo about her work, *Doña Milagros*, in 1894. His admiration for Pardo Bazán’s talent is further evident in a letter to his sister of January 1887 in which he asks Sofía to visit with the woman who is in Paris, as he will have to cancel his own travel plans to the French capital: “Me parece bien que la veas y la obsequies en algo, si puedes ... Doña Emilia ha de ser personaje raro, pero muy tratable y decente. Su talento de escritora es innegable y nada común” (C 4, 621).

As Leonardo Romero Tobar notes, not all of Valera’s contemporaries were capable of such respect: “Valera no exhibía los violentos prejuicios antifeministas que manifiestan otros corresponsales suyos” (“Valera y Pardo Bazán en sus epistolarios”, 71). Romero Tobar actually cites a letter from Menéndez Pelayo to Valera in which the former refers to “la inferioridad intelectual de las mujeres” (ibid., 71n), proven, as he claims, by Pardo Bazán’s “Apuntes autobiográficos”, which he describes as displaying, “un gusto tan rematado y una total ausencia de tacto y discernimiento” (ibid.).

DeCoster also concludes, in his article examining Pardo Bazán’s relationship with such contemporaries as Galdós, Pereda, Menéndez Pelayo, Palacio Valdés and Clarín, that aside from Galdós, with whom she was romantically involved, the Galician writer and intellectual maintained better relations with Valera than with the others: “They

frequently attended each other's *tertulias*. She apparently did not allow herself to be upset by his adverse, and not always fair, comments about her works on naturalism and the Russian novel nor by his opposition to her election to the Academy. At the same time, he was not rebuffed by her aggressive manner as so many people were" ("Pardo Bazán and her Contemporaries", 124).

Such mutual esteem is intriguing and leads one to wonder if a feminist, such as Pardo Bazán was considered to be, could have had such a congenial relationship with a man who, as Oltra Pons seems to suggest, was so dismissive of women. Also interesting, given the nature of Valera's alleged admiration for the woman who submits to the private sphere of domestic life,<sup>16</sup> is the author's acceptance of a woman who clearly refused to do so and whom DeCoster claims was regarded by many of her contemporaries as "abrasive and presumptuous" ("Pardo Bazán and her Contemporaries", 130).

Actually, Valera appeared to defend women like Pardo Bazán in his review of a work in 1888, entitled *El parnaso colombiano*,<sup>17</sup> containing the poetry of many Colombians, a number of them women. He mentions one by the name of Agripina Montes as being among several featured who display talent, going on to remark: "Yo me figuro que en Colombia no deben de ocurrir las varias causas que en España, y sobre todo en Madrid, influyen para que las mujeres no escriban versos" (*Cartas americanas*, *Oc* 3, 274). In a lengthy digression from his review, he highlights the attitudes of men who for generations actively discouraged the education of women, and how, at the beginning of the 19th century, when their learning became fashionable again, women, particularly those of the distinguished classes, influenced by English, French and German tutors, displayed a singular preference for everything foreign. Those who may have had a talent for writing, had little encouragement: "En la literata suelen ver los solteros algo de anormal y de vitando, de desordenado y de incorrecto, por donde crecen las dificultades para una buena boda, etc., etc. De aquí si una jovencita sale

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<sup>16</sup> "¿Cómo no ve la poesía y la noble elevación de su papel en el hogar doméstico, donde le toca descollar cual reina y señora, establecer y conservar el orden y la economía, y ser encanto y consuelo de su marido, espejo de virtud y modestia en que sus hijas han de contemplarse, y refugio y apoyo de los hijos jóvenes, a quienes infunde amor, confianza y respeto?" ("Las mujeres y las academias", *Oc* 2, 868).

<sup>17</sup> Cited in María Duarte Berrocal, "Valera y la mujer finisecular", 146.

aficionada a literatear o a versificar, ella misma lo oculta como un defecto o impedimento dirimente, cuando no es la propia familia la que procura ocultarlo” (ibid.). Valera’s admiration for the woman who overcomes such obstacles is patently obvious: “En toda mujer que se lanza en España a ser autora, hay que suponer una valentía superior a la valentía de la Monja Alférez, o a la de la propia Pentesilea ... Sólo la más ardiente y firme vocación y un extraordinario mérito pueden sobreponerse a tanto cúmulo de inconvenientes” (ibid.). Valera’s attitude toward women was clearly more complex than even his essays on the subject suggest; his correspondence thus offers us an invaluable opportunity to glean the full picture.

Oltra Pons’ claim concerning Valera’s incisively critical attitude toward American women is not born out by the author and diplomat’s correspondence from 1884-1886, when he resided in the U.S. capital. And indeed Valera’s correspondence in general shows him to be rather a forgiving character, “bonachón” in nature, and without the misogynistic attitude which Oltra Pons attributes to him. Cyrus DeCoster, author of “Valera en Washington” would likely concur with this viewpoint. Having reviewed the author’s correspondence from the American capital himself, he concluded in his article, which predates that of Oltra Pons by 25 years, “Aunque le extrañara, no censuraba la libertad de que gozaban las jóvenes, yendo a tertulias y teatros o saliendo a caballo sin ‘carabina’, situación muy diferente de la vigilancia a que estaban sometidas las mujeres en España, especialmente en Andalucía” (219).

It is true that in his correspondence Valera sometimes referred to women in arguably pejorative terms, but such statements cannot be taken out of the wider context of a man who frequently expressed admiration for women, and whose fictional depictions of them demonstrate the same. One must also consider the identity of those receiving such letters (men), the era in which both Valera and recipient lived, and the certainty that bravado had a part to play, not only in what Valera expressed, but in how he chose to express certain subjects. Carlos Sáenz de Tejada Benvenuti, in referring to his own work, *Juan Valera—Serafín Estébanez Calderón (1850-1858): Crónica histórica y vital*, also intimates that the pressure to impress might have been responsible for Valera’s vulgar writing about sex during his Rio de Janeiro posting, stating, “La correspondencia entre Valera y Estébanez, aquí publicada, es, sin duda,

aquella en la cual Valera es más crudo, más agrio y en ocasiones casi exagerado,” (342) and going on to offer among several possible influences that the young diplomat was, “presionado por la obsesión de costumbrismo que le impone Estébanez” (ibid.).

A further point also deserves consideration: behaviour emanating from purely carnal and animalistic impulses (or even self-interested ones, as is intimated in the case of the German women Valera wrote to Cueto about) and uninspired by lofty ideals and emotions such as love would not have seemed deserving to him of a more refined, delicate and romantic language appropriate to situations inspired by elevated sentiments. Along these lines, Valera’s crudest descriptions always coincide with references to promiscuity, infidelity and prostitution. Sáenz seems to hint at the significance to Valera of underlying sentiments in another of his reasons for why the author wrote so crudely about sex during his Rio posting, referring to the international society and “Las falsas estructuras que dentro de ese grupo social posee el matrimonio, como contrato comercial, cesión de influencias, acuerdo paterno, etcétera” (*Juan Valera—Serafín Estébanez Calderón*, 342). On the other hand, Bravo-Villasante highlights Valera’s general preference in his letters for the “expresión más sencilla, normal y clara” (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 87), citing the blunt wording of his resignation letter from Rio de Janeiro as an example.<sup>18</sup> This tendency to forego euphemisms also applies to his accounts of sexual exploits, both his own and those of others. And yet Valera’s at times more colourful expression should require no explanation beyond the simplest: he wrote as he did to shock and titillate, not only himself, but his male correspondents too, trusting that far from being offended they would be delighted instead.

The author was certainly surprised by the freedom of American women, but if he had any criticisms of Washington society, his distaste was directed at other aspects of the culture, such as at the Americans’ fixation with making money, and at the men, with the author remarking to Menéndez Pelayo in a letter of May 1884,

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<sup>18</sup> Apparently his boss had written to the Ministry of State on his subordinate’s behalf, citing “por hallarse enfermo de las entrañas y no probarle bien el clima de Brasil” (ibid.), while on the same day, Valera forwarded his own petition stating simply: “irritación de estómago” (ibid.), as his grounds.

Esto me entusiasma poquísimamente como sociedad política o reunión de hombres. Me parece todo vulgar, grosero, zafio, en lo masculino. Las mujeres son otra cosa. Ellas hacen perdonar muchos defectos de los maridos, hermanos y padres. Las hay muy hermosas; presumen de cultas y a veces lo son; y son sobre todo de extraordinaria amabilidad y dulzura. La libertad de que las mujeres gozan hace que con ellas se trate uno como con los hombres. Reciben solas, van a comer a casa de uno, si uno las convida, etc., etc.—Tengo, pues, unas cuantas señoritas amigas.... (C 4, 109)

Not only does the author praise American women, showing a warmth of attitude toward them, he neither makes fun of their efforts to be “cultas” nor begrudges them their freedom.

In fact, in an excerpt from Valera’s correspondence cited by Oltra Pons himself (72), the author and diplomat will elucidate the cause of such freedom, stating, “Como hay, en la clase acomodada, muchas más mujeres que hombres, las solteras abundan, y, fuerza es confesar, que se conforman con la soltería y no rabian como en ese viejo mundo” (C 4, 304), essentially resigning themselves to their situation, in contrast to the case of Spanish women whom he says “rabian” about it, which if not a criticism is certainly not a compliment. In this same excerpt, Oltra Pons cites Valera’s arguably crude and dismissive description of how the young *misses* behave given the freedom they are permitted. It is this passage which seems to have greatly influenced Oltra Pons’ viewpoint, since it is the only one he cites of such a tone. Having just referred to the Americans’ cultural “afán de allegar dineros”, Valera continues:

Las mujeres, si bien se mira, son un poquito más poéticas, pero rayan en la extravagancia y en la locura ... Verdad es que aquí se emancipan, andan sueltas y como vacas sin cencerro, y hacen todo aquello que se le ocurre, cohonestando lo que hacen bajo la elástica y vaga denominación de *flirtations*. Yo creo, y dicho sea *inter nos*, y con el conveniente sigilo, que las tales *flirtations* se dilatan y amplían hasta donde buenamente se puede llegar sin grave peligro de preñez. Ello es que estas *misses*, que van de viaje solas, o con algún amigo, desde San Francisco a Nueva York y desde Nueva Orleans a Mount Desert; y que van de fonda en fonda;

y que salen de paseo con el correspondiente *flirteador*, de día o de noche; en coches, a pie o a caballo; o embarcadas; por vericuetos, andurriales, mares y ríos, siempre *flirteando*, y siempre, al parecer con la virginidad auestas, dan algo que recelar que la tal joya se quede o se haya quedado olvidada en algún parador, o entre unas matas, o en algún barquichuelo, o detrás de algún escollo a orillas del resonante mar, que se lo calla, aunque resuene. (C 4, 304)

Perhaps it is Oltra Pons' pre-conceived belief that Valera was moralistic and severe, or perhaps it is the crass and arguably disrespectful manner with which Valera expresses the ladies' activities—comparing them to “vacas sin cencerro”, for example—which leads the scholar to interpret Valera's attitude toward them in a negative light. Whatever the case may be, Oltra Pons himself makes a concession about why the letter is, as he sees it, derogatory in tone: “hay que tener presente que la tal carta la escribió un día en que se mostraba deprimido debido a un fracaso diplomático, por lo que todo lo que en ella dice hay que tomarlo con prudencia, contrastando con las observaciones que sobre el mismo tema se encuentran en otras cartas” (“La mujer norteamericana”, 72).<sup>19</sup> DeCoster remarks similarly upon the need to take Valera's sometimes caustic remarks in stride, stating:

A veces, según su humor, los yankis le parecían insoportables.... Se comprende que sintiera nostalgia lejos de su familia, y la repentina muerte de su hijo mayor y predilecto, Carlos, en agosto de 1885, fue un golpe tremendo. Aunque cuando estaba desalentado se mostraba extremadamente cáustico contra los Estados Unidos, las más de las veces se divertía, y entonces su juicio sobre los norteamericanos y su civilización solía ser totalmente favorable. (“Valera en Washington”, 218)

Also worth considering is James Courtad's insightful observation that “Don Juan had great wit, often appearing very sarcastic, which could make him sound more critical than he really was” (*The Letter as Creative Perfection*, 45).

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<sup>19</sup> He failed to get a treaty with Cuba ratified. Writing on the subject, he told Sofía, “Espero ... con calma que el Gobierno muestre su enojo contra mí por no haber conseguido lo del tratado, con la conciencia de que lo que yo no consiga no lo ha de conseguir otro que envíen....” (C 4, 301).

Nonetheless, Oltra Pons will also go on to highlight the very significant concluding statement Valera made to his vulgar description of the American ladies' activities, when the ageing author and diplomat added, "Todo esto si yo tuviese veinte años menos de los sesenta que ya he cumplido, acaso me divertiría; pero, a mi edad, me divierte poco o nada. Hasta me quita la gana del galanteo platónico más puro; no haga el demonio que uno resbale y se deslice poniéndose en empeños de que sería menester sacar fuerzas de flaqueza para salir airoso" (C 4, 304).

In fact Valera will participate in the world of *flirtation* to the point of having extra-marital affairs. He will also speak positively of the experience. Referring to his troubled marriage, he explains to his sister: "Todavía con 60 años, parezco bien y enamoro a otras mujeres. Como en mi casa he sido tan ajado y humillado, esto da fuerza a mi espíritu y le alza de su abatimiento" (C 4, 333).

In response to Oltra Pons' assertion that Valera did not like American women and of his suggestion that he viewed and even preferred a woman to be "un poco tonta", Valera himself would have refuted such an accusation, citing the tremendous responsibility he believed rested upon the shoulders of women. In his chapter "Importancia de la mujer en el progreso y cultura del linaje humana", Valera proclaims his "firme convicción de que la mujer forma, cría y modela al hombre, no sólo materialmente, concibiéndole y llevándole en sus entrañas, sino también moral e intelectualmente, influyendo en su espíritu" (*Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1410). It is not likely that women classed as "tontas", whether due to an innate deficiency, or an absence of opportunity for cultivating their intellect and abilities, would have been capable of fulfilling the lofty role he saw for them. In fact, he suggests quite the opposite, stating, "la misión de la mujer es importantísima ... y a fin de que esta misión se cumpla, conviene que la mujer reciba una educación general, o sea, dialécticamente, antes de tomar oficio, más cuidadosa y esmerada que la que el hombre recibe" (ibid.).

As for moral judgments, the only categorical one Valera ever appears to make in relation to the behaviour of American women commends the fact that it is the *misses* who engage in casual sexual affairs, and not their older married counterparts. He also



seems to reflect upon the possibility that it is their greater freedom in singlehood which enables them to be more faithful in marriage. (Note also his intimation that the standard back home is not exactly ideal.) Writing to Menéndez Pelayo, Valera observes:

En esta tierra no digo que las casadas sean unas Penélopes, pero no se ha de negar que hay menos putería adulterina que en el mundo antiguo. Las solteritas hacen el gasto, lo cual me parece más moral. Acaso esto consiste en el modo de vivir. Las hijas se van de paseo, viajan y hacen todo cuanto se les antoja de solteras; pero las casadas duermen siempre en la misma cama con el marido, y no logran ni aspiran a la independencia de ahí. (C 4, 110)<sup>20</sup>

In a letter to his sister of September 1888, Valera will again refer to the unexemplary conduct of people back home, remarking, “la *high life* española ... está compuesta de la más inmunda putería” (C 5, 109).

His approval of the greater morality of the American arrangement is clear. Many years later Valera will refer to the dangers of keeping young, single women overly-protected in their youth, writing,

La virtud no estriba ... en la ignorancia, por santa que sea. Suele acontecer, por el contrario, que cuando dicha santa ignorancia se pierde de súbito, la improvisada revelación presta seductores encantos a lo recién conocido y apenas da tiempo para que nazca la debida repulsión al vicio y al pecado y se perciba toda su fealdad y su torpeza. Por eso con frecuencia no pocas jóvenes educadas con extremoso recato han distado mucho de ser modelo de casadas, después de salir al mundo y contraer matrimonio. (*Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1416)

### **The Wife in Valera’s Fiction**

As for fidelity, not all of his heroines represent model wives. Costanza, Rosita, Blanca, Doña Inés and Rafaela all cheat on their husbands. However, in Blanca’s case

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<sup>20</sup> From the context, “hacer el gasto” appears to mean engage in “putería”.

she has an affair because she is not in love with Don Valentín and is actively pursued by a man to whom she is ardently attracted (Fadrique); and in the case of Costanza, because she finds herself in the midst of a mid-life crisis and is looking for fulfilment where she cannot otherwise find it. With regard to both of these women, Valera nonetheless portrays them in the manner he described in Chapter 16 of *Pasarse de listo* and cited at the beginning of this thesis. As Blanca describes to Fadrique, “Llegó usted a alucinarme hasta el extremo de anhelar yo perderme por salvar a usted ... Creía ver en usted un hombre extraviado que me enamoraba, que estaba prendado de mí, a quien por amor mío iba yo a cautivar el alma, haciéndola capaz de más altos amores” (*El comendador Mendoza, Oc 1, 435*). As for Costanza, she is described as having been as supportive, loving and faithful a wife as can be imagined to the Marquis of Guadalbarbo in the seventeen years leading up to her “crisis”. Once Costanza and Faustino’s relationship is rekindled,<sup>21</sup> she sets out to raise the spirits of her discouraged cousin, “a dar aliento a su pobre primo, a sacarle de aquella postración y abatimiento en que se hallaba, a hacerle sentir lo que valía” (384).

Additionally, Rafaela of *Genio y figura* cheats, continuing with her promiscuous relations even after she and Don Joaquín have married. Her behaviour is justified, however, the basis being her background and upbringing—not to mention her generosity faced with men, who as the Viscount explains of her willingness to have sex, urge her “con ahínco” (89)—and just as crucially, because of what a good wife she was in other respects. Referring to her care of Don Joaquín, the narrator explains:

Por ella andaba él aseado, elegantemente vestido y empleado en negocios importantes que le daban honra y provecho. Ella le cuidaba, le mimaba, mostraba quererle, y sin duda, le quería. Lograba que fuera de su casa olvidara o prescindiera el vulgo de los antecedentes de don Joaquín, no le quisiera mal y casi le respetara. Y lo que es en casa con sus mimos y con su dulzura, Rafaela le hacía dichoso,

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<sup>21</sup> Ironically this occurs from the Marquis’s repeated insistence to his wife that Faustino is an attractive person worthy of admiration: “llegó a hacer de él los mayores elogios y a sacarle siempre a relucir como ejemplo de los caprichos e injusticias del destino.... Costancita en un principio contradecía a su marido ... pero el Marqués propendía a probar que no había tales defectos, sino que todas eran excelencias y perfecciones. La Marquesa se fue poco a poco convenciendo de lo que su marido afirmaba” (*Las ilusiones, 382*). In *Genio y figura*, Valera portrays the cuckold as a fervent admirer of all of Rafaela’s lovers (*Genio y figura, 156*).

arrebolando y dorando con luz alegre los días de su vejez y colmándolos de satisfacción y de ventura. (91)

In fact, Rafaela represented in so many ways Valera's ideal in spite of her background as a former prostitute. Don Joaquín becomes a better person because of Rafaela's influence. Before she goes to work on him, Joaquín was a detestable, morally corrupt individual:

Sin dejar de enriquecerse, acometiendo, movido por la codicia, las más atrevidas empresas, debía principalmente sus grandes bienes de fortuna a una economía tan severa que rayaba en lo sórdido, y al ejercicio de la usura prestando dinero sobre buenas hipotecas y a interés muy alto. Habitaba, se trataba y se vestía casi como un pordiosero y exhalaba un millón de suspiros y daba cincuenta vueltas a un *cruzado* antes de gastarle. Tales prendas y condiciones no eran las más a propósito para que en Río le quisiesen y le respetasen. (72)

Rafaela changes all of this. She also involves him in charity, rearranging his finances so that part of them is designated for helping the poor; another part, for investment in Joaquín's country and community. Rafaela, in acknowledging that the majority of his wealth has been gained at the expense of others, aims so that "En adelante no había él de ganar un solo *rei* que presupusiese que otro le había perdido, sino que había de ser un *rei* nuevo, si añadido a su caudal, añadido también a todo el acervo de la riqueza de su nación, y hasta del género humano" (83).

This depiction of Rafaela's achievement in bettering Joaquín is in line with Valera's belief in the importance of a woman's love and influence upon a man. As he states in his essay, "Las mujeres y las academias, cuestión social inocente", "Si el hombre es valiente, estudioso, trabajador, honrado, limpio, elegante, cortés, ameno, chistoso, buen poeta, orador, gran político, sabio, bailarín y ágil, todo es por ganarse el corazón de una mujer y ser de ella muy querido" (*Oc* 2, 865). (Incidentally, although there is ambiguity above and in other parts of *Genio y figura* in relation to whether Rafaela really felt love for Joaquín (overall it is suggested she did not), her behaviour as a loving spouse is supposed to be all the more commendable for this reason—yet

another manifestation of her generosity.<sup>22</sup> She exercises “fe altruista”, a concept which Valera admired, as mentioned earlier, and which is discussed further in chapter 4 of this thesis.)

Interestingly in *Pepita Jiménez*, if Luis is honest with himself and able to overcome self-delusion in respect to his calling to the priesthood, this is also “por ganarse el corazón de una mujer y ser de ella muy querido”. Before such female influence in his life (Pepita represents the first of it in many years; his mother died when he was young), Luis was inclined toward misguided thinking and planning. It is not exactly with Luis’s interests in mind that Pepita shows him the role nature has designated for him as husband, father and landowner, and not as a missionary in exotic, faraway lands; it happens inadvertently upon her own pursuit of what she needs most—Luis: “único que había amado en la vida, único que se sentía capaz de amar” (150). Nonetheless, it happens with the influence of a woman all the same.

This is precisely what the eponymous Morsamor had absent from his life: feminine influence (according to him, there was only one woman who ever loved him, Beatriz, and she did not equate to his ideal), a contributing factor to why he himself spends all but the very last moments of it struggling. He spends his youth trying to gain fortune and fame as a poet and a soldier. Failing to achieve that, he devotes himself to God, retiring to a Monastery at the age of 35 to live out the next 40 years of his life. When the novel opens, he is 75 and in distress: hearing the news of Spain and Portugal’s conquests and adventures overseas, he wishes he were young again so he could take part, and accomplish what he never could before. A fellow monk offers him a rejuvenating potion. Morsamor takes it and sets out, circumnavigating the globe. It is

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<sup>22</sup> According to Luis, Pepita also represented an ideal in her behaviour toward Don Gumersindo, her octagenarian husband whom she did not love, and for whom she was nonetheless a loving spouse. As he writes to his uncle about the young woman’s previous life: “es lo cierto que ella vivió en santa paz con el viejo durante tres años; que el viejo parecía más feliz que nunca; que ella le cuidaba y regalaba con un esmero admirable, y que en su última y penosa enfermedad le atendió y veló con infatigable y tierno afecto, hasta que el viejo murió en sus brazos, dejándola heredera de una gran fortuna” (*Pepita*, 73). On the other hand, when the narrator of “Paralipómenos” refers to that situation, he suggests that Pepita’s saintly behaviour was born of imposition not altruism: “no había sabido sino obedecer a ciegas a su madre y a su primer marido, y mandar después despóticamente a todos los demás seres humanos” (*ibid.*, 150), suggesting that, aside from Luis’s account being perhaps inaccurate (and in this case more flattering than negative of Pepita), that the repression of her true feelings and desires came at a cost: she treated others harshly as a result. In this regard, Pepita is still somewhat like Rafaela, however, being honest and authentic in nature, as opposed to Valera’s experience with real women such as Madeleine Brohan who, we will see in our discussion later, appeared to play games with him.

often said that *Morsamor* (1899) is a novel about frustrated ambition<sup>23</sup> but it is also about a man's failure to find the love of a woman to inspire and direct him. Eventually Morsamor will meet his match in Urbasi, but she will die tragically, only days after he finds and marries her. As Robert Trimble points out, this situation is perhaps comparable to that of Valera who himself felt unlucky in matters of love. Referring to three women of major significance in the novelist's love life, Trimble remarks: "el período de amor verdadero de Morsamor es tan breve como ... el de Valera para Lucía, Magdalena Brohan o Catalina Bayard" (*Valera en sus novelas*, 179).

In "Las mujeres y las academias", Valera also addresses the role of women in relation to domestic and caring duties, responding to those who sigh with frustration on being restricted to such occupations for which Valera saw them as indispensable.

Lo confesaré ingenuamente: la mujer que es buena madre de familia, a quien veneran y bendicen los criados; que despunta por hacendosa y casera, si es pobre o vive en la medianía, y que, si goza de muchos bienes de fortuna, sabe gastar con acierto, haciendo brillar su opulencia con su buen tono, aseo, primor y elegancia exquisita, y logrando que se la perdonen por su afable trato, su benigna condición y su caridad para con los menesterosos y desvalidos, me interesa mil veces más que una académica, por sabia que sea, y suponiendo que ya las haya. (*Oc* 2, 868)

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<sup>23</sup> Actually, numerous critics, DeCoster (*Juan Valera*, 153) and Romero Tobar ("Introducción" to *Morsamor*, XXXVII) among them, have also indicated the novel's underlying message about the importance of resignation. (Indeed, Morsamor's own experience is ultimately one of resignation: he returns to the monastery at the end of his adventures to renounce what he now believes was his false pride and misguided ambition.) Along these lines, Valera makes the following remark in the novel's dedicatory letter to his cousin about Spain's position in the face of its extinguished significance as a colonial power: "Creo que el mejor modo de obtener la regeneración de que tanto se habla, es entretenerse en los ratos de ocio contando cuentos, aunque sean poco divertidos, y no pensar en barcos nuevos, ni en fortificaciones, ni en tener sino muy poco soldados, hasta que seamos ricos, indispensable condición en el día para ser fuertes. Ser fuertes en el día es cuestión de lujo. Seamos pues débiles e inermes mientras que no podemos ser lujosos. Imitemos a Don Quijote, cuando quiso hacerse pastor después de vencido por el Caballero de la Blanca Luna. Mientras que unos esquilan las ovejas y mientras que otros recogen la leche en colodras y hacen requesones y quesos, aumentando así la riqueza individual y por consiguiente la colectiva, nosotros, o al menos yo, incapacitados por la vejez para tan útiles operaciones, empleémos en tocar la churumbela, el violón u otro instrumento pastoril para que se recreen las ovejas.... A fin de vivir contentos en esta forzosa Arcadia, recordemos nuestras pasadas glorias, no superadas aún por los pueblos más pujantes y engraidos que hay en el mundo, y compongamos, con dichos recuerdos y con el buen humor que no debe abandonarnos, historias como la que yo te ofrezco, la cual, si no es amena, es por su benigna y candorosa intención digna de todo aplauso" (*Morsamor*, 7-8).

While letters addressing his grievances about his wife will attest to the fact that Dolores appeared to possess none of the qualities described above, most of his principal heroines, even when they are portrayed as flawed in other respects, do indeed represent his ideal in this regard. Juana la Larga is an excellent mother, while both she and her daughter, Juanita, are the embodiment of “*hacendosa y casera*”, looking after their own domestic responsibilities and tending to those of others. Even Teletusa, the Cádiz-born nymph who accompanies Miguel de Zuheros and his men on their mission for glory to the Far East, manages to delight and comfort those on board ship with her culinary skills. As she announces to her companions one day: “Yo me he apoderado de un barril de harina y de un enorme botija llena de aceite, y valiéndome de estas sustancias voy a daros, mientras dure nuestra navegación, una fruta de sartén, distinta cada día” (*Morsamor*, 128). According to the narrator, Teletusa fulfilled her promise, “sin estropear sus manos, que las tenía bonitas y bien cuidadas, amasó y frió de diario los más deliciosos y diferentes manjares farináceos que imaginarse pueden. Ya eran buñuelos de una clase, ya buñuelos de otra, ya sopaipas, ya empanadillas, ya gajarros, ya pestiños, ya hojuelos, ya piñonate” (*ibid.*).<sup>24</sup> Returning to Valera’s novels set in the Spain of his own time (Miguel’s sea-faring adventures take place in the early 16th century), from the stratum which “goza de muchos bienes de fortuna”, among others, we have Costanza and Rafaela. Costanza is a particularly interesting case, because in spite of her morally questionable behaviour early on in the novel when she is portrayed as spoilt, calculating and a coquette—and later on in Madrid, too, due to boredom and frustration—she is described unironically in the intervening years before her “crisis” of Chapter 28 as having been the perfect wife to the Marquis of Guadalbarbo. In regard to the Marquis’s former home, it was “restaurada y adornada de nuevo con suma elegancia y lujo” by her, following the couple’s return from living many years abroad. Even more importantly, Valera is emphatic about how good she was to her husband and children:

Durante diez y siete años, amando al Marqués, siendo modelo de madres de familia, pasando entre los libertinos por una diosa de mármol, y citada como dechado de fidelidad y afecto conyugales por todos los sujetos graves y severos que la conocían ... se desvivía por el Marqués, le adivinaba los pensamientos, procuraba

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<sup>24</sup> James Courtad writes extensively on the significance of hands in Valera’s novels. (See *The Letter as Creative Perfection*, 244-252.)

que se distrajese, le hacía reír con chistes y burlas, le consolaba cuando tenía algún disgusto, siempre levísimo, y le cuidaba como a un niño cuando tenía alguna enfermedad, también siempre ligera. (378)

She is also described as having been admirably charitable with the needy (ibid.).

It appears that because his own wife was not loving at all, and certainly nothing like the better aspects of Costanza or Rafaela, Valera saw fit to justify his infidelity, arguing on numerous occasions that had he a wife who respected and cared for him, he would have been the most loyal and faithful of husbands. He would also go as far as to blame Dolores for his need to cheat, explaining to Sofía from Washington, “Si ando en amoríos y haciendo tonterías como un chico de 20 años, no es en realidad por mi culpa. Como uno de los chistes de mi mujer es ponerme siempre de viejo, yo me demuestro que no lo estoy; y como ella me desdeña tanto, me doy el gusto de demostrarme que no todas las mujeres son del mismo parecer” (C 4, 324). Contrary to Don Joaquín’s experience in *Genio y figura* of a charmed old age, Valera expressed to his sister the horrible one he envisaged for himself: “te aseguro que me apesadumbra mucho pensar que en los últimos años de mi vida, cuando ya sea ridículo e imposible amar fuera de casa, no halle yo ni soledad completa en casa ... sino odio y desdén injusto. Pícaro vejez va a ser la mía” (C 4, 317).

### **Coquetry and Madeleine Brohan**

Nonetheless, Valera’s excuses for his own conduct and his lenience *vis-à-vis* the *misses* appear consistent with the author’s generally more permissive attitude toward a number of behaviours conventionally frowned upon. Coquetry, for instance, although a relatively minor offence in the eyes of most, also appears to have been a vice which Valera regarded indulgently—a natural element within male-female relations, as a letter to his wife from Washington will highlight. Although it is not entirely clear what has led to the situation Valera describes, he writes from the American capital of the demise of his nephew’s courtship, stating, “Juanito ha coqueteado con ella y ella ha coqueteado con todos. De aquí, celos, furores y desazones. Yo, hasta cierto punto, disculpo a miss Mac Ceney. Hasta para vengarse, hasta para dar picón, si no lícito,

será natural su coqueteo” (C 4, 161). In Valera’s analysis of his short-lived romance with the French singer and actress, Madeleine Brohan, whom he met during his posting in St. Petersburg (1857-1858), he will also identify the amorous attention she gave to him as born of coquetry and yet his lack of spite and resentment toward her in the painful aftermath of his rejection will also be abundantly evident. In part, we can attribute his philosophical response to his own understanding of how unrealistic their relationship was. At one point he reflected upon his exaggerated affection for a woman he barely knew, remarking to Cueto, “es de notar que los hombres descreídos que tenemos el corazón amoroso, solemos amar entrañablemente, cuando amamos, poniendo en la mujer un afecto desmedido, que para Dios debiera consagrarse” (C 1, 482); at another, he referred to their meetings as “un frenesí continuo, que no podía durar” (C 1, 480). On the other hand, numerous letters also detail his own less than ideal, and at one point, shameful behaviour toward her. According to Valera, Madeleine had repeatedly invited him to visit with her, flirting with him, engaging in foreplay—“Siempre las mismas ternuras, los mismos extremos, la misma resistencia y el mismo rendimiento y desmayo para terminar la función” (ibid.)—but always stopping short, “nunca consistió [sic] ella, por más esfuerzos que hice, en hacerme venturoso del todo” (ibid.). In the last of their trysts Madeleine spent the first part of the evening crying about problems she was having with other men<sup>25</sup>—“Di a entender asimismo a Magdalena, aunque no tan crudamente como aquí voy a decirlo, que, si bien toda mujer casi-santa es digna de consideración y de respeto, nada hay más ridículo ni menos respetable que ser casi-puta” (C 1, 503)—and then the caresses began... From here, “no pude contenerme dentro de los términos razonables y decorosos, y la di la tarquinada más brusca y feroz que he dado en toda mi vida ... Mi ataque desaforado no sirvió sino de ponerla furiosa, de hacerla llorar más, de acusarme de brutal y de no sé cuántas otras cosas, y de tener que largarme de su casa, aunque perdonado y absuelto, bastante fríamente. Ahora pienso no volver por allá sino a despedirme” (C 1, 504). Such an ending shocked and disappointed Valera. His letters up to this point document what he claims to be a love for this woman, a love

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<sup>25</sup> According to Valera there were a lot of other men, among them, “Un agregado de la Embajada de Francia, Mr. de Levalette, se fue de aquí desesperado por ella, después de haber sido durante seis meses su *patito*, y ahora quiere volver, aunque sea dejando la carrera.... A un periodista francés, que estuvo aquí para describir las fiestas de la coronación, le aconteció lo propio. El ministro de Turquía que va a venir ahora la quiere hace seis años, desde que estuvo de secretario en París.... Ya le ha escrito diciéndole que viene más enamorado que nunca. Y así otros mil de todas naciones y religiones, circuncisos e incircuncisos” (C 1, 504).



which he constantly hopes will conclude with her decision to choose him over the other men. His “ataque”, however, appears to end any such possibility, Valera prefacing his account of that evening’s events, with the statement, “En verdad que soy yo muy infeliz, porque, siendo yo tan amoroso y tierno, rara vez o casi nunca hallo quien aprecia mi amor y mi ternura y sepa pagarlos” (C 1, 502).

Even the impetus for Brohan and Valera’s relationship appeared to be set on shaky foundations. Retrospectively, Valera would decide that Madeleine’s interest in him had originated only from his initial indifference to her. As he reflects upon the evolution of his own emotions, what culminated in infatuation had its roots in him feeling flattered: informed that the French woman liked him, “muy hueco de mi conquista y agradecido a Magdalena empecé a cobrarla cariño” (ibid.). Leading up to that point, Valera had no intention of getting into a relationship, “porque yo me imaginaba viejo y para poco” (C 1, 478). Valera was 33 at the time.

The farthest Valera will ever go in expressing what could be termed as criticism of Madeleine is in the following comment he made to Cueto. Analysing Brohan’s habit of toying with men and then getting upset with the outcome, he observed: “Tiene la educación de una loreta, el temperamento de una bacante y el corazón de una muchacha púdica y candorosa y casta y con todo esto, le faltan entendimiento y voluntad suficiente para conciliar de un modo o de otro tantas antinomias y reducirlas a una síntesis suprema ... Es, además, muy coqueta, sin poderlo remediar, y llora las desgracias que causa con sus coqueterías, que su vanidad abulta” (C 1, 503). And yet this comment is devoid of the emotion and certainly any anger required for it to be classed as a criticism; instead, it demonstrates a remarkable detachment and objectivity, not to mention an inclination on Valera’s part (as well as a capacity) to understand the complex interplay of factors which led her to behave the way she did. Many have argued that Valera’s letters were the precursor, or a kind of training ground, for the development of his novels, María de Concepción Piñero Valverde, for instance, remarking that it was in his letters from Brazil that “Valera descubre todo su talento como escritor en prosa y, particularmente, como escritor jovial” (“Juan Valera, observador de la vida brasileña”, 55). Above, we can see how his correspondence also

offered Valera the opportunity to hone skills that would prove essential to his work as a “psychological” novelist.

Along these lines, Valera’s letter writing also appeared to influence his very use of the letter in his novels, most notably in *Pepita Jiménez* (although the letter as a narrative device appears in each of his other novels also).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the first half of *Pepita Jiménez* is told through the first-person account of the young Luis de Vargas in his correspondence to his uncle, Dean of a seminary, from which he has recently departed. Aside from similarities between Valera and Luis in relation to observations they make about their villages’ customs and environs, there is little in common between the nature of the novelist’s letters and those of his protagonist, because Luis is writing from the perspective of a seminarian, and Valera never from such a viewpoint. Valera does vacillate in his letters to Cueto between believing Madeleine to be a “buena amante y sublime” (C 1, 486)—“Nunca ... me persuadiré de que Magdalena Borhan es *une coquine*” (ibid.)—and flirtatious and manipulative, and in this way Valera’s experience is, to some extent mirrored in Luis’s initial difficulty in assessing Pepita’s virtue; on the other hand, Luis’s letters in general demonstrate that the young man exhibits a far more judgmental disposition and is a far harsher critic of individuals’ flaws than Valera ever was. In an early letter to his uncle, for instance, Luis explains the dispensation that Pepita should be given for the ignoble grounds of her marriage to Don Gumersindo (she has married him for wealth), and yet for the reader this dispensation does not go far enough, his very focus upon the issue in the first place raising questions—what James Whiston points out as Luis’s “uncharitable” tendency in these early letters to relate stories to his uncle that are based on mere hearsay and local gossip (Whiston, *Pepita Jiménez*, 31). Luis also demonstrates himself to be, although very loving toward his father, critical, even patronising in his assessment of Pedro’s lifestyle and past conduct. A lot of this relates to Luis’s early youth spent in a seminary, his lack of worldly experience and even an underlying shame over his illegitimate birth; and yet Luis demonstrates, nonetheless, a marked, one could even say, excessive preoccupation with trying to establish the “condiciones morales” (Valera, *Pepita Jiménez*, 78) of others. Valera certainly had a tendency when he was in foul humour to make generalising remarks, sometimes even nasty ones,

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<sup>26</sup> For further discussion on this subject see James Courtad’s *The Letter as Creative Perfection*, 223-232.

about a mass of people (the Spanish readership, a nationality, etc.), but when remarking upon the behaviour of a specific individual, he tended instead to be circumspect, even indulgent in his analysis. In fact, more often than not, Valera's correspondence documents him reacting defensively to what he regards as the unfair accusations of others against him. Perhaps rather than Luis then, a more apt comparison can therefore be made between Pedro and Valera: both victims of misunderstanding and judgment by others.

### **Valera and Pedro de Vargas**

Pedro is described as an excellent man, in spite of his weaknesses. His decision as he explains it to his brother of sending his son, Luis, in early childhood, to the seminary, attests to his lack of selfishness as a parent, good judgment and love of the boy: "Me separé de él y te le entregué para que le educases, porque mi vida no era muy ejemplar, y en este pueblo, por lo dicho y por otras razones, se hubiera criado como un salvaje" (173), he explains. Pedro also exhibits the kindness and warmth Valera felt was intrinsic to his own nature, and of which he was so proud and yet nonetheless felt he received little recognition for. Just as Valera's admiration for and belief in the fundamental decency of Fadrique is evident in his depiction of the man, so too does his enthusiasm for Pedro de Vargas shine through. Aside from any weaknesses and lapses for which his protagonist may be guilty, Valera celebrates Pedro's love and generosity in his response to his son, Luis's, anxiety-ridden admission that he has stolen Pepita from his father. Luis approaches Pedro to admit his culpability, confessing, "Padre mío ... yo no debo seguir engañando a usted por más tiempo. Hoy voy a confesar a usted mis faltas y a desechar la hipocresía" (171). But Pedro immediately reassures the boy, stating: "Muchacho, si es confesión lo que vas a hacer, mejor será que llames al padre vicario. Yo tengo muy holgachón el criterio, y te absolveré de todo, sin que mi absolución te valga para nada. Pero si quieres confiarme algún hondo secreto como a tu mejor amigo, empieza, que te escucho" (171-172). Luis is horrified by what he has done and reluctantly opens up. Pedro responds, "Pues no tengas vergüenza con tu padre y di sin rebozo" (172). What follows is Luis's admission and Pedro's light-hearted response, aimed at putting the boy at ease. He pretends he has known for some time about the young pair's developing love for each

other: “Los viejos sentimos crecer la hierba” (ibid.). Luis, ashamed and upset, cries, “¡Es verdad he querido engañar a usted. He sido un hipócrita!” Pedro reassures him: “No seas tonto: no lo digo por motejarte. Lo digo para darme tono de perspicaz. Pero hablemos con franqueza: mi jactancia es inmotivada” (ibid.). He admits that he has known for only two months, thanks to warnings from his brother who has received Luis’s letters revealing, at times unknown to Luis himself, the progress of his blossoming love for Pepita.

Pedro reads his brother’s letter aloud to Luis and then reads aloud his own response to the Dean. Here it becomes apparent that at first Pedro was disappointed with the news that Pepita favoured Luis and not himself: “No te negaré: me mortificó y afligió un poco ... pero después lo reflexioné todo ... y mi mortificación y mi aflicción se convirtieron en gozo. El chico es excelente” (173). He goes on to explain how the news is positive as it now means Luis will remain near, providing Pedro with an inheritor to his name and fortune. If Pedro does not get to have the young, pretty Pepita as his wife, even better that his son gets to. He is even generous in his assessment of the girl, who, up to this point, has faced suspicion and judgment from all others at one time or another. Pedro vindicates Pepita from any wrong-doing, describing her as “más apasionada que coqueta” (174). He also suggests that she has saved them all a lot of hardship in essentially rejecting Pedro: had they married, he explains, she may have ended up hating him over time, saddled as she would have been with a husband who, ageing slowly, would have been old nonetheless. In sum, Pedro sees only the positive in this turn of events, “Lejos de llevarte al chico otra vez, le retendré aquí, hasta por fuerza, si es necesario,” he tells his brother, “Me decido a conspirar contra su vocación. Sueño ya con verle casado. Me voy a remozar contemplando a la gentil pareja unida por el amor” (ibid.).

While Valera certainly fell short of castigating Madeleine in his letters from Russia, this is not to suggest that he appreciated her coquettish ways. According to Bravo-Villasante, reunited with Dolores in adulthood,<sup>27</sup> his wife’s innocence and modesty is

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<sup>27</sup> Dolores’s father had been Valera’s boss during his posting in Rio de Janeiro from 1852-1853. Valera also lived with Don José and his family during that time, rather humorously observing and commenting upon their daughter who would grow up to be his wife fifteen years later. He wrote to Estébanez, “Esta señorita, que cuenta ahora 8 ó 9 años primaveras, siempre está llorando y dando gritos, y sólo se apacigua y distrae cuando una esclava le rasca las espaldas, o cuando ella misma acaricia a su

what attracted him to her: “No sabe lo que es coquetería. No excita a Valera. Únicamente infunde en su alma un sentimiento de serenidad, de tranquilo y amoroso goce, de bienestar supremo, no turbado por la vehemencia de los sentidos” (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 156). Consider also Valera’s disregard for the possibility of marriage to Malvinita Rivas, the daughter of the Duke of Rivas, in his youth, among other reasons, because “la muchacha unas veces me parece inocente y otras coqueta, y temo casándome con ella, si bien puede ser virtuosísima, sea lo contrario” (C 1, 95).

As with Valera’s other heroines, Rafaela’s impertinent behaviour—in this case her outright promiscuity—is condoned by the author as it is shown to emanate from a fundamentally decent motivation, Rafaela’s “pecados” stemming from her unbridled generosity. In addition, the Viscount’s comments demonstrate a willingness to look at other factors, such as her upbringing:

Ya que no para disculparla, para atenuar su falta y su responsabilidad moral deben valer el descuido de su vida pasada; el nunca conocido por ella vergonzoso temor de las niñas que se crían vigiladas por madres virtuosas, los ejemplos, siempre desafortunados, que ha visto en torno suyo, en vez de verlos buenos, y hasta la carencia del orgullo señorial, que no podía perder, porque nunca le había tenido. (*Genio y figura*, 89-90)

In this regard, Valera encourages us to examine the circumstances surrounding Rafaela’s behaviour. We see a similarly tolerant stance in relation to Valera’s defence of his brother-in-law, Alonso, who stirred controversy by running off with a “cantarina zarzuelera”. Alonso was not committing adultery by doing so; his wife, Valera’s sister Ramona, had already been dead for ten years. Nonetheless, it is clear he was behaving in a manner that his family disapproved of, while Valera on the other hand found it possible to defend the man. Rather than censuring his behaviour, Valera’s stance extends beyond compassion to actually taking his side, although he begins tentatively, explaining to his sister, Sofía,

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hermanito a coces y bocados. Don José la suele decir para tranquilizarla: ‘Vamos, picarilla, no seas caprichosa, o guarda esos caprichitos para cuando tengas 15 años, que no ha de faltar entonces quien te los satisfaga.’ Atrevidísima proposición, que sólo puede disculpar el cariño paterno, pues la muchacha es fea como el pecado” (C 1, 181).

Yo no aplaudo esta locura, pero me la explico, comprendo [sic] que los niños Caicedos<sup>28</sup> la tienen bien merecida y casi lo disculpo. Alonso no recibía en su casa sino burlas, desaires, malos modos, peores tratos, sofiones y desdenes de sus tres hijos. No es de extrañar que busque cariño, mimos y afección fuera de casa.... Nadie sabe mejor que yo lo duro que es ser maltratado, desdeñado y ofendido por los propios. Esto justifica cualquier disparate. (C 3, 141)

At least some of Valera's compassion is certain to have stemmed from his ability to put himself in his brother-in-law's shoes: the author, too, felt insulted and unloved by those closest to him, principally his wife, although at other points he will regard his children's alleged lack of affection for him sensitively. In one of many such statements Valera would make to his sister, Sofía, during the 1870s and 1880s, in August of 1882, he would write, "Yo quisiera, con toda mi alma, tenerte por aquí alguna temporada: este sería gran consuelo. Estoy rodeado de enemigos, de personas que me aborrecen, y deseo vivir con la única persona que verdaderamente me quiere" (C 3, 430).

### **Eroticism and Valera**

In addition to her generous nature, there is another impulse behind Rafaela's lascivious behaviour. As Robert Trimble rightly point outs, her conduct is not only a consequence of her altruistic instincts but a powerful erotic side (*Valera en sus novelas*, 154).

For Trimble, this facet of Rafaela's character originates from a very similar one in her creator, regarded by many of his contemporaries as a "viejo verde".<sup>29</sup> Consider Valera's enthusiasm for the American custom of what he terms "flirtación escaleril", discovered during his posting in Washington, D.C. The seating arrangement by which men and women find themselves "enteramente circundada, envuelta en carne

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<sup>28</sup> Antonia, Juanito and Alonso, the children of Alonso and Ramona.

<sup>29</sup> (ibid.) Trimble, in his chapter about *Genio y figura* expands upon other similarities between Valera and his heroine, concluding that Rafaela represents the author's "intellectual and spiritual alter-ego" (*Valera en sus novelas*, 151).

humana” of the opposite sex obviously piques the author’s erotic imagination. He writes to his sister from the American capital:

Como las casas son pequeñas y acude mucha gente, casi todos están de pie. Son tertulias, digámoslo así, verticales. Es, pues, un regalo, sentarse en los escalones. Parecen estos un cuadro de ánimas. Generalmente hay, al empezar cada escalera, seis o cinco parejas amorosas o *flirtadoras*. Y se sientan con arte y previsión. Por ejemplo, Juanito está con una *miss* en el escalón tercero, y la *miss* está a su derecha. Periquito está en el escalón cuarto con otra *miss* a su izquierda; y en el escalón segundo está Dominguito con otra *miss* a su izquierda también. De este método alternado y entreverado, resulta que cada *miss* se halla enteramente circundada, envuelta en carne humana masculina; hombre al lado, hombre por detrás y hombre por delante, con contacto y rozamiento trino; y a cada hombre le sucede lo propio con tres señoritas. (C 4, 131)

Also notable about Valera’s commentary is his reference first to the situation of the women who find themselves surrounded on all sides, experiencing “contacto y rozamiento trino” by men. Considering the lead-up, it would have been natural for Valera to first describe the position of “cada hombre”, but instead Valera reverses his descriptive order so that he can relish the image of “cada *miss*”. The male’s perspective is summarised—only an afterthought, indicating Valera’s particular delight in the idea of the woman as being at the centre of pleasure and erotic experience. This predilection is reflected in his seventh novel, *Genio y figura*, in which Valera’s sole focus is upon the story of a former prostitute who retires from her work to continue sleeping with men indiscriminately, simply because it seems natural to her.<sup>30</sup> Consider also the erotic undertones in Pepita’s response to Luis that a platonic relationship will not suffice for her: “Para mí es usted su boca, sus ojos, sus negros cabellos, que deseo acariciar con mis manos; su dulce voz y el regalado acento de sus palabras, que hieren y encantan materialmente mis oídos; toda su forma corporal, en suma, que me enamora y seduce” (*Pepita Jiménez*, 157). As for the

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<sup>30</sup> However, as DeCoster points out, Valera’s sometimes colourful manner of describing his own exploits in letters to correspondents such as Calderón, Cueto and Campoamor is not replicated in his description of Rafaela’s; in *Genio y figura*, “Valera plays down the sensual side of Rafaela’s promiscuous adventures and avoids spicy details. Valera himself was no prude ... but in his novels he is careful not to offend any sensibilities” (*Juan Valera*, 142).

“rozamiento trino” Valera describes from Washington, the author’s sensitivity to this aspect of human interaction is also evident in *Pepita Jiménez*, when Luis and Pepita’s knees accidentally touch under the card table. As the young man writes to his uncle: “A veces, jugando al tresillo, se han tocado por acaso ... y he sentido un indescriptible sacudimiento” (ibid., 115).

According to Trimble, without an appreciation of Valera’s “actitud de abandono total al placer sexual para la propia satisfacción” (*Valera en sus novelas*, 153), it is impossible to fully comprehend Rafaela’s nature and conduct. Additionally, Trimble goes on to suggest that Rafaela’s outlook on sex is not in fact at odds with how Valera imagined most women regarded the act: as naturally pleasurable, and not merely undertaken as a favour to their men. Citing a letter Valera wrote to an Enrique Gómez Carrillo, a Guatemalan author of erotic literature, Trimble writes of its content: “Primero dice que a pesar del estado o la condición de una mujer nunca se cansa del acto sexual. Luego, dice que todos los actos precursores no tienen importancia a menos que sean seguidos por ‘el plato de resistencia’”<sup>31</sup>—a term, according to Trimble, which Valera most likely meant as “contacto sexual.”

In the case of Valera’s other heroines, Pepita, María, Rosita, Blanca and Costanza all demonstrate a similar tendency to let their desires take control, for Valera, a more honest and natural approach than what he experienced of Madeleine Brohan. This also occurs with Irene of *Pasarse de listo* who falls in love with the Count of Alhedín but because of their differing social backgrounds (he is a well-to-do aristocrat, she a relatively poor woman from the middle class) cannot express her desire to marry him and yet, for her very inability to do so, “y porque le amaba, me he rendido sin condiciones, le he abandonado mi alma y mi vida” (182). (It is worth noting that Valera repays Irene for the authenticity of her actions, willingness to love and self-sacrifice by having the Count, albeit unrealistically, marry her at the end of the novel.)

Much like Irene, neither are Valera’s other heroines portrayed in pursuit of physical pleasure alone. Apart from Rafaela, their interest is restricted to a specific man: in Blanca’s case to Fadrique; in Pepita’s to Luis; in María, Rosita and Costanza’s case to

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<sup>31</sup> (ibid., 154). Valera’s letter about which Trimble writes can be found in C 6, 349-351.



Faustino (although Costanza's material desires will lead her to marry another man; and Faustino's rejection of Rosita will ultimately lead her into a loveless marriage during which she has numerous extramarital affairs). Although Rafaela is depicted as having many partners and enjoying the act irrespective of partner, the narrator suggests that had the English aristocrat, Juan Maury, repaid her love, she would have happily left her old ways behind. Incidentally, Trimble points out that in her *Confidencias*, when Rafaela refers to never having found her "plato de resistencia", in this case, she is referring to true love (ibid.).

As with all of the examples mentioned above, the willingness of Valera's heroines to give themselves physically is portrayed as a consequence of love, or at least some initial stirrings of it. That is, in none of his novels does Valera depict women such as the German ones he wrote to Cueto about, who behaved promiscuously, and even with the suggested end of material benefit. In this way, Valera's heroines differ, largely driven as they are by romantic impulses and certainly without the cynical motives of the women he often encountered in life. As Irene explains to Beatriz, of her affair with the Count: "Seguí tu consejo de coquetear, no por reflexión, sino por instinto; no con estudio y cautela, sino ciegamente y poniendo en ello todo mi ser y toda mi alma. Todavía, si el Conde hubiera sido pobre como yo, oscuro como yo, menesteroso como yo, yo le hubiera dicho: cástate conmigo, pero siendo quien es, me repugnaba decirselo" (182). Not even Rafaela, a prostitute, is depicted as self-interested; she is forced to go to Brazil to try her hand as a performer because, in spite of her formidable client base in Lisbon, she cannot make a living, the comment—"Los *janotas*, que frecuentaban más a Rafaela, aseguraban que era toda ella corazón. De aquí que sus negocios económicos fuesen de mal en peor" (70)—hinting that Rafaela may not even have been charging, at least not adequately, for her services.

### **The Selfish Costanza**

The one glaring exception to Valera's idealisation of his heroines in this regard is Costanza of *Las ilusiones*, who is highly pragmatic in her approach to choosing a husband, accepting the proposal of the Marquis of Guadalbarbo, an older wealthier gentleman who is able to offer her the financial security Faustino cannot. Rosita is

also depicted as calculating and self-serving in her choice of Don Claudio as husband, but their marriage occurs only after Faustino, her first choice and the man who led her on, rejects her in favour of another woman (361-362).

Costanza's calculation is patently clear from a conversation she has with her aunt in Chapter 11 of the novel. Explaining why she and Faustino would have made a bad match, she highlights for Araceli the fact that their love is not powerful enough to withstand the obstacles posed by their equally scant resources: "con lo que mi padre puede darme y con las ilusiones y esperanzas vagas de Faustinito sería un disparate casarnos, a no querernos tan fervorosamente, que ambos sacrificásemos todo sueño de ambición y de gloria, y nos resignáramos a vivir en un rincón" (*Las ilusiones*, 203). At the heart of the problem is ambition; for it is not only Faustino who possesses it, but Costanza also. Recounting Faustino's appeals to her, she explains to Araceli how, "entretejiendo con sus amores sus ensueños de gloria, y pintándome inhábilmente para seducirme la realización de sus esperanzas ... despertaba en mí la ambición, que a menudo olvidan los hombres que también agita el alma de las mujeres" (*ibid.*).

Araceli is distressed by her niece's reasoning that to satisfy ambition money should be such an important factor, and she attempts to explain that the noble things in life, discretion, beauty, "ingenio", all of which the girl possesses, cannot be bought. But her niece, resolute in her beliefs, and with the confidence of one who has lived beyond her years, cynically explains, "Tía, crea Vd. que el dinero es el que constituye en esta época, como quizás constituyó en todas, la verdadera aristocracia" (204).

Ambition appears at the heart of it. But what exactly is Costanza looking for? Addressing the matter of Faustino's potential, the girl acknowledges that while he may end up as a successful "sabio", orator, or poet, that is not enough to buy her the luxuries she desires,

Con este brillo ni se paga a la modista, ni se compran elegantes muebles, ni coches, ni caballos, ni joyas, ni trajes, ni todo lo que necesita una señora para brillar ella también. Sería muy triste, tía, que tuviese yo que consolarme y quietarme con gozar del reflejo de la gloria de mi marido, y que, si alguna vez me sacaba a relucir,

pasase yo entre las damas aristocráticas de la corte por una señora temporera, efímera o provisional, por una semi-fregona, encogida y oscura, de quien unas preguntarían: “¿Quién es esa?”, y otras responderían con desdén: “Esa es la ministra tal; esa es la mujer del doctor Faustino o del poeta Faustino. (202)

It is worth mentioning here that Araceli, although a minor character, is important in the novel as a rare example of true generosity and selfless behaviour.<sup>32</sup> Early on, Araceli acts as matchmaker for her niece and nephew, Faustino (as pertains to the exchange between Costanza and Araceli described above), and the author-narrator defends Araceli in Chapter 7 against the bad name given to old ladies who perform this function, claiming that in her case it was for “amor del amor, sin atender al propio bien ni al logro del propio deseo.... Sólo mujeres tiernas y excelentes, como Doña Araceli, son capaces de esta virtud” (160). In a later chapter, he adds, “Hay, por dicha, corazones de viejos y de viejas que no tienen la monstruosidad de amar para sí, que no se encastillan en el egoísmo, y que siguen amando con más energía y de un modo más completo, si cabe, que cuando eran mozos. Uno de estos corazones, y de los más nobles, era el de Doña Araceli” (191). For Valera, the desire to be loved was driven by egoism. Here, in his depiction of Araceli, he highlights the nobility of her actions which stand out against the selfish motivations of most of the novel’s other characters.

Costanza’s desire for nice things and her need of recognition were all desires of Valera’s own wife, whom the author’s correspondence reveals as embittered because of his inability to provide accordingly. In 1879 he wrote to his sister: “Claro está que, si yo tuviera mil duros al mes de que disponer, para tener aquí todos los *conforts* imaginables, comida y coche, sin que ella pagase nada, no habría furias, todo se

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<sup>32</sup> There is also the ephemeral Irene (not to be confused with Irene of *Pasarse de listo*), whom Valera once claimed was the only “mujer de completa belleza moral” (C 2, 576) in *Las ilusiones* (it is not entirely clear why Valera does not class Araceli as such), but Irene appears only briefly at the end of the novel—“una mujer inmaculada, una santa, un ángel, no puede mezclarse en la acción sino a costa de los otros personajes; lo mejor es que aparezca, sin llegar con el extremo de su vestidura al lodo de la tierra, y acabe por esfumarse.... Sus pies apenas si deben tocar al suelo” (*Pasarse de listo*, 134)—as the virtuous, serene and majestically beautiful daughter Faustino never knew he had, while Araceli appears in several scenes and serves important functions beyond Irene’s only obvious one which was to provide that essential “trascendental desenlace dichoso, que se sobrepusiese a todas las catástrofes y a todos los horrores” (Oc 2, 710), which Valera declared in his *Apuntes sobre el nuevo arte de escribir novelas* was vital to works of a tragic nature.

reduciría a desdenes, de los cuales se me importaría poco; pero yo no tengo suficiente dinero para pagarlo todo, y de aquí nacerán las peloterías” (C 3, 178).

Even Costanza’s concern about having to “gozar del reflejo de la gloria de mi marido” appears to reflect Valera’s experience with Dolores. Again writing to Sofia, this time from his second posting in Lisbon (1881-1883), the author refers to a dinner the couple attended, revealing his wife’s jealousy at the fact that all the attention went to him: “a nadie aplaudieron y celebraron tanto como a mí, por versos que se leyeron. La cena era buena y cenó; pero salió tan furiosa como había entrado” (C 3, 183).

In light of Valera’s experience, Costanza’s decision to reject Faustino on the grounds that she does is an interesting one. Seen in the context of Valera’s misery because of being married to a woman who, in particular, resented him for not being able to provide adequately, no doubt he wished that Dolores had considered his own position more carefully before agreeing to marry him. Numerous comments from Valera’s correspondence, such as the following, indicate that the author felt his wife knew the situation she was marrying into. In a letter believed to have been written in November of 1879, Valera writes: “La conciencia no me acusa de haberla faltado en nada. Sólo, pues, porque soy pobre y porque tengo 22 años más que ella, y todo esto lo sabía cuando se casó, me ha tratado muy mal y sigue tratándome” (C 3, 169). Considering his niece’s reluctance to marry, Valera remarks to his sister, “Veo que Luisita es difícil para aceptar marido; pero yo no puedo censurarlo. Estoy pagado [sic] para censurar lo contrario; esto es casarse por casarse, y moler luego al marido toda la vida, como le sucede a mi mujer conmigo” (C 3, 142).

It should be noted, of course, that even Valera himself was once in Costanza’s difficult place. Writing to his father at the age of twenty-six, he had also weighed the relative advantages and disadvantages of marriage in such calculating terms. Referring to the potential of a union with Malvinita Rivas, daughter of the Duke of Rivas (mentioned earlier in relation to her coquettish tendencies), in this same letter, he considers the pros and cons of making her his wife:

Como cálculo no me parece una cosa ventajosísima el casarme con la niña; pero no deja, sin embargo, de tener sus ventajas. Ella no es rica, pero su posición es muy buena ... y sus amigos me levantarían y ayudarían entonces. *La Culebrosa*, además, tendrá por lo menos 10 ó 12 mil reales de alimentos y su título de marquesa. Como cosa deleitable no deja de serlo, porque la muchacha es graciosísima. Los inconvenientes son: primero, que aunque yo ahora soy un perdido, puedo mañana o el otro llegar a ser persona de valía y encontrar mejor acomodo si me quiero casar.... (C 1, 95)

He then goes on to state as the second concern her flirtatious nature and the consequent potential for infidelity, remarking in his characteristically jocular manner nonetheless, “en cuyo caso tendré que dar un escándalo a la antigua, esto es, mandarla a paseo o romperme la cabeza con alguno u otro al uso del día, esto es, echar a los 2 ó 3 meses de matrimonio cada uno por su lado, quedando tan amigos como antes y haciendo cada cual lo que mejor le parezca, que es lo que hacen Bedmar y otros mil” (C 1, 95).

Similarly to Costanza’s confidence to her aunt, the bulk of the reflections he presents to his father reveal his focus upon the marriage’s potential for gaining or losing him power in financial, status-related or reputational terms. Thus the fictional situation presented in *Las ilusiones* through Costanza also represents the author’s own perspective—a dilemma although more acute for women, not confined to them, as Valera’s many other comments will highlight. Reflecting upon his difficulty making money, he will complain to his sister many years later in 1879: “Mi país me ilusiona cada día menos. Cada día creo más innegable que aquí, de no tener dinero por herencia o por boda, sólo los ladrones y los usureros se enriquecen” (C 3, 152).

There is little doubt that Dolores’s bitterness had a profound impact upon Valera’s psyche. In the throes of writing *Las ilusiones*, he warned his sister that the work’s completion would depend on respite from his wife’s tirades: “He empezado a escribir y aun a publicar otra novela, que se titula *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino*,” Valera informed Sofía: “Ya te la enviaré cuando esté concluida, si es que los disgustos y

rabietas incesantes me dejan humor y reposo para concluirarla”.<sup>33</sup> Given the mood around him, unsurprisingly Costanza’s premarital deliberations are not the only feature of *Las ilusiones*, at least partly inspired by his experience with Dolores. The character of Costanza’s former maid has much in common with that of his wife, as does the woman’s unhappiness with her choice of husband, Mr. Mercier, and consequent treatment of him reminiscent of the author’s experience with Dolores in their marriage.

## II. Valera’s Relationship with his Wife, Dolores, and its Impact on his Fiction

### Etelvina and Mr. Mercier

The former “antigua doncella de la Marquesa de Guadalbarbo” as she refers to herself, or, “Manolilla”, as she was known before moving to Madrid and adopting her new, more *chic* identity, Etelvina Mercier, is also as ambitious. Introduced under her new identity in Chapter 30, she visits Faustino, who is seriously wounded following a duel, initiated by Costanza’s husband on discovering his wife’s infidelity with the main protagonist. Etelvina comes on behalf of Faustino with a message. Although her mission is a serious one, Valera clearly has a lot of fun with this character:

En torno suyo se difundía una fragancia exquisita a *opponax*, que era entonces el perfume más *chic* y de más alta *nouveauté* que destilaba por sus alambiques *The Crown Perfumery Company* de Londres. Su traje, su sombrerillo, sus movimientos y sus modales, todo era o aspiraba a ser distinguido. Se diría que el último figurín de *La Moda Elegante Ilustrada* había tomado humanas proporciones, se había animado por arte mágica y entraba allí de visita. (*Las ilusiones*, 417)

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<sup>33</sup> (C 2, 568). Here, Valera refers to his troubled relationship with Dolores as an impediment to his finishing his novel. And yet it is important to note that before his marriage to Dolores in 1867 at the age of 43, Valera had attempted to write two novels, *Cartas de un pretendiente* (1850) and *Mariquita y Antonio* (1861), both abandoned before completion. Not until 1874, seven years into his marriage and one year after what he deemed to be its irreparable breakdown (C 4, 282), would Valera find success with his masterpiece, *Pepita Jiménez*. Seven more novels would follow, all written amidst the backdrop of an unhappy marriage, a fact that certainly did have consequences, one way or another, for the material of his novels.

Although Etelvina represents the quintessential *cursi* type (the milieu of which represents the social backdrop of his fourth novel, *Pasarse de listo*, set in the capital), specific elements of her character, attitude, and values, even circumstances, mirror the image of Valera's wife, developed in letters to his sister, Sofía.

Like Etelvina, who, clearly from the description above, is fixated by the latest fashions and tries to project an image of refinement and distinction, Valera's wife was similarly preoccupied with such concerns. In the summer of 1871, Valera reveals his family's abject boredom at a seaside resort where, apparently, they have no choice but to remain, for, as he explains to Sofía, “la moda, la elegancia y el buen tono requieren y exigen salir a veranear, y mi mujer se creería la más desdichada criatura del mundo y la más humillada y vejada, si no veranease” (C 2, 482).

Further along, the narrator continues with his description of Etelvina, explaining how having lived abroad in London and Paris, “había adquirido estimación desmedida al bienestar material y a los medios de conseguirle; de modo que a Mr. Mercier, que no se descuidaba antes, le hizo sisar cuatro veces más después del matrimonio” (*Las ilusiones*, 420). Valera was likewise strained by his nuptials with Dolores. In letter after letter outlining his financial difficulties, he concludes: “Yo he doblado mis dificultades casándome, pero ya no tiene remedio” (C 2, 402).

He even suggests that his lack of financial resources is the central impediment to Dolores's ability to love him, claiming, “Si yo, por cualquier medio, aunque fuese robando, me proporcionase dinero, quizás mi mujer volvería a quererme o a fingir que me quería” (C 2, 491). Just as Dolores is unable to humbly accept the limitations as to what her husband can provide, neither can Etelvina:

Por último, viéndose ya Doña Etelvina tan encumbrada y adiestrada en los trotes del *fashion* y del *dandynismo* [sic], tuvo una idea que le dio sumo tormento. Imaginó que debió y pudo haberse casado con algún conde, o por lo menos con algún caballero principal, y que había hecho una verdadera *mésalliance* casándose con un cocinero. Maldecía a cuantos recordaba que le habían aconsejado que se casase, sosteniendo que la habían hecho *déchoir*, que habían labrado la desgracia

de su vida. Cuando se casó, era tan inocente, según decía ella, que no sabía lo que era matrimonio, y por eso se casó con un hombre que le doblaba la edad. (*Las ilusiones*, 420)

This humorous portrayal of a spoilt woman expressing regret over her choice of spouse, albeit a more colourful account, bears a striking resemblance to Dolores's sentiments. Compare it with Valera's account to his sister of the fury sparked (on both sides) one night after his wife's frustration at not being paid enough attention:

Mi mujer ha estado en estos días en unos bailes, y como no le han hecho caso o ella supone que no le han hecho el caso que ella cree merecer, está que no hay quien la sufra; me ha puesto como un trapo; me ha dicho que su tremendo infortunio es haberse casado conmigo; que se casó porque su madre y hermano la indujeron a ello y ella ignoraba lo que era casarse, y otras mil bestialidades que merecían que yo la hubiese hartado de puntapiés en el trasero. (*C 3*, 22)

Both women regret marrying as they did, painting themselves as victims of bad advice and blaming others for their misfortune. Etelvina clearly believed that she could have and should have married someone more distinguished, not to mention younger, not a man who "le doblaba la edad." According to Valera, Dolores felt the same way: "me ha hallado siempre viejo, pobre y hasta poco elegante y distinguido para lo que ella cree merecer" (*C 3*, 174). Similarly to Mr. Mercier, Valera was twice as old as his wife: he forty-three and she twenty when they married.

Just as Valera portrays Etelvina with an air of superiority, he paints Dolores in this manner. Writing of his wife's snobbish attitude, he describes her plans for the evening: "Esta noche habrá tertulia en casa de Pepa Calderón, a cuya casa irá Dolorcitas, aunque, como es natural y no podía menos de suceder, halla a Pepa ordinárisima: *very vulgar*" (*C 2*, 453). Foreign terms are widely employed in the descriptions of Etelvina, as if imitating the expressions her character would have used. As Cyrus DeCoster points out of Valera: "In his critical works, he frequently condemns the use of foreign neologisms when Spanish words are available. When we find them in his writings, it is invariably with an ironical twist" (*Juan Valera*, 146).



Referring specifically to *Genio y figura*, DeCoster continues, “given the setting and ambiance, the foreign expressions effectively accentuate the affectation and false standards of the characters” (ibid.). Valera uses them to the same end in *Las ilusiones*, highlighting Etelvina’s pretentious behaviour; and in descriptions of his wife, the term “*very vulgar*”, indicating Dolores’s snobbery. Although Dolores was a rightful member of Madrid’s high society, it is clear from his correspondence that Valera was not impressed with her superior attitude toward others or her fixation about what was or was not suitably elegant. Valera will allude to this in a letter to his sister of June 1881. Writing from his second posting in Lisbon, he encourages Sofía to visit: “Muchísimo favor me harás en venirme por aquí; mi mujer, estando tú se reportará algo ... muchas cosas aprobadas por una duquesa, no le parecerán tan cursis, etc.” (C 3, 309).

In regard to the satirical use of foreign terms, we see more below in relation to Etelvina. Writing of her derisive attitude toward Spain, the narrator describes how Etelvina “se había hecho insufrible de puro denigradora de su patria, que consideraba tierra de bárbaros, y de puro fanatismo y admiración por los primores y refinamientos ingleses y franceses. Casi todo le parecía *shocking* y grosero en nuestras costumbres” (*Las ilusiones*, 420). In terms of their sentiments, those of Valera’s wife (and his mother-in-law, too) are even stronger: “España es condenada,” he tells Sofía, “a dúo, cada minuto, por país bárbaro, bestial, feroz, feo, infame, etc., y sus habitantes, yo inclusive, por animales estúpidos, sucios, asquerosos, viles, torpes, etc” (C 2, 414).

Finally, in the case of both Dolores and Etelvina, frustrated by their marriages and the constraints imposed by them, much of their anger seems to have been channelled into abusing their husbands. As the narrator remarks in a tongue-in-cheek manner of Etelvina, “Aborrecía la mentira, vicio propio de los pueblos corrompidos como el español; y como aborrecía la mentira, decía con la mayor franqueza al infeliz Mr. Mercier que le detestaba, que se avergonzaba de él y que soñaba con un caballero, que era lo que le cuadraba ella” (*Las ilusiones*, 420). Valera writes similarly of the disdain his wife feels toward him, stating, “Dice que me odia o que me desprecia, y no obstante sigue viviendo en mi compañía para achicharrarme la sangre” (C 3, 47). However, with regard to Etelvina’s case, the narrator goes on in a humorous vein,

“Mr. Mercier, por no matar a palos a su dulce esposa, tomó el recurso de morirse, y pasó a mejor vida” (*Las ilusiones*, 420). On this point, Valera is more defiant than his fictional counterpart: “Como mi mujer me aborrece tanto y es tan bestia, está deseando que yo me muera, pero yo, aunque no sea más que para que no salga con la suya, haré por vivir lo más largo tiempo que sea posible” (C 3, 28).

While there is much to suggest that Valera’s wife had an impact upon Etelvina’s depiction, there are some crucial differences, such as Etevína and Dolores’s social backgrounds. Dolores was the privileged daughter of a diplomat, who spent her early childhood in Brazil and later youth in Paris, having moved to the French capital with her mother in 1856 at the age of ten, following her father’s death (Matilde Galera Sanchez, Introduction to *Cartas a sus hijos*, 15). Etelvina, in contrast, begins life in Andalusia as Manolilla, a maid. In addition to belonging to a higher social stratum, Valera’s wife was also not really Spanish, her mother, Doña Isabel de Silva Areas, a distinguished Brazilian lady (ibid.), and her father, Don José, as comments from Valera’s correspondence indicate, although Spanish, had already been living in Rio de Janeiro for some 27 years before Dolores was born. Thus Etelvina represents a disloyal Spaniard; Dolores, a frustrated though not very gracious foreigner.

And yet, Etelvina has some redeeming qualities. Once free of her chef husband, it is only through focus and hard work that she finds herself a successful entrepreneur of *tiendas de modas*, as she explains to Faustino, who is obviously surprised to see her transformation. On this point, Etelvina would have had some modicum of respect from her creator, for she is portrayed in spite of her other flaws—and similarly to the way many of Valera’s principal heroines are portrayed—as a disciplined and determined woman who knows her mind. As she recounts her adventures to Faustino: “He tomado el nombre de Etelvina porque el de Manolilla era vulgar y prosaico. Serví muchos años a la señora Marquesa; me casé con monsieur Mercier, el jefe de su cocina, eminente químico. Luego enviudé, y con los ahorros míos y del difunto que en paz descansa, dejando la casa de la señora Marquesa, he puesto tienda de modas” (*Las ilusiones*, 417). Etelvina has successfully achieved at least some of her goals, and the narrator confirms her achievements. After Mr. Mercier’s death, we are also told, “se hizo modista, ínterin llegaba la ocasión de casarse con un conde y hacerse condesa”

(ibid., 420). Dolores, on the other hand, is portrayed by Valera as lacking in even the organisation and discipline to run a house, let alone a business. Valera laments this, writing to his sister: “mi mujer y mi suegra no sirven para gobernar casa, donde los criados sean malos como en España. Lo que es aquí cada día tenemos en casa más desorden y confusión y más despilfarro. Ayer desaparecieron los pendientes de diamantes y perlas.... Después, el mismo día, al anochecer, salió mi mujer de paseo, y llevó un abrigo para resguardarse del sereno. El abrigo, que era nuevo, se perdió también” (C 2, 470). He also suggests that she lacks any willpower. Initially when Dolores is preparing to give birth to their third child, she insists on going to Biarritz, but as Valera informs Sofía: “ha desistido por su natural vacilación e irresolución en todo, la cual, en este caso, me ha sido útil” (ibid.).

Analogously there is the suggestion that Dolores lacks a mind of her own. In his letters to Sofía of the early 1870s Valera repeatedly refers to his wife and mother-in-law as if they are working as a team to make his life unbearable. He also suggests that his wife behaves in large part as she does because she is imitating her mother: “Mi suegra sigue rabiando y encontrando ordinarísimas y vulgares a todas las señoras españolas... Mi mujer repite lo que oye a su madre, a quien cree una madame de Sevigné, cuyas cartas sabe mi suegra muy bien; casi de memoria” (C 2, 452).

Just as Valera’s marital troubles were not confined to a single year or two, neither was this theme a feature of *Las ilusiones* alone. Individuals, unhappily married, appear in some of Valera’s other novels, too.

### **Doña Blanca and Don Valentín**

In *El comendador Mendoza*, the manner in which Valera portrays the marriage and characters of Doña Blanca and Don Valentín bears resemblance to the portrait of himself, Dolores, and their own marriage, as it emerges in letters to his sister, Sofía. Valera, for instance, repeatedly throughout his correspondence refers to himself as “débil” and a “Juan Lanas” (C 3, 81), while Valentín is similarly described as being “débil y pusilánime” (*El comendador Mendoza*, Oc 1, 389). According to the narrator, don Valentín is so subservient to Blanca that “tenía la inveterada costumbre de no

hacer la menor cosa sin mirar antes a su mujer para notar la cara que ponía y si le retraía de consumir o le alentaba a que consumase su conato de acción” (393). While Valera did not always deal with his wife in the submissive nature of his protagonist, descriptions of Dolores and her temper suggest that harmonious relations with her depended on him doing so. Not only did he complain in his letters to Sofía of his wife’s cruelty, but of the power she had in the marriage (even if she was, at times, influenced or persuaded by others). According to Valera, it was her spendthrift habits which were largely responsible for him having to take diplomatic assignments, often sending him far from his children for long periods, to which he sadly attributes their weak bond (C 3, 321). In Washington, he expressed an interest in their son, Luis, coming to live with him, but Dolores, whom he deems ungenerous, would not consent: “ella dice que yo no cuidaría a mi hijo, y además que no soy moral. Es capaz de suponer que yo le pervertiría” (C 4, 330). Back in Spain she decided where the family summered. Valera also appears to be nervous of his wife most of the time. In August of 1882, Valera will beg his sister Sofía to visit them in Cintra, detailing how they should proceed with the delicate matter of getting Dolores to make the invitation without her finding out that they had already been discussing the possibility: “como es tan cavilosa, supondrá que al hacerte dicho ruego, como es la verdad, me he quejado de ella” (C 3, 433). At one of the most trying stages of their marriage, Valera confessed to his sister, “Mi mujer hace más de cinco años que no es mi mujer sino mi enconada enemiga ... Las peloterías que tenemos son espantosas”.<sup>34</sup> Valera’s correspondence is also replete with references to Dolores’s volatility. Doña Blanca is similarly described as having a tremendous temper—even the robust character of Father Jacinto is afraid of her “genio violentísimo” (*El comendador Mendoza, Oc 1*, 410).

The situation with Dolores is so severe that by the early 1870s she and Valera begin living apart for periods. Of one such period, Valera explains, “Lo que me llevó a desear esta separación fue el cúmulo de desdenes, de insultos y de rabietas, con que mi mujer me abrumaba y vejaba” (C 3, 128). Blanca is described as being equally uncharitable towards her husband. However, while Valera claims on countless

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<sup>34</sup> (C 3, 47). At least one fight was so intense it led to physical abuse. In December of 1870, Valera wrote to Sofía: “Las pupas de los arañazos de mi mujer aún me dejan rastros y señales en una mano” (C 2, 435).

occasions that his old age, poverty and the fact of his being “poco elegante” in Dolores’s eyes were the reasons for her disdain, only one is given for Blanca’s. She simply did not love Valentín: “Doña Blanca no había encontrado en él ni un átomo de la poesía, ni una chispa de las sublimidades que había soñado hallar, en su inexperiencia, en el hombre a quien dió su mano, siendo aún muy niña” (*El comendador Mendoza, Oc* 1, 441). Noteworthy about Blanca’s disappointment in her choice of spouse is the reference to her “siendo aún muy niña”—recalling suggestions of the innocence and powerlessness implicit in Dolores’s self-pitying claim that she was pushed to marry Valera (“la indujeron a ello”—*C* 3, 22) by her brother and mother. Likewise, Dolores was “muy niña”, 21 when she married her husband. Blanca, one can surmise from the age given for her in the novel’s early chapters, would have been about 23.

The narrator goes on to state of Blanca:

Luego, hacía diez y siete años, no veía ella en D. Valentín sino un hombre cuya serenidad era el perpetuo sarcasmo de las borrascas de su corazón; cuya unión con ella había hecho que lo que pudo ser un buen lícito, una felicidad santificada, fuese un pecado abominable, y cuya salud corporal parecía una burla de los achaques y padecimientos que a ella la atormentaban. Hasta la paciencia con que D. Valentín la sufría era odiosa a Doña Blanca, cual si implicase bajeza, gana de no incomodarse por no molestarse, desdén o menosprecio. (441)

Everything about Valentín annoys Blanca. The same can be said of Dolores, as the author writes to his sister in March of 1885:

Creo que ni hecha de encargo, hubiera podido buscarse para mí mujer más enemiga, más aborrecedora, más dura censora de mis faltas y debilidades, y más sorda, ciega y de todo punto cerrada con siete sellos, a toda impresión favorable y amistosa hacia mí, de resulta de mis buenas prendas, si es que tengo alguna. En lo profundo de mi alma estoy herido de su odio, de su desdén, de sus malos tratos, a nada de lo cual me considero acreedor. (*C* 4, 273)

No doubt Valera had his wife's opinion of him in mind when he wrote, "Las mejores prendas del alma de Valentín, con intervención quizá de algún demonio astuto se trocaban, en el alma de doña Blanca, en defectos ridículos" (*El comendador Mendoza*, Oc 1, 441).

One manner in which Blanca and Dolores appear to differ is in relation to the former's description as being competently in charge: "La hacienda, los negocios, la educación de la hija, todo dependía y todo era dirigido y gobernado por doña Blanca" (*ibid.*, 389). While Valera does claim that his wife takes control of many affairs, he does not suggest she manages them well: "tiene poco arte para gobernar casa," he claims in one letter (C 3, 462). In another he goes as far as to question Dolores's judgment as a mother, blaming her choice of an "ama vieja y gastada" on the lagging development of one of their sons (C 2, 399).

In this regard, Blanca is perhaps modelled more upon the character of Valera's mother, whom Carlos Sáenz de Tejada Benvenuti describes in his introduction to *Cartas íntimas (1853-1897)*, "Análisis de esta correspondencia", as similarly domineering: "absorbente y autoritaria... lleva en todo momento las responsabilidades básicas de la familia, la educación de sus hijos, la colocación matrimonial de sus hijas, el mantenimiento y, si es posible, la elevación del rango social de su familia que no se ve en ningún momento amparada ni protegida por su 'hombre'" (17). In fact Valera's father appears, like Valentín, to have been a less forceful character than his wife, no doubt in part due to personality, but perhaps also because of circumstances. Sáenz seems to hint that Valera's father was somewhat withdrawn: "ex-marino, liberal, revolucionario desilusionado, que ... llega al matrimonio con pocas esperanzas, y ... vive una vida retirada en Cabra, Doña Mencía y, en cortas temporadas, en Málaga" (*ibid.*). According to Marsha Abrahamson, Valera's father had been incarcerated for his liberal ideas during the reign of Fernando VII (*Valera and Krausism*, 55).

On the other hand, Valera's mother did not manage all of her responsibilities successfully. While she may have achieved certain goals, such as marrying off her

daughters well,<sup>35</sup> she was certainly not as skilled in economic matters. Valera's correspondence testifies to her poor management of the family estate and it is well documented that upon her death in 1872, she left him saddled with her debts, a fact that only added to his financial stress and the rancour between him and his wife.

Whatever possible comparison there may be between Valera's mother and Blanca, there is little doubt that Valera also had Dolores in mind. Making an apparent exception to his claim that none of his characters are modelled on real-life figures, the author himself compared the women. Referring to *El comendador Mendoza* in February 1877, he remarked to Sofía, "hay una Doña Blanca que se parece a mi mujer en el mal carácter, salvo que Doña Blanca tiene religión y mi mujer no tiene ninguna" (C 3, 50). A thinly veiled jab at Dolores, Valera's comment does nevertheless indicate a genuine difference between the depiction of Blanca and the reality of his wife—a difference which earns Blanca more respect in the author's eyes. After all, a great deal of the character's ill-concealed unhappiness (which manifests itself in Blanca's bitter temper) results from her extreme religiosity—what DeCoster refers to as her obsession with the "pervasiveness of sin and evil" (*Juan Valera*, 114)—and ultimately the ongoing guilt she feels over the sin she committed herself in her affair with Fadrique seventeen years before. For Valera, these factors would have amounted to a more noble reason for such deep-seated unhappiness, than what appeared to him as the source of Dolores's misery (and her consequent tantrums)—frustration at the financial constraints on their lifestyle. In keeping with Valera's respect for Blanca, as DeCoster notes (*Juan Valera*, 114), the author imparts nobility to her character, describing the woman as "sublime como una pantera irritada y mortalmente herida" (*El comendador Mendoza*, 416). Valera, in contrast, refers to Dolores as a "tontiloca frenética" (C 3, 27)—a clear dismissal of his wife.

### **Valera's Sympathy for his Wife**

And yet Valera did not altogether lack sympathy for his wife's position. He expresses tenderness toward her on more than one occasion, referring to "cierto cariño inconcebible que le tengo" (C 3, 564) and the fact that she inspires "más piedad que

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<sup>35</sup> She married her first daughter, Ramona, to the Marquis of Caicedo; and her second, Sofía, to the Duke of Malakoff, unions from which both women received titles of nobility.

ira” (C 3, 327). In a letter from November 1879, he will go as far as to claim, “la quiero, aunque califico mi cariño de irracional y le creo nacido de mi debilidad de carácter” (C 3, 169). Indeed, Valera’s main complaint, about which he commented non-stop, was Dolores’s lack of love and support,<sup>36</sup> and her tendency to “molerme”, referring to her on multiple occasions as his harshest critic. And yet, when she did behave well he was not unwilling or incapable of acknowledging this fact, even if he did so at times sarcastically. In February of 1882, for example, during an illness of their daughter Carmen, he commends Dolores for her maternal, caring way with the girl, writing that “Mi mujer se sacrifica por la niña como madre cariñosísima. En esto merece los mayores encomios” (C 3, 376). On another occasion, in 1890, he gives his wife credit for “ciertos visos de razón” which alerted him to the need to bid a proper farewell to the Infanta doña Isabel, who had been very generous to them during their summer holiday abroad (C 5, 281). He will also, at times, communicate his positive impressions directly to her. In a letter from July of 1883, he is clearly elated following her uncharacteristic show of support for him. “Mi querida Dolores,” he writes:

Acabo de recibir tu carta del 20 y te escribo de nuevo para darte gracias, porque mostrándote, como te muestras, tan valerosa y generosa, me infundes ánimo y matas el mal espíritu que me atormenta e inutiliza. Tú lo puedes aun todo conmigo, como quieras y como me quieras. Alentado por ti, creo que iré hasta donde llegue el límite de mis facultades, y que éstas desplegarán brios y poder que no manifestaron nunca antes. (C 3, 550)

The quotation illustrates the role he gives his wife for inspiring him with confidence, and the power he attributes to her—“alentado por tí, creo que iré hasta donde llegue el límite de mis facultades”—points discussed at length in his critical works “Las mujeres y las academias” and “Importancia de la mujer” and which form the basis for his arguments about society’s need for women to accept their role as “auxilio” to men. Valera does not end his letter here, but continues, growing even more dramatic in his thanks. He adds: “Cuando te pones algo bondadosa conmigo, me siento revivir ... Búrlate de mí; despréciamе; pero he de confesarte aquí que tienes singular dominio sobre me alma. Todas mis iras, todas mis rabietaѕ contra tí, son de enojo de que no me

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<sup>36</sup> “En lo profundo de mi alma estoy herido de su odio, de su desdén, de sus malos tratos, a nada de lo cual me considero acreedor, por más que miro con severidad en el fondo di mi conciencia” (C 4, 273).



quieres ... Quiéreme por amor de Dios” (ibid.). This rather dramatic, even gushy, outpouring of gratitude is the result of the rare circumstances which precipitated it (ostensibly her support). Perhaps most surprising of all, however, is the impression Valera gives about the depth of his love for Dolores. Valera’s statement, “he de confesarte aquí que tienes singular dominio sobre mi alma”, does not seem consistent with the overall tone of most of his comments about her, which suggest that while affection may have formed the original basis for their relationship, romantic love did not. Indeed, Valera, early in his marriage, described it to his mother as “un delito de egoísmo miserable, por el cual me castiga Dios” (C 2, 409). Nevertheless, his wife’s approval and kindness would have understandably raised his spirits. And here, as on other occasions, Valera demonstrates his own inclination to show warmth and kindness in return. We see it again following the death of their son Carlos in the summer of 1885. Rancour has characterised their exchanges up to this point, and yet he writes: “Tu carta del 24 me ha conmovido. La sencillez, la naturalidad, la espontaneidad con que está escrita dan testimonio de la bondad y nobleza de tu corazón” (C 4, 341).

The author also makes repeated comments in his correspondence acknowledging that life is hard when one is unable to afford nice things, living amongst others who can. He also recognised the constraining position of women of his time, who were forced into a position of dependency by society’s conventions; and yet his fictional portrayals of women sympathetically acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of female ambition. In this regard, his critical essays discussing the woman who stays at home, deriving fulfilment from domestic and caring roles, and as her husband’s source of guidance and support, represents his ideal—not necessarily what Valera accepted to be the norm.<sup>37</sup> In a letter of September 1891 Valera advises his nephew, Salvador, that in order for his son Fernando, the subject of their letter, to achieve his professional goals, he must project himself and mix with the “gran mundo” (C 5, 363). He goes on to suggest, however, that this requires money, and that while he is struggling

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<sup>37</sup> Valera’s ability to appreciate exceptions may also explain why he could be open minded about women like Pardo Bazán. When he wrote about the importance of women supporting the men in their lives, and married women dedicating themselves to domestic and family matters, he was referring to an ideal as it could apply to the majority of women, not the reality which he himself seemed to accept: that some individuals, women included, may have a unique calling in life. Valera understood the importance of finding one’s true calling. This, although mainly depicted through his male protagonists, represents a major theme in several of his novels.

financially, his wife will have to be patient: “Se requiere, pues, gran dosis de resignación en Merceditas, y que se conforme, por ahora, con que su marido vaya donde ella no puede ir, esperando que Fernando la saque a relucir cuando tenga para ello, si alguna vez lo tienen todo el dinero que se necesita” (ibid.).

Valera also addressed what he regarded as the unfair dependency upon men which forced so many women into marriage. In his work “Importancia de la mujer”, Valera sympathetically argued on behalf of the woman’s need to be capable of supporting herself:

La queja más importante que pueden formular las mujeres, el mayor agravio que se les hace y que es fundamento de la dependencia en que se hallan con relación a los hombres, es la afirmación de que la mujer apenas tiene medios de mantenerse por sí y necesita que un hombre la mantenga, ya sea su padre, ya su hermano, ya su marido, ya su amante. ¿Qué será, se dice, de la mujer que carezca de caudal o de rentas propias, que sea honrada y que se quede soltera? Es indudable que importa remover todos los obstáculos a fin de que la mujer, cualquiera que sea la clase social en que se halle, pueda creer y esperar, sin forjarse ilusiones, que no es indispensable que ningún hombre la mantenga: que su habilidad, su ingenio y su trabajo, han de bastar, según su mérito, a proporcionarle una subsistencia decorosa y aun han de abrirle, cuando ella tenga fuerza y capacidad para seguirlas, no pocas de las sendas que llevan a la riqueza, a la notoriedad, a lo más alto de las esferas sociales, a los triunfos y a la gloria. ¿Quién impide a la mujer que sea escritora, pintora, escultora, poetisa, literata llena de erudición, sabia versada en las ciencias, compositora de música, actriz o cantante? ¿Quién le estorba aprender y ejercer otras profesiones y oficios compatibles con su modestia y su decoro y en los cuales, puede adquirir posición, riqueza, crédito y nombradía, sin que sea un hombre quien para ella conquista todas estas cosas? (*Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1409-1410)

Addressing the position of women from a more modest social and educational background, Valera continues,

Acaso la fuerza muscular de la mujer es por lo común menor que la de del hombre, pero son innumerables los oficios y menesteres en que la fuerza muscular entra por poco y que más bien exigen cierta delicadeza, primor y agilidad en las manos, y en el ánimo sosegada perseverancia y otras prendas de que las mujeres están mejor dotadas que los hombres. ¿Por qué, en tales oficios, no ha de ganar la mujer salario igual o mayor al que proporcionalmente ganen los individuos del otro sexo? (1410)

Recognising the more precarious position of women, Valera also once complained to his friend, Menéndez Pelayo, about an inheritance his children received in which his son was given more than his daughter. Luis did not need it as much as Carmen, Valera highlighted, because he was a man and had a career (*Epistolario de Valera y Menéndez Pelayo*, 599).

No doubt such considerations are also what led Valera to reflect with disappointment upon what he believed was Malvinita Rivas's principal interest in him. Referring to his possible marriage to the girl, he writes to his father, "La madre lo desea, y ella también, más que la madre. Esto lisonjea mi amor propio cuando creo que es por mí, pero no cuando imagino que lo que ambas desean es un marido y lo encuentran en mí a propósito y de su gusto" (C 1, 95). Valera was not wealthy at the time, but no doubt he was regarded as having ample potential to support Malvinita according to the living standards with which they had both been raised.

### **Valera's Sympathy for Fictional Heroines, Doña Ana and Pepita**

The compromising position of a woman unable to support herself is also addressed in his fiction. In his second novel, *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino* (1875), Valera describes Faustino's mother, Doña Ana, as very intelligent and highly educated and yet, "Todo el saber de Doña Ana no le valió, sin embargo, para negocio alguno ... cuando ya tenía veintinueve años cumplidos, recelando quedarse para tía o para vestir santos, y estimulada por su padre y hermano, que ansiaban colocarla, o dígase deshacerse de ella, se resignó a casarse con el Sr. D Francisco López de Mendoza" (*Las ilusiones*, 92). It is clear that her father and brother, the two men responsible for

supporting her had she remained single, pushed her into the marriage. Valera begins by explaining the arrangement euphemistically but ends with putting it plainly: Ana may have been “estimulada” into marrying Francisco, but what her father and brother achieved was to “deshacerse de ella”. In *Pepita Jiménez*, the young Pepita is also said to have been forced into a marriage—in this case, not just to support herself, but to resolve her mother and brother’s indigence: “La madre, que apenas tenía para sí y para Pepita, se desesperaba, rabiaba, maldecía de sí y de su destino con paciencia poco evangélica, y cifraba toda su esperanza en una buena colocación para su hija que la sacase de apuros” (72). Especially interesting about Pepita’s case is her brother’s role in the problem: “había sido gran calavera en el lugar, jugador y pendenciero, y a quien después de muchos disgustos había logrado colocar en La Habana ... A los pocos años de estar [el muchacho], su mala conducta hizo que le dejaran cesante, y asaeteaba a cartas a su madre pidiéndole dinero” (ibid.). Thus, Pepita is forced into a marriage of convenience not only to support her mother, but to resolve the economic problems of her brother, who, if he were to reform and apply himself properly to work, would, as a man, be perfectly capable of supporting himself through employment not open to his sister. Pepita’s suffering is short, her elderly husband dies within three years, leaving her wealthy; Ana, on the other hand, endures greater hardship when her husband dies after a number of years (unspecified), but also leaving her poor.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Doña Ana is described as having been “una esposa modelo” (92), and not because Don Francisco was an easy husband: “aunque muy caballero, era rudo, ignorante y violentísimo. Doña Ana supo amansarle, pulirle y civilizarle un poco a fuerza de paciencia y dulzura” (ibid.). She was faithful also, although Valera suggests Francisco’s “ferocidad y vigilancia” would have permitted little else: “anduvo siempre ojo avizor y con la barba sobre el hombro, como quien no quiere la cosa; y si hubiera cogido en un renuncio a Doña Ana, ni el Tetrarca ni Otelo se le hubieran adelantado en vengar el agravio” (ibid.).

Valera’s intent on driving home the degree of Ana’s poor treatment (both by her despicable husband and her father and brother who pushed her into the marriage)

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<sup>38</sup> “Ora jugando, ora en francachelas, en ferias y en excursiones a otros pueblos de Andalucía, ora en regalos a las mancebas que había tenido, ora con su desorden, mala administración y necios planes, D. Francisco López de Mendoza se había empobrecido y se había empeñado” (*Las ilusiones*, 337).

becomes further evident when he returns to the subject following Ana's death, to declare:

Su marido, rudo, selvático, montaraz, no sabía estimarla. Ni siquiera por gratitud, viéndose tan cuidado y respetado, había mostrado amor y consideración a Doña Ana. Con sus amores viciosos por la Joya y la Guitarrita, y por otras daifas palurdas por el estilo, había humillado cruelmente a su mujer. Ni siquiera amistad, ya que no amor, había sabido mostrar a aquella noble señora, con quien jamás había acertado a sostener un diálogo que durase cinco minutos. (*Las ilusiones*, 337)

Not all marital arrangements were so "successful". Commenting upon the problems created by women's dependency upon men, in *Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Valera states,

La causa principal de las perturbaciones morales que nacen del trato entre la mujer y el hombre es la idea, tan arraigada y difundida por todas partes, de que la mujer necesita que la mantengan. El día en que la mujer, cualquiera que sea la clase social en que esté o en que haya nacido, se persuade de que puede y debe mantenerse por sí, sin que necesite para ello de hombre alguno, ese día la moralidad superior habrá aparecido en el mundo. (*Oc 3*, 1417)

In fact Valera goes even further, claiming that the situation not only creates immoral behaviour but an unacceptable diminishment of the self-respect and dignity women ought to be afforded.<sup>39</sup>

Considering Valera's acknowledgment of women's lack of liberty, the author must have had some degree of sympathy for his wife's frustrations. One particularly poignant letter written to Dolores in 1888 and cited by Bravo-Villasante for its significance (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 265), suggests that this was the case, as Valera

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<sup>39</sup> "Llevado al extremo el sentimiento celoso que exige grandísimo recato en la mujer, y combinando este sentimiento con la idea de que la mujer necesita que alguien la mantenga ... la moralidad y el interés han venido a fundirse y han producido ... resultados a mi ver, harto poco agradables: han rebajado a la mujer intelectual, moral y físicamente" (ibid., 1418).

admits to feeling culpable for his role in her misery. Responding to her “recriminaciones”, Valera states,

Hay ... cosa que me mortifica y amilana, y en ella persistes siempre y en todas partes. Cuando no te hacen todo el caso que debieran, cuando te desairan o imaginas tú que te desairan, yo soy siempre quien tengo la culpa. Mil veces te he contestado a eso con la mayor humildad y desconsuelo. Yo reconozco que en eso tienes razón ... Si yo fuese, no un infeliz, dulce y resignado, no un Juan Lanás, que es lo que soy por desgracia, sino un personaje ilustre, temido, importante en mi país, sin duda que nadie te desairaría, pero si yo mismo soy desairado y burlado, ¿cómo soñar en que por mí a ti te consideren? El único mérito que yo creo tener (y acaso sea ilusión y vanidad de mi alma) es el de escritor; pero este mérito vale poco en todas partes, y menos aún en un país como el mío, frívolo, corrompido, semi-salvaje, donde nadie se lee, donde la *high-life* es aún más ignorante y grosera que la *low-life*, donde no da consideración personal la más primorosa obra de ingenio. Yo no tengo un amigo, ni valimiento, ni crédito con nadie. Hasta los de mi familia me consideran como un bicho raro y extravagante, un don Antonio Alcalá Galiano que no echa discursos, un pobre diablo, salvo el valerse de mí cuando por casualidad les he podido servir de algo y los he servido. Aunque saliese yo por ahí pordioseando, no habría usurero que me prestase mil duros al 30 por 100 al año. Confieso que toda esta incapacidad y toda esta mala ventura mía debí yo tenerlas presentes antes de casarme, y no hacértelas compartir. Aquí está mi pecado y hasta mi crimen. (C 5, 82-83)

A dramatic confession by a man whose self-esteem was obviously suffering at the time, he goes as far as to suggest that he committed a sin, even a crime by effectively “misleading” Dolores into marrying him. In other letters we have seen Valera write quite the opposite, suggesting that his wife is spoilt—“lo menos vivirán en Madrid 25 mil mujeres, muchas más ricas y en mejor posición que Dolores, que no van a París a hacerse corset, calzado y trajes” (C 3, 174)—and that she knew well his position. In 1879, Valera states, “Yo no le oculté ni mi vejez, ni mi pobreza, y sin embargo hace años que me está desdeñando y moliendo con que soy viejo y pobre” (C 3, 142). In another letter he suggests, contrary to what he claims in his 1888 letter, that his wife’s

accusations are not warranted, “Por más que hago examen de conciencia no caigo jamás en que puedo yo haber ofendido a mi mujer para que tan mal me trate” (C 3, 147). Given such contradictory statements, it is not entirely clear which case represents the true state of Valera’s mind: guilt or a clear conscience,<sup>40</sup> or whether his feelings on the subject, as it is tempting to suspect, lay somewhere in the middle: between a sense of culpability and a genuine belief that he had married a spoilt woman of impossible character, and vacillating from one extreme to another depending on other external factors affecting his mood and self-confidence at any give time. During his posting in Washington, D.C., for instance, Valera comes across as particularly dismissive of Dolores’s insults at the same time that he is describing to Sofía the attention he is receiving from numerous young women: “¿Qué tendré yo para parecer tan mal a mi mujer? Todavía con 60 años, parezco bien y enamoro a otras mujeres” (C 4, 333).

Whatever evidence there may be that Valera felt his wife’s disdain to be unjustified there is little doubt that he was frequently dogged by sentiments of guilt, self-doubt and self-loathing. These, having emanated in large part from the unhealthy nature of his relationship with Dolores, had an impact upon his fiction.

### **Braulio and Beatriz**

In *Pasarse de listo* Valera once again portrays a troubled marriage—this time a husband’s fear that his wife is losing love and respect for him. As Braulio, scarcely a month in Madrid, writes to his friend Paco,

Beatriz se casó conmigo por amor. A pesar de la gran diferencia de edad, me quiso, no hallándome inferior a cuantos ahí había visto. Creo que Beatriz sigue queriéndome; pero el temor de que me pierda el cariño, la sospecha de que el alto concepto que de mí formó vaya rebajándose de continuo, me tiene constantemente sobresaltado. (62)

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<sup>40</sup> Events preceding Valera’s 1888 letter do not appear to represent a significant change to the normal state of affairs, except that Bravo-Villasante refers to his recent resignation as Minister in Brussels (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 265). It appears that Dolores did not approve of Valera being a “cesante”; and nonetheless, his postings seemed to bring as much burden financially as did his time in Madrid “unemployed.”

Braulio has reason to worry. The couple, along with Beatriz's younger sister, Inés, have just moved from Andalusia to the more competitive and glamorous environment of the nation's capital. Her husband, working as a civil servant in the Treasury Department, has only a modest income. Beatriz is also one of Valera's most ambitious heroines. The narrator refers repeatedly to her "esperanzas ambiciosas" (39), "su afán de elevarse y de elevar a su familia" (ibid.); her desire to "lograr riqueza, dignidades y distinciones" (ibid.) and to "vivir con esplendidez y elevarse a mayor posición en la jerarquía social". She is described as "deudora" to Braulio for having made possible her departure from their small town "donde se ahogaba" (ibid.). Commenting on their modest income and resulting "apuros", the narrator reveals that Beatriz has a plan: "... la cual cavilaba mucho ... desde que había salido del lugar, ya casada" (38).

The manner by which Beatriz hopes to ascend socially is two-fold: through helping Braulio to focus his energies in such a way that his talent bears fruit (she recognises that up to this point, while gifted, he has suffered from a "falta de estímulo", "vagos ensueños" and "teóricas distracciones"); and by marrying her sister, Inés, well. To this end, Beatriz initially has set her sights on an aristocrat, the Count of Alhedín, to be her potential brother-in-law. Half of Chapter 4 is devoted to the depiction of Beatriz lecturing her sister on the art and importance of coquetry. While Inés does end up marrying the Count at the novel's end, it is not without months of damage to her sister's reputation—the "sociedad murmuradora" (109) accusing Beatriz of having an extra-marital affair with him. Worst of all, Braulio, believing that his greatest fear has come true, commits suicide by throwing himself off the viaduct in Segovia.

As it turns out, contrary to appearances and in spite of much temptation, Beatriz did indeed remain faithful to her husband and to the narrator's assertion early on that in spite of her aspirations, Braulio was "un hombre a quien veneraba y quería" (39). Nonetheless, for Bravo-Villasante, the insecurities of Braulio bear a striking resemblance to those Valera expresses in relation to his wife, Dolores, around the time he was writing *Pasarse de listo*. Highlighting his age (Valera was 22 years older than his wife), his difficult economic position and his general appearance and standing—we remember the comment Valera made to his sister about Dolores: "Me ha hallado siempre viejo, pobre y hasta poco elegante y distinguido para lo que ella cree merecer" (C 3, 174)—Braulio identifies similar shortcomings in himself. According to



the narrator, “Se reconocía fatigado, melancólico, viejo, poco ameno, mal vestido, nada elegante...” (*Pasarse de listo*, 100). Also, on numerous occasions Braulio’s financial limitations are alluded to.

Significantly, in spite of Braulio’s insecurities, his wife is not portrayed in the same resentful manner that Valera’s is. While Valera describes Dolores as hating him—“me ha tratado y me trata con desdén y con despego, cuando no con furia” (C 3, 174)—the contrary is said of Doña Beatriz’s attitude toward Don Braulio. The essential difference, then, between what Braulio experiences as against his creator is that Braulio’s misery comes from what he fears could develop, whereas the evidence indicates that Valera’s marriage was already in turmoil. In addition, and no less importantly, Braulio is depicted as unable to embrace the encouragement his wife wishes to give him to spur him to succeed, whereas Valera intimates on numerous occasions that his wife is altogether unwilling to offer him that love and support which, as his critical essays communicate, he saw as so essential to man’s self-confidence and thus success. These narrative changes, which make Valera’s fiction deviate drastically from what he experienced in life, are important, for they enable the author to explore not only the circumstances which contribute to Braulio’s insecurity, unhappiness and ultimate suicide (his recent move to the more competitive and glamorous environment of Madrid), but his character flaws as well.

Braulio’s excessive pride, his inability to trust (born ultimately of low self-esteem), his general pessimism and fatalistic attitudes are all contributing factors to the character’s downfall. Although he is described as “melancólico por temperamento” (68), his wife is said to love and respect him and yet his inclination is to doubt her, in spite of these positive indications. In a brief soliloquy, Braulio wonders why Beatriz married him in the first place:

Por una casualidad, primero: por haberla hallado en un lugar donde nadie había que compitiese conmigo. Y después, por un contrato, consagrado por la religión: por un deber moral, legal y religioso, que la impulsa a amarme de un modo exclusivo. Si este, aquel o el otro fuese su marido, en vez de serlo yo, ¿no le querría como a mí me quiere? ¿Quién sabe? Quizá le querría más. (102)

Their recent move to Madrid has only worsened his fears. According to the narrator,

A cada paso veía hombres cuyas prendas de entendimiento, cuyo valer moral, cuya alma, en suma, le parecían muy inferiores a lo que en su ser propio notaba y estimaba, pero que eran al mismo tiempo tan superiores a él en todo lo que más fácilmente se nota y se estima, como, por ejemplo, distinción y soltura en los modales, juventud, hermosura física, salud y brío, amenidad y alegría en el trato, ligereza y gracia en la conversación, que miraba como prodigio inexplicable que su mujer no gustase, más que de él, de cualquiera de dichos hombres. (100)

At the same time that Braulio is worrying obsessively he is also exhibiting signs of excessive pride, as indicated above by the suggestion that beneath the surface, he is actually superior to others (“le parecían muy inferiores a lo que en su ser propio notaba y estimaba”). Braulio’s sense of superiority is highlighted by comments to his friend Paco about his intelligence. In a letter to him, Braulio explains that in spite of his angst, there is still one fact which leaves him a modicum of consolation: his belief that he is actually a genius, and that he has not reaped the fruits of his gift because he is actually too intelligent to benefit from it. According to Braulio’s theory, only a certain amount of intelligence is required for success—beyond that point having extra is superfluous, unnecessary, an impediment even. The potential implications of such a belief are easy to imagine: held back by what Beatriz identifies as a “falta de estímulo”, “vagos ensueños” and “teóricas distracciones”, her husband is unable to apply himself effectively and with determination in pursuit of higher pay, status, and so on—the things Beatriz needs for the fulfilment of her dreams.

While Braulio is at least comforted by this confidence in his own intellect, understandably he worries that having an overly-gifted husband will not do Beatriz any good. He laments to Paco, “Ella no mira sino que va a pie, que vive en pobre casa, que nadie la atiende, y que el respeto, la consideración y la lisonja de que anhela verse rodeada, le faltan por mengua mía” (64).

Further illustrations of Braulio’s lack of self-esteem and his tendency, at the same time, to behave in an aloof manner out of a feeling of superiority (not to mention these

traits' self-isolating consequences) can be witnessed from Chapter 10 and into Chapters 11 and 12 where the author-narrator deals with, among other matters, Braulio's anxiety over his wife and sister-in-law's new friends. When they find themselves at the *tertulia* of Rosita, the narrator compares the three characters' varied reactions. Predictably, Beatriz adores the experience: "estuvo ... encantada y encantadora. Satisfecha de verse atendida y mimada por todos, desechó la cortedad y *tomó la tierra*, como si hiciera ya años que asistiese en aquellos salones" (91). Inés, in line with the very different nature with which she has thus far been depicted, is claimed to have also adapted well, but in a far more natural and less eager manner: "Su serenidad olímpica, su calma divina, no la abandonó ni un instante... estuvo en la tertulia como pudiera haber estado una princesa real, para quien todas aquellas magnificencias eran elemento propio, o más bien, quedaban por bajo del elemento que ella respiraba y en que su alma vivía" (92). Unsurprisingly, Braulio finds this new setting much more difficult. According to the narrator, "estuvo bastante encogido y fuera de su centro" (ibid.). Significantly, the narrator partly attributes this discomfort to his character: "*escamón*, como dicen en su tierra... andaba con la barba sobre el hombro, y le parecían los dedos huéspedes. Era listo, pero presumía de ladino, y llegaba a ser sobrado malicioso. Formó, pues, de la tertulia un concepto muy diferente del que doña Beatriz había formado" (ibid.). Braulio has always lived a retired life, the narrator goes on to explain, first in Andalusian towns, then in Seville, and as he has never actually taken part in the "gran mundo", he has developed an image of it as being much grander than what he sees before him. He thus decides that Rosita and her friends are frauds; and as such looks upon all of them with great disdain, with the exception of one individual present, the Count of Alhedín, whom Braulio decides he likes.

The author-narrator's criticism is pointed. He comments upon Braulio's attitude toward his and Beatriz's new acquaintances, suggesting that although perhaps understandable, his view of them is more extreme—"sobrado malicioso", than it ought to be. In relation to the man's belief that he is intellectually superior to others, the author-narrator does not permit such a claim (born of arrogance) to go without remark. At the beginning of Chapter 7, he highlights the leeway he has as a writer of novels and not of dramas, which allows him to go further than presenting characters' voices

according to the “carácter, condición y pasiones que representan” (67), but to comment upon them also: “En la novela caben todas las explicaciones: en pos del veneno se administra la triaca. El autor puede tomar la palabra en medio de la narración y contradecir a sus personajes, mitigando o ahogando en seguida el mal efecto que las opiniones de cualquiera de ellos hayan producido” (ibid.). And that is what he does, writing, “para aquietar mi conciencia, harto escrupulosa, tengo que hablar ahora de D. Braulio y de su carta, la cual contiene proposiciones aventuradas sin duda, y que creídas por el cándido lector, pudieran pervertirle con una de las más feas perversiones que se conocen, la de considerarse *genio* no comprendido; ser superior desatendido injustamente” (68). He goes on to explain how Braulio worked hard, kept to himself, and though he communicated his idea about his genius to his closest friend only, he did not share it with anyone else. Notwithstanding this, he remained unhappy and unsuccessful:

D. Braulio, melancólico por temperamento, poco favorecido de la fortuna, y enamorado y celoso sin saber de quién, deliraba acaso forjando teorías; pero no dejaba que dichas teorías trascendiesen a la práctica; y parecía a la vista del más lince, como un empleado modesto, que sabía todo cuanto importa saber y hacía cuanto importa hacer para ganar el sueldo en conciencia y no estafar al Tesoro público. (68)

Just as Faustino of *Las ilusiones* has been identified as having a strong basis in Valera’s youthful persona (Bravo-Villasante, *Vida de Juan Valera*, 195), there are similarities between Valera and Braulio too—particularly where flaws are concerned. Take for example, Braulio’s narcissistic belief that he is underappreciated because of others’ inability to recognise his merit. Valera himself expressed similarly brazen confidence. Writing to his father in 1850 he conveys a striking self-belief in his own talents:

Yo me creo más instruido y más capacitado que muchos periodistas y sabios del día ...Ya V. verá qué estúpidamente están escritos todos los periódicos; los dramas y comedias que se hacen ahora son pésimos; los libros de ciencias y política e historia son menos que medianos. Si yo no fuera, pues, tan desidioso, o no

estuviera tan preocupado, y me pusiera a trabajar con constancia, podría hacer algo que me diera nombre, porque en la tierra de los ciegos el tuerto es rey. (C 1, 74)

Significantly, in the midst of declaring his superior ability, he also addresses what he believes is a character defect standing in his way to success, “desidia”, a trait which is comparable to the “falta de estímulo” which the narrator of *Pasarse de listo* claims is the reason Beatriz assigns to her husband’s lack of success.

Again, this time in a letter to his mother, Valera addresses those character flaws which preclude him from being able to make himself successful as a writer. “Desidia” is identified, but he additionally refers to “desaliento, falta de habilidad y de costumbre” (C 1, 142), all of which suggest a lack of discipline, and perhaps even confidence—in sum, a “falta de estímulo”, such as that which Braulio seems to suffer. However, like Braulio, Valera lays the final blame on others, claiming that aside from these obstacles, he must also contend with “la indiferencia y hasta mala voluntad del público español, poco amigo de leer cosas serias” (ibid.).

Similarly to Braulio, who turns his nose up at the society surrounding him, Valera also expresses a sense of superiority in relation to the Madrid community of which he is a part. This is clear from Valera’s suggestion above that the “público español” is not sophisticated enough to appreciate what he writes. Additionally, he complains to his mother, “Yo que aprecio tanto la amistad, y la ciencia y los modales cortesanos y las conversaciones discretas, no tengo ni siquiera un amigo que pueda satisfacerme en estas cosas. Los que son eruditos están muy mal educados, son sucios y pedantes; y los que son limpios y cortesanos, tan mentecatos que no hay medio de poderlos aguantar” (C 1, 88).

If a major difference exists between Braulio and Valera at the time he was writing to his parents—aside from the men’s diverging socio-economic backgrounds (Valera came from a semi-aristocratic family, Braulio is middle-class)—it lies in the fact that Braulio is much older than the twenty-something Valera was on making the remarks above. Moreover, as Valera aged, though he remained greatly critical of Spanish society and its values, maturity tempered his snobbery (if not disappointment) as he

became increasingly more conscious of his own shortcomings and their role in his failures. Writing decades later in 1887 to nephew, José Alcalá Galiano, he admits,

Me he puesto muy viejo, y me siento muy abandonado, muy solo y muy triste. Mi mujer, con sus lamentaciones, acrecienta mis tristezas en vez de aliviarlas ... Y lo peor de todo es que yo creo con toda sinceridad en que en gran parte tenemos los hombres la culpa de nuestros males: con lo cual ni me queda el consuelo de culpar a la suerte y de glorificarme o al menos consolarme yo. (C 4, 657)

In this way, although Braulio's troubled nature shares much in common with the worst of Valera's traits, the latter proves far more conscious and reflective of his part in his misery (largely by living longer, it must be recognised). In fact, while Valera may have had a snobbish attitude in his youth, in his more advanced state of life it was he who exhibited tolerance and his wife who expressed a feeling of superiority to many of those around them. Writing from his second diplomatic posting in Lisbon, Valera explains to his sister how it is the wife of the Secretary of the Legation who hosts his *tertulias*: "Mi mujer no consintió en estas ... mientras aquí estuvo, porque no sé cuántas cosas la faltaban y todo lo hallaba incompleto y poco elegante" (C 3, 321). She also refused to attend those of others: "en casa del conde de Cheste ... Grande de España ... importante hombre político, capitán general y director de la Academia, tuve que rogarle mil y mil veces que fuera. No quería ir porque no había quien la peinase y porque se le antojó que aquello no era tan *high life* como Fernán Núñez" (C 3, 183).

In relation to Beatriz, there is not much to suggest that Dolores inspired her depiction beyond her social-mindedness. Superficially the women came from very different backgrounds—Beatriz grew up as middle class in a small town in Andalusia, whereas Dolores came from a cultured diplomatic family; her father, a career diplomat, had been Valera's boss many years earlier during his posting in Rio de Janeiro.

With regard to their traits, both women are ambitious, but Beatriz's "carácter alegre" (*Pasarse de listo*, 70) and inner confidence aid her socially, whereas Valera in a rare moment of empathy and thoughtful reflection about his wife's problems attributes a good deal of her frustration to what he sees as her anxious character, "tímido y desconfiado que rechaza a la gente" (C 5, 188.)

In contrast to Dolores, Beatriz is also described by the narrator as “cauta” and “astuta” (*Pasarse de listo*, 40). Moreover, where Dolores’s snobbery (and perhaps underneath it, insecurity) leads her to disdain much of their company, Beatriz welcomes all. A far cry from Valera’s depiction of Dolores, Beatriz “No era despilfarrada, sino ordenadísima y económica” (70). She is also described as having “creencias cristianas, vivas y fervorosas” (39).

Beatriz has negative traits also. She behaves naively and imprudently in her relations with the Count of Alhedín. And yet there is little detectable criticism on the part of the narrator—whose references to his past novels in Chapter 16 affirm that it is the author speaking. If any disapproval is apparent in *Pasarse de listo*, it is in relation to Braulio’s character rather than Beatriz’s. Valera’s heroine is far from perfect, but for the author, neither is her ambitious nature worthy of censure.

Valera admires Beatriz as he admires all of his principal heroines. Indeed, a rare reference in his correspondence to his fictional characters celebrates the women rather than the men. To his friend, Gumersindo Laverde, about the pleasure he gets from writing, he remarks, “Las hijas de mi espíritu, Doña Luz, Pepita, Rosita, Doña Beatriz, Inesita, Constansita, Doña Blanca, Clara y Lucía, me forman una tertulia agradable cuando estoy en la soledad de mi estancia” (*C* 3, 150-151). A statement of little note if it were not for the conspicuous absence of any male character listed, Valera confirms with it a particular affection for his female creations, in contraposition to those real-life women, such as Madeleine Brohan and his wife Dolores, who frustrated and disappointed him terribly.

In summary, this chapter has explored many aspects of Valera’s thought and temperament, bringing to light his keen interest and intriguing views on the role, conduct and position of women in society—an interest reflected in his depiction of several heroines. Aspects of Valera himself, his values and experiences, appear in his own work through characters such as Fadrique, Pedro, Valentín, Braulio, but even at times through his heroines, such as Rafaela and Costanza. And yet particularly evident in his fictional depictions is the impact that his wife, Dolores, and his troubled relationship with her had upon characterisation and recurrent themes in his novels.

Not all Valera's heroines take after Dolores—those who do represent an improved version; while Etelvina, who is rather cruel, is only a minor character, used for the purposes of comic relief. Indeed the majority of his fictional heroines represent a closer approximation to Valera's ideal, an ideal expressed in his essays, and one that appeared in sharp contrast to the reality which he experienced. None of the women he imagined are perfect—but their prevailing flaws and mistakes appear to be vices which Valera found forgiveable, because of the self-sacrifice and desire for love which so often forms their basis, but also because of his more tolerant, and in some cases uniquely progressive views relative to the times in which he lived.



## Chapter 2

### The Influence of Hardship and Personal Frustrations on Valera's Fiction: "The Autobiographical Novels", *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino & Pasarse de listo*

It has often been noted that Valera's novels present a more cheerful and vibrant view of the world than existed during the author's time, that his characters tend to be attractive, healthy and fit—indeed, Valera believed in the importance of art to uplift and inspire.<sup>41</sup> But while several of his novels adhere to his aesthetic as a "misión o fin de purificar las pasiones ... de elevar nuestras almas a la contemplación serena de lo imperecedero y de lo hermoso" (ibid., 634), some do not, presenting what José Montesinos claimed was the only limitation Valera put upon art: "la de no ser fea, torpe o deprimente" (*Valera o la ficción libre*, 7). This chapter will show how the frustration and disappointment Valera experienced in life did at times lead to negativity—bleak themes, negative characterisation and less than ideal settings—and how when Valera does, according to his aesthetic aims, present a more idealised depiction of life, this idealisation is still created through a lens influenced by his own very personal experience of hardship and challenge.

Among Valera's early-period heroines, his depiction of Costanza is particularly interesting, given that she represents a major focus for psychological study, with Valera presenting her in her youth in the novel's early chapters and then revisiting her in middle age later on. (He does the same with Rosita and María; however, Valera does not study these two women to the same degree.) The short timeframe represented by most of his novels, where the action transpires over months or up to a year or two, does not generally allow for character studies which explore their psychological states from one stage of their life to the next. In the case of Costanza though, such a study is possible because in *Las ilusiones* Valera allows seventeen years to elapse between the first part of the novel, set in Andalusia, and the last part, set in Madrid. Only in *Genio y figura*, Valera's seventh novel, will the author similarly examine the position of his heroine at two different stages of her life, presenting Rafaela in her twenties and thirties and then finally at fifty, although in this later work he does so in even greater

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<sup>41</sup> *Apuntes sobre el nuevo arte de escribir novelas* in *Oc* 2, 657.

depth, handing narrative control over to Rafaela, and allowing her speak for herself, in a way that he never will to Costanza or any other female character.

Portraying Costanza as calculating, cunning and understanding exactly what she wants from life at 18, Valera has her arrive at the age of 35 to find herself in a crisis—“echaba de menos en su vida cierta poesía” (*Las ilusiones*, 377)—leading her to resume contact with her cousin Faustino and embark on an affair. Referring to the “poesía” she was missing from her life, “la buscaba por otra parte, no en aquello de que estaba satisfecha esta la sociedad” (*ibid.*). His company is said to remind her of a simpler, more natural time, a time when without the burden of social dictates, she could just be herself. Referring to Costanza’s relief upon the departure of the vain and presumptuous General Pérez from their company one afternoon, we are told that once alone with Faustino, Valera’s heroine “se acordó de su primera juventud y de la franqueza y naturalidad de Andalucía; olvidó por completo su papel de gran señora; volvió a ser la muchacha traviesa y alegre y aflojó la rienda a la risa, que hasta allí había tenido refrenada con el freno de circunspección” (399).

Costanza has enjoyed the best of everything during her marriage to the Marquis of Guadalbarbo thus far: good health, enduring beauty, riches, a social life in the most prestigious salons of Europe, the position of everyone’s envy; and yet she is tired and restless with her life. Referring to the most refined and sophisticated civilisations in history, Valera describes the similar discontent which arose among its people: “en Alejandría, por ejemplo en tiempo de los sucesores del hijo de Filipo, y en Versalles, en tiempo de Luis XIV y de Luis XV, es cuando, por contraposición, se ha despertado el gusto y hasta la manía de la poesía bucólica; del idilio, de la vida campestre, del amor sencillo entre pastores y zagalas” (376). Costanza is said to have faced the same crisis,

Vivía gustosa en Madrid, pero de vez en cuando atormentaba su corazón cierto prurito de vida patriarcal y primitiva. La marquesa de Guadalbarbo componía a veces idilios inefables, allá en el fondo de su alma, en cuya composición entraban por mucho los recuerdos de su pequeña ciudad natal, de su jardín, del azahar y de las violetas que le embalsamaban, del cielo despejado de Andalucía y de toda aquella existencia menos artificiosa y más próxima a la madre naturaleza. (377)

Although neither Valera's biographers nor his correspondence suggest he was ever drawn into a similar-type love-affair as Costanza was with Faustino—an unsatisfied, middle-aged Valera with a fellow native of Cabra or Doña Mencia he had known in youth—the dream of a simpler life and the idealisation in his mind of his native Andalusia, once faced with the limitations of a society fixated only by superficial interests, is a nostalgia her creator knew well.

Born in Cabra, in the province of Córdoba, and raised principally in the nearby smaller village of Doña Mencía, Valera spent most of his early youth in Andalusia, going on to receive a secondary school education in Málaga, and attend the first two years of university in Granada. He spent his third year studying in Madrid but returned to Granada to complete his degree, awarded to him in 1844, at the age of 20. Shortly thereafter, Valera returned to Madrid again with the intention of practising law. As DeCoster points out, once Valera left Córdoba in 1846, he never returned to live there permanently (“Valera and Andalusia”, 200), residing for the rest of his life in the capital with the exception of intermittent diplomatic postings abroad, totalling sixteen or so years.

### **Disillusionment in Madrid**

As Valera's correspondence attests, although he was initially drawn to Madrid, once there, he found life underwhelming and frustrating. Only eleven letters have survived leading up to his first diplomatic posting, embarked upon in 1847, as an unpaid *attaché* to Naples, and these document a young man who enjoyed his time in the capital; however, Valera's correspondence following his return to Madrid in 1849 has a very different tone. In a letter to his mother in January of 1850, Valera complained, “Este país es un presidio rebelado. Hay poca instrucción y menos moralidad, pero no falta ingenio natural y sobra desvergüenza y audacia” (C 1, 65). In another he declared, “Mi salud es excelente; pero Madrid no me divierte, y, si no hubiera sido porque deseaba ser algo, me hubiera ido por ahí tiempo ha. La sociedad madrileña tan frívola y presumida como de costumbre...” (C 1, 78) Instead, he dreams of the opportunity to get away to places more inspiring, Granada among them:

Si yo tuviera 100 duros míos y no tuviese ambición, me iría a Granada los veranos y el resto del año a París o a Italia, a vivir pobre pero libremente, como viven los artistas y los verdaderos poeta, cantando y amando, y gozando con el trato de la gente por allí, de la erudición sin pedantería, del verdadero buen tono y del saber sin pesadez, que desgraciadamente por aquí no se hallan, y menos que en los hombres, en las mujeres. (C 1, 68)

At many points, Cabra and Doña Mencía will also figure in his fantasy of returning to Andalusia—although neither of these places will remain entirely untargeted by criticism.

What particularly seemed to disappoint Valera about his experience of the capital was a lack of culture and sophistication among its upper classes. This is evident from his comment above implying that *madrileños* are full of “pedantería” and without “buen tono” and “saber sin pesadez”. Remember also the complaint Valera made to his mother, cited in Chapter 1 of this thesis,

Yo que aprecio tanto la amistad, y la ciencia y los modales cortesanos y las conversaciones discretas, no tengo ni siquiera un amigo que pueda satisfacerme en estas cosas. Los que son eruditos están muy mal educados, son sucios y pedantes; y los que son limpios y cortesanos, tan mentecatos que no hay medio de poderlos aguantar. (C 1, 88)

In a letter from 1850, he would describe more concretely the nature of *madrileños*’ superficial values, stating to his father, “Estos últimos días he estrenado una levita muy elegante y he notado que todo el mundo estaba más amable conmigo, me saludaba y hablaba con más cariño” (C 1, 84). Writing to his mother only a year later, in 1851, and alluding to their money troubles, Valera would also remark on the social importance of wealth, begging her not to move Sofía and herself to the capital, remarking, “Cómo han de vivir ustedes en Madrid? Usted no sabe el lujo que últimamente se ha desarrollado en aquella capital, y el poco caso que allí se hace de la gente pobre” (C 1, 177). In this regard, Valera’s depiction of Madrid society in *Las*

*ilusiones* is loyal to his own experience of having lived in the capital. Valera and Faustino do not undergo identical experiences. Faustino's struggles are greater: when he moves to Madrid he lives in a boarding house, poor, obscure and with few friends for 17 years. And yet, Valera's protagonist also experiences the shallow and unfriendly qualities of the "sociedad elegante" his creator claims to have encountered; for it is only when Faustino comes into money through his marriage to María that he is described as a legitimately participating member of society and able to make friends: "no era ya Don Faustino un sujeto obscuro e ignorado, sino un personaje de mucho viso y lustre. Sus riquezas, o dígame las de su tío y de su mujer, prestaban brillo, realce y notoriedad a todas sus buenas prendas" (ibid., 431).

There is also Valera's reference to Madrid's high society as "compuesta de la más inmundanda putería" (C 5, 109). Faustino is immersed in a community lacking in scruples (C 5, 109), exhibited through characters such as Etelvina Mercier (see chapter 1) and the pompous, even predatorial General Pérez, who pursues Costanza persistently in his attempts to seduce her. In an effort to discourage Pérez with his unwelcome advances, Costanza enlists the help of Faustino, and then ends up having an affair with her cousin instead. In this regard, neither does Rosita behave in a morally upstanding manner. Describing her life in the capital, following her marriage to Don Claudio, the narrator states, "Rosita era la *lionne*, la reina, la emperatriz de las cursis. Lo menos catorce o quince poetas, simultánea o sucesivamente, habían hecho de ella su musa, su Laura o su Beatriz, y la habían compuesto baladas, elegías, cantares y doloras. Rosita procuraba hacer creer que sus amores con todos estos vates habían sido platónicos, y no hay razón para que no la creamos" (*Las ilusiones*, 363).

Consider also the scant loyalty displayed by Faustino's compatriots during his very serious illness: "Los pocos medio o menos de medio amigos de secretaría o de la sociedad, que estimaban o querían algo a Don Faustino, vinieron a informarse de su salud, y, como se les dijese que el Doctor estaba enfermo de cuidado y no se le podía ver, se contentaron con esto y se fueron" (415). Valera also himself felt the victim of indifference throughout much of his life.

Although he would end up applying himself with greater vigour than Faustino to the pursuit of his aspirations, Valera would still complain of the inadequate support and encouragement he received from his fellow countrymen. While Cyrus DeCoster acknowledges in his article, “Valera en Washington”, that Valera was a “gruñón crónico” (218) throughout his life, few complaints from the native Cabran are more consistent than those expressing disappointment about the sorry state of literature in Spain. According to DeCoster, Valera’s disappointment went as far as to affect his appraisals as a critic: “He took a benevolent attitude toward the mediocre plays and novels which he reviewed, feeling that since Spain was producing so little, one should not discourage the few who were writing. At the most he damned the second-rate with faint praise” (*Juan Valera*, 34).

In January of 1860 a more mature Valera continued to muse on the frivolous preoccupations of Madrid’s high society and how “La ridiculez inaudita de los que me rodean me hace temer que no caiga yo también en ella y este temor acabará por quitarme todo aliento para escribir y hasta para pensar” (*C* 1, 652). And to Gumersindo Laverde in March of 1867, he would thank him for the copies of an article entitled, ‘El neopriscilianismo’, going on to remark, “No se le daré a leer a nadie porque no creo que hay en todo Madrid una sola persona de cuantas yo conozco a quien se le importe un bledo de que un escritor de Galicia largue desatinos o no los largue, ni de nada que huela a filosofía o literatura. Me encanta su candor de usted y le envidio. Yo no creo que aquí importe ya a nadie nada la vida del espíritu” (*C* 2, 285).

Equally, Valera’s experiences in the capital appear to have influenced its unmistakably negative depiction in *Pasarse de listo*. Certainly the difference in circumstance between the author and Braulio are great, given that Valera’s family connections would have ensured him introductions into aristocratic circles and participation in the “gran mundo” (an elite of which Braulio reflects in Chapter 10 that Rosita and her friends do not appear to be part), but the author was no less strained by finances (relative to the greater expectations of his higher social class), and a sense that he could not live up to his wife’s ambition and penchant for luxury. If there was a pressure upon women to dress well, there was, in most cases, a pressure upon men to provide the means to make this possible. Valera highlights his wife’s frustrations, in a

letter to his sister Sofía of 1870, stating: “Dolorcitas se queja de que... no tiene para vestirse con todo aquel chic de París, con que sueña” (C 2, 407). Writing in 1891, the author will also refer to the expectation upon women to spend extravagantly: “Un hombre aunque sea más pobre que las ratas, se cuele por todas partes en teniendo un frac negro, camisa limpia y el cuerpo bien lavado y fregado; pero una mujer necesita gastar muchísimo en modistas y en coches y en otras mil cosas, si ha de figurar en la *alta sociedad* sin ponerse en ridículo y en apuros su marido” (C 5, 363). This standard was not new to the late 1800s; in 1850 Valera had written to his mother about “la ninguna autoridad que tienen las damas que no arrastran coche y llevan en pos de sí criados de librea” (C 1, 177).

Importantly, in *Pasarse de listo*, Braulio is not the only character whom Valera illustrates as facing challenges in light of their move. Valera gives their housekeeper Teresa a voice in Chapter 5, with her lengthy lament,

¡Cuánto mejor estábamos en nuestro pueblo! Verdad es que allí el sueldo era más ruin; pero... si allí con una peseta se hace más que aquí con un duro... Yo, lo confieso, me ahogo en estos tabuquillos y chiribitiles en que vivimos. ¡Cuánto echo de menos aquellos patios, aquellos corralones de mi tierra! ¡En la cocina del señor cura cabía toda esta habitación y sobraba sitio! ¡Y luego... vivir tan altos... tan encaramados! ¡Vaya si hay escalones hasta llegar aquí! Y no es esto lo peor. Lo peor es el poco o ningún caso que aquí le hacen a una. Todavía no tengo en Madrid persona con quien hablar. Allá en el pueblo, ¡qué delicia! Salía yo a la calle y no había perro ni gato que no me dijese: Dios guarde a su merced: adiós, ama Teresa: ¿cómo lo pasa usted, señora?, y otras cosas por el estilo. Aquí no hay un alma que me dirija la palabra y me dé los buenos días. Luego todo está carísimo: se come oro: o es menester ponerse a dieta o gastar en comer cuanto dinero hay. Dentro de poco empezarán los zorzales, y en nuestra tierra llegan a ponerse hasta a cinco cuartos el par. Ve tú a comerte aquí dos zorzales tan gordos como aquellos. Ya, ya... trabajo te mando... Sobre que no los hay... Y toma... Si los hubiera, costarían un ojo de la cara. ¡Pues a fe que te gustaban a ti poco los zorzales! ¿Y las anguilas? ¿Y las ancas de rana? Nada de esto está por aquí a nuestros alcances, sino cuando repican recio. (*Pasarse de listo*, 53)

An expression of homesickness and maladjustment, the above outburst by the family's housekeeper—the numerous exclamations and length of which emphasise the vehemence of her feelings—aside from providing comic relief, signifies the traumatic effect the move to Madrid has had on her. Among Teresa's gripes are: the absence of a range of familiar items; the unfriendliness of people and the sense of being anonymous; but perhaps most important of all, the higher cost of living about which Valera complained frequently. On one of numerous occasions Valera wrote of a desire to move back to Cabra because living there costs less (*C* 2, 387)—Andalusia in general symbolising an affordable alternative where he could bury his head in his books and write as he wished.

In truth, *Pasarse de listo* presents very little *costumbrismo* and a minimally portrayed sense of the public, exterior world. Instead what appears to have interested Valera about the capital as a setting—and likely why he chose it—had to do with the potential it held for showing characters confronting obstacles and change in the face of new pressures. Valera was not interested in an objective reality of Madrid, but in his character perceptions of it, demonstrating, ultimately, how Madrid as a concept was significant to each: to Beatriz and Inés, as a source of hope and opportunity; to the housekeeper Teresa, a source of frustration and loneliness; to Braulio, a source of anxiety and threat.

While not all of Valera's novels portray characters moving from one city to another and occupied with the challenge of adapting and making a new life, all depict his protagonists facing some sort of challenge, with the opportunity to emerge triumphant. In fact, Valera particularly seemed to enjoy demonstrating his heroines in such circumstances. In *Pepita Jiménez* Valera actually modified the premise upon which the novel was based in order to increase the hardship his heroine was facing. According to one of Valera's descendants, Jesús Contreras, Valera's first novel was based on the experience of one of his aunts (*Valera: Su perfil ignorado*, 30). Similarly to Pepita, Dolores Valera y Viaña, as she was called, married her much older uncle for financial reasons, an arrangement allegedly promoted by her mother (although as Contreras mentions this cannot be definitely confirmed). Also similar to the fictional version, two years into her marriage (in Pepita's case it was actually three), Valera's aunt was widowed, enabling her to subsequently marry a man nearer her own age—



this time for love. In this way, Valera's first novel is based on true events, although as Andrés Amorós recognises, the author chose to emphasise certain parts: "Embellece Valera esta historia suprimiendo el primer noviazgo" (*La obra literaria de Valera*, 177). And as Manuel Azaña suggests, although the character of Pepita may have been based on Valera's aunt, the latter was "ni rubia ni de manos tan bellas como quiso don Juan que fuesen las de Pepita" (*Ensayos sobre Valera*, 215). But Valera makes other changes also. For instance, in the fictional version, Luis de Vargas, the young man Pepita falls in love with and marries, starts out as a seminarian destined for the priesthood and it is his father who is courting Pepita. Additionally, Valera increases the age of Pepita's uncle, putting him at eighty in contrast with his aunt's uncle who, according to Contreras, was seventy-one when they married. Valera's motives for changing such details are clear: they make Pepita's challenges even greater, thus making her triumph and the novel's outcome all the more uplifting.

*Genio y figura*, Valera's seventh novel, an apparent departure from his earlier works, given the author's uncharacteristic use of foreign settings, is no different from those which preceded it. In fact, much like *Pasarse de listo*, Valera utilises his protagonist's geographical displacement to increase the obstacles facing her. Somewhat differently, however, Rafaela, being a prostitute, comes from the humblest origins of any of Valera's previous characters.

Rafaela's story unfolds mainly in two foreign locales, Brazil and France (with a brief interlude in Portugal), clearly chosen, at least in part, because of Valera's familiarity with them from official business and other travels. He had diplomatic postings in Rio de Janeiro from 1852 to 1853 and postings in Lisbon on two different occasions: first from 1850 to 1851 and then from 1881 to 1883. Paris he visited on many occasions, sometimes for extended periods, as his sister Sofía lived there.

Valera experienced repeated upheavals during his lifetime, created by the need to move for economic reasons. And in regard to the Rio leg of his diplomatic career, his correspondence testifies to the challenges he faced upon arrival:

El calor me mata, y un dolor de estómago casi continuo me quita el gusto para todo. Las calles de la ciudad están mal empedradas, los coches son caros y

detestables, las distancias enormes, la comida nauseabunda, ... las habitaciones mal ahajadas, y llenas de arañas, curianas, lagartijas, mosquitos, salamanquesas, alacranes y otros monstruos horribles y asquerosos. (C 1, 178)

Two months later, he is still finding aspects of life in the Brazilian capital repulsive. Referring to the letter he is having difficulty composing, he writes to Estébanez,

Una irritación de estómago y dolores de cabeza constantes me impiden ser más extenso y más claro. La melancolía me abruma. No hay aquí, para mí al menos, con quien hablar, ni de quien ser amigo. Harto sabía yo que la fiebre amarilla era fruta de esta tierra y, sin embargo, pedí al Gobierno venir aquí para adelantar en la carrera; pero no lo hubiera pedido si me hubiese enterado anticipadamente de lo mucho que me iba a aburrir, de lo caro del país en proporción al sueldo que me dan, de lo poco amables y francos que son los brasileños con los extranjeros y de la soledad y aislamiento en que vivo. (C 1, 215)

Thus, Rafaela's experience of having to move abroad to make a living, and once there having to adapt and set up a life for herself, and then having to move again, was a challenge Valera would have experienced. Valera was not unaware of how her displacement could increase the sense of adversity she was facing. Quite the contrary: he exploited it.

Exotic descriptions of Brazilian landscapes and customs highlight how different her new home was from her old one, as the narrator describes aspects of the life and people that, although idealised, would have been utterly different to either Spain or Portugal. And Rafaela's transition from one society to the other is not presented as being a smooth one either. The man put in charge of helping her organise her first performance is detested by his compatriots. Thus, her introduction to Rio is characterised by hostility:

El odio y el desprecio que el señor de Figueredo inspiraba, tocaron como por carambola y se estrellaron contra la pobre Rafaela. La mayoría de los oyentes sostuvo que Rafaela desentonaba y daba feroces gallipavos, y las damas severas y

virtuosas y los honrados padres de familia clamaron contra el escándalo, e hicieron que su pudor ofendido tocase a somatén. El resultado de todo fue una espantosa silba, acompañada de variados proyectiles ... Sobre la pobre Rafaela cayó un diluvio de aguacates, tomates, naranjas, bananas, cambucás y mantecosas chirimoyas. (73)

Paris is also depicted as a difficult place to navigate, especially when it comes to integrating socially. Valera takes great pains to show this, emphasising how heavily stratified and impermeable the upper class social circles are. To be admitted to the most exclusive French one, it is not enough to be wealthy; the narrator informs us that one must also possess an abundance of other distinguishing attributes. After a lengthy list which leaves us wondering if there is anyone who would be able to fulfill the criteria, he concludes by stating that the last essential ingredient for success is luck (173). Although these lengthy descriptions seem to be a distraction from Rafaela's affairs and certainly many of the details in these chapters are not directly relevant to her story, they clearly contribute to giving us a sense of the atmosphere she has been living in for the twenty years since she last saw the Viscount. And, more importantly, we get a sense of the social acceptance that evaded her in the French capital; for as Trimble notes, when she reappears in Chapter 26 it is at a *tertulia* for the Spanish, Portuguese and South American expatriates (*Valera en sus novelas*, 155).

Having to move between societies clearly entails challenges. The way that Rafaela manages, however, is truly admirable. With regard to her initial move to Brazil, she maintains composure even during her public humiliation following her debut performance in Rio.

She also does not retreat into obscurity after the embarrassing incident. Although she no longer pursues a career as a dancer, she does become a prominent individual in Rio society, famous for her hospitality and hosting *tertulias*. Some never fully accept her, but she is self-assured and without need for validation from others—she is not even vexed when the Queen snubs her following Don Joaquín's attempts to have his wife presented to her. In addition to her self-confident nature, Valera uses the journey to illustrate and emphasise other qualities such as her independence and adaptability, the

last of which is demonstrated particularly well when the narrator explains her motivations for defending Brazilian women against Arturo Machado's insults: Brazil is her “patria adoptiva”—yet another manifestation of Rafaela’s generous nature. And this manifestation is not insignificant, but contrasts sharply with that of Valera’s wife, from Brazil, who refused to embrace Spain as her “patria adoptiva” but instead derided it constantly according to the author’s correspondence (as highlighted in chapter 1).

Finally, Valera is able to emphasise Rafaela’s generosity through her efforts to transform the nature of Don Figueredo’s financial activities; she wants him to modify his practices so that they will benefit others too. In this way, she is seen to be improving the state of the community at large.

Throughout the rest of his life, Valera’s enthusiasm for Madrid would remain muted at best, with Andrés Amorós maintaining that, “Al llegar a Madrid, a la mitad del siglo XIX, el joven Juanito Valera siente una gran decepción ... No cambió su opinión, con los años, aunque en Madrid vivió, cuando estaba en España, hasta su muerte” (*La obra literaria de Valera*, 124).

A recurring theme in Valera’s correspondence is his frustration over the lack of recognition he gets for his writing. His early letters are full of disdain, but his later ones also feature occasional outbursts of the same. We may cite again his 1888 letter to Dolores, when he denigrated Madrid’s people, labelling them “frívolo, corrompido, semi-salvaje, donde nadie se lee, donde la *high-life* es aún más ignorante y grosera que la *low-life*” (C 5, 82-82). Reading on in that same letter it becomes evident that much of what fuelled Valera’s bitterness was the feeling that those most capable of appreciating him did not do so. Bravo-Villasante also maintains that much of Valera’s negativity on returning to Madrid from Naples in 1849 related to the young man not getting the recognition he felt he deserved: “grandes oportunidades de darse a conocer y la posibilidad de ocupar más alto puesto ... No han de pasar dos meses y ya está desengañado. Él, sin embargo, no es el mismo de antes. Cuando se considera, ve que en estos dos años ha crecido su saber. ¿Por qué no le aprecian como se merece?” (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 50).

Financial worries would also contribute to colouring Valera's view of the city and its people, his life in Madrid representing an unsustainable option, and in his own words, "lo más a propósito para perder uno su tiempo sin provecho y sin gusto" (C 1, 651). And yet Valera's being drawn to Andalusia appears not only born of practical considerations but of an appreciation for certain aspects of life there.

### **Valera's fondness for Andalusia**

His enchantment with home is evident from numerous letters, not least the following one written from Doña Mencía in October of 1880 to his sister:

Aquí estamos aún en verano, muy verano; el tiempo hermosimo [sic], aunque con bastante calor. Ayer cogí rosas en la Paniega como en mayo. Estoy encantado de un árbol que tengo en el corral de esta casa mía, que se ha hecho gigantesco. Está ahora precioso, lleno de su fruto colorado. Tiene el árbol muchos metros de elevación. Veamos si adivinas lo que es por el sabor de esas hojas que te envío. (C 3, 217)

Other letters would celebrate the *ferias*, food, natural beauty and amusing village antics: "Nuestro sibaritismo o refinamiento en los deleites es extremado" (C 3, 589), he wrote proudly to his friend, the Baron of Greindl, during another visit to Doña Mencía in October of 1883. Such enthusiasm would not go untranslated into his fiction.

Although according to Cyrus DeCoster "regionalist elements play a much more important role in *Juanita la Larga* (1895) than in the other novels," ("Valera and Andalusia", 207), *Juanita la Larga* is not the only of Valera's novels set in his native region. *Pepita Jiménez*, the first three quarters of *Las ilusiones de doctor Faustino*, *El comendador Mendoza* and *Doña Luz* (1879) are also based in Andalusia. As DeCoster correctly points out, even Valera's novels set outside this southernmost province such as *Pasarse de listo*, *Genio y figura* and *Morsamor* feature protagonists who originate from it (ibid., 204).

Nonetheless, even though Valera's native land inspired the settings for most of his novels, they do not accurately depict it, his Andalusia tending to represent a more salubrious, cheerful version of what existed during the author's time. In fact, Valera's letters highlight the fact that he was far from blind to the state of his homeland. During a visit to Cabra in September of 1875, he wrote to his nephew, José Alcalá Galiano,

No sé si te diga que me alegro o que siento que no hayas venido a esta patria de *Pepita Jiménez*.... Esto está triste por mil razones: porque no ha llovido y el campo está seco y los bolsillos vacíos: porque la comarca está infestada de bandidos y nadie se atreve a ir al campo sin llevar escopeteros; porque con las enormes contribuciones todo el mundo está desesperado; y porque no se oyen sino lamentaciones y maldiciones contra todos los gobiernos habidos y por haber que no saben más que sacar el redaño sin proporcionar ventaja alguna.<sup>42</sup>

And yet, *Pepita Jiménez* contains no such misery, clearly indicating that Valera's comment, "Yo tengo bastante de poeta, ... y me finjo otra Andalucía muy poética cuando estoy lejos de aquí" (ibid.; see also C 2, 600), is in fact very accurate.

Indeed, the Andalusian settings of most of Valera's novels are enchantingly described. In *Pepita Jiménez*, Luis's surroundings, predominantly those of his natural environment are responsible for distracting his mind from his studies and drawing him into a reengagement with the material world, leading him to fall for Pepita, marry her, and thus abandon his decision to pursue the priesthood. While it is the enchantments of a single evening, "la velada de San Juan", which most obviously have their affect, arguably the process of his seduction begins immediately on his return to the village.

The first of Luis's references to the natural world appears in his very first letter to his uncle, dated March 22<sup>nd</sup>, and is written four days after his arrival to his hometown, from which he has been away for twelve years. He mentions the impression his father's house has made on seeing it again, but quickly moves on to comment about

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in DeCoster, "Valera and Andalusia", 203; see also C 2, 583.

the surrounding countryside, betraying a sense of excitement and wonder about this aspect of his home region specifically:

Lo que ahora comprendo y estimo mejor es el campo de por aquí. Las huertas, sobre todo, son deliciosas. ¡Qué sendas tan lindas hay entre ellas! A un lado, y tal vez a ambos, corre el agua cristalina con grato murmullo. Las orillas de las acequias están cubiertas de yerbas olorosas y de flores de mil clases. En un instante puede uno coger un gran ramo de violetas. Dan sombra a estas sendas pomposos y gigantescos nogales, higueras y otros árboles, y forman los vallados la zarzamora, el rosal, el granado y la madreSelva. Es portentosa la multitud de pajarillos que alegran estos campos y alamedas. Yo estoy encantado con las huertas, y todas las tardes me paseo por ellas un par de horas. (*Pepita Jiménez*, 69)

For Bravo-Villasante, we owe the novel to Valera's prolonged visits to Cabra and Doña Mencía in the years leading up to its production (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 185). According to DeCoster, during one visit in particular, in 1872, "shortly before writing *Pepita*, Valera spent several months in Andalusia and was struck by the splendour of the surroundings, more beautiful than he had remembered them. Many of the descriptions in the novel are similar to passages in the letters which he wrote to his wife during that visit" ("Valera and Andalusia", 211).

In *El Comendador Mendoza*, although the town's setting and environs receive far less attention, there is still a charming description of religious festivities, and the natural world is described in all its grandeur and beauty on an excursion taken by Fadrique, Clara and Lucía in Chapter 8. Similarly to Luis, who has been away for many years, Fadrique, the main protagonist of Valera's third novel, has been away even longer and returns to his hometown at age 50. Bravo-Villasante sees several biographical similarities, particularly regarding Don Fadrique's return to his native land. For her, this event mirrors Valera's return to Cabra and Doña Mencía, and at the end of the novel, Fadrique's marriage to a much younger woman reflects his own marriage to Dolores, also a much younger woman (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 199).

### Setting and Atmosphere in *Las ilusiones*

Not all of Valera's novels depict Andalusia in such charming terms. One novel in which even natural elements are at points rather intriguingly depicted as unattractive is *Las ilusiones*. Contrary to the case of Luis and Fadrique, who return to their villages, Faustino is portrayed as trapped and unhappy within his and thus his home and immediate environs appear rendered in such a way as to reinforce that sense of entrapment and stagnation characterising his life there. The fact of his family's perpetual decline in economic terms (which is one of the factors entrapping him) is captured in the dereliction of the Mendoza's ancestral home:

Aunque no tanto como la familia misma, la casa ha decaído y da muestras claras y tristes de la estrechez de los dueños. En muchos balcones faltan cristales; las antiguas puertas, prolijamente labradas y cubiertas de graciosos clavos de bronce, están descuidadísimas; y el amarillo jaramago publica la afrenta de aquella fábrica arquitectónica, brotando por entre las grietas que se han abierto al separarse varios sillares. Las grietas son tan anchas y profundas en algunos sitios, que ofrecen sobrada capacidad para que en su seno se aniden las lagartijas, las salamanquesas asquerosas y los feos y medrosos murciélagos, y para que nazcan, se arraiguen y crezcan allí no pocas higueras bravías y yerbas y maleza. Esta vegetación parásita se desenvuelve mucho en primavera y da a la fachada el aspecto de un jardín vertical. (*Las ilusiones*, 79)

The description of parasitic plants and animals is notable, because adjectives such as "asqueroso", "feo" and "medroso", or elements which could be considered as such are extremely rare in Valera's novels. Consider James Whiston's observation about natural elements in *Pepita*. In his article, "Campo, huerta, jardín, estufa: el deseo y la domesticidad en *Pepita Jiménez*", having enumerated the various species of plants and animals contained within Valera's first novel, he notes that in relation to the latter, "no hay ningún animal nocivo o dañino, o ave de presa" (267), a fact which adds to the idealised, idyllic feel of the scenery.

In fact, Valera's general tendency is indeed to idealise his settings, homes, surroundings and even the physical qualities of characters, altogether omitting the



depiction of the ugly. It is not in keeping with his aesthetic to include such misery. And yet at the beginning of *Las ilusiones*, he does.

Even Faustino's house itself is situated in an unappealing manner—"en el sitio más esquivo y apartado ... en un callejón sin salida" (80). Whereas homes featured in *Pepita Jiménez* and *Doña Luz* are in possession of inner courtyards and lush gardens tended by radiant women, when Faustino looks out the window, he is presented with scenery "poco risueño ... la calle solitaria y sin salida ... Las tapias del corralón que servía de cementerio" (234). Valera does not leave the reader to interpret the significance of the home's situation beside a graveyard, "fácil es de comprender lo fúnebre que será con esta vecindad del antiguo cementerio y de la iglesia, bastante ruinoso ya, y depósito asimismo de osamentas" (81). Doña Ana is said to have kept the house well but "el orden y limpieza luchaban con lo triste y aislado del sitio" (93).

Just as no description of gardens or flowers, or anything of the like can be found in or around the house, Villabermeja itself is described in terms of limited beauty, with the narrator referring to "los andurriales y vericuetos más solitarios" (109). The area is scattered with little more than, "los restos ruinosos de un torreón" and is described as, "estéril", "pedregoso", and with "matas ruines de amarga retama, tomillo, gayomba y romero", with "lirios silvestres, que brotaban en las hendiduras de los peñascos, otras flores moradas y de un solo pétalo, que llaman por allí candiles, y sobre todo multitud de esparragueras" (ibid.). When one considers the other types of vegetation frequently alluded to in other passages and in other novels, which are vibrant and aroma-producing, the lack of fertility and lushness, the lack of the word "frondoso" in describing any vegetation is striking. There is a melancholy quality to the scene, coinciding with Faustino's own melancholy, which leads him to take solitary walks to places which are never more than barren or relatively infertile. To emphasise his sense of longing there is a comment about the spot from which he likes to pause and gaze out: "se oteaban los campos y se descubría mucho horizonte" (109).

Animals mentioned in this early part of the novel are few and far between. Not long after the description of the facade of the Mendoza home, Valera goes on to describe other parts of it, which provide refuge to opportunistic creatures,

El alero del tejado es tan ancho que deja un espacio grande entre su extremidad y el muro, donde las golondrinas fabrican con predilección sus rústicos nidos. Sobre el piso principal de la casa hay otro piso de graneros y zaquizamíes; pero como, de mucho tiempo ha, apenas hay granos que llevar a aquellos graneros, sólo los habitan algunos búhos y lechuzas melancólicos y algunos ratones parcos y ascetas.  
(80)

Even the animals share qualities similar to the Mendozas—being “melancólicos”, solitary, withdrawn.

In Chapter 3 the family dogs are mentioned, the “podencos, galgos y pachones” (113) who are said to complete the *tertulia* between Faustino and his mother, highlighting, once again, the social isolation of mother and son. Further along, this kitchen area is described as having “cierto encanto entre rústico y señoril” (114) containing, among other things, “cinco jaulas con perdices cantoras”, hunting arms and a selection of dead and stuffed animals: “cabezas de venados, zorros, lobos y garduñas”. Aside from the birds, dogs, mother and son (and later we learn, Vicenta), the house appears to be inhabited by little more than spirits of dead ancestors, stuffed animals and a lot of dust. These elements enhance the sense of stagnation dogging Faustino’s life.

Following the initial chapters of *Las ilusiones* in which Valera establishes the primary protagonist, Faustino, and his mother, their noble lineage, poverty, and their complex, yet limited relationship with Villabermejans—not to mention the problem of Faustino’s future—Faustino ventures from home, spurred by his mother’s encouragement and the possibility of marriage to a wealthy cousin, who, given her supposed fortune, would give him “alas” (116). On the morning of Faustino’s second day on the road, Valera writes, “Era una hermosa mañana de primavera. Golondrinas, jilgueros y ruiseñores cantaban. El ambiente diáfano, el vientecillo lleno de frescura y la rosada luz que iba asomando por el oriente, alegraban el corazón” (121). It would seem the uplifting quality of nature exists only outside Villabermeja, a point perhaps indicated by Faustino’s relatively elevated mood, which Valera conveys with the next statement: “El doctor se sentía menos melancólico que de costumbre” (ibid.).

As Faustino travels further away from Villabermeja and closer to Costanza’s town, more plants and gardens come into perspective. From the vantage point of a hill,

Faustino spots a quaint, inviting town: “Blancas eran las casas por el mucho enjalbiego y con grandes patios, desde cuyo centro se alzaban las verdes copas de naranjos, acacias, adelfas, azofaifos y cipreses. Un riachuelo, que corre por delante de la ciudad, regaba no pocas huertas en una fértil llanura que se extendía a los pies de los viajeros” (127). This is, we are told, where Costanza lives.

Only a few pages later, we have Faustino’s arrival at Araceli’s house, matchmaker and cousin of Doña Ana; and with it, the bedroom where he will be staying, described as

Muy alegre y bonito, con balcón a un patio interior, cuyos muros estaban entapizados con las siempre verdes y frondosas ramas de varios naranjos y limoneros, y en cuyo centro se alzaba un surtidor de agua cristalina, derramándose en una taza de mármol con peces colorados. Todo alrededor se veían arriates con flores. Su aroma y el apacible murmullo de la fuente lisonjeaban a la vez olfato y oído. (131)

Considering the description of Faustino’s house with its parasitic vegetation and grotesque creatures, not to mention the general absence of delightful elements described following it, the contrast with Araceli’s house is striking. Note the references to colourful elements, which are pleasing to the eye, and which give off a pleasant scent or sound. In *Pepita Jiménez*, the only novel Valera had completed before *Las ilusiones*, these elements have a special status—a powerful effect upon characters, and are not merely background elements of little consequence. As they have for Luis, they will prepare Faustino, this young man, for the possibility of love.

Nonetheless, Faustino’s attempts to woo Costanza prove futile. The scene is described in Chapter 8 with the requisite enchantments: “la espesura frondosa de naranjos, limoneros, jazmines, rosales de enredadera y otros árboles y plantas”; “profundo silencio”, and “el murmurar de la fuente”, “las estrellas”, “muchas violetas ... su aroma [que] sobresalía por cima del de las rosas, azahar y demás flores” (169)—but far more prosaic concerns make their marriage impossible; for Costanza is not one of Valera’s heroines he idealised on multiple levels, but a woman more typical of those he encountered in day-to-day Spain. Writing to sister, Sofía, in June of 1889, the author reflects upon his son Luis’s not having the same “éxitos” with Spanish women as he had with the foreigner, Princess Ourousov: “Las españolas no son más virtuosas,

pero son menos novelescas que las extranjeras. No se dejan llevar de la imaginación ni del sentimentalismo, sino de los que dan turroneos o dinero o satisfacen por su posición el amor propio” (C 5, 153). Faustino is unable to offer Costanza the wealth and position about which she dreams. As Costanza, with some guilt, will reflect in Chapter 28 of the novel, “sólo el egoísmo, el miserable interés, el ansia de goces materiales, el afán del lujo, y la vanidad la habían guiado y arrastrado a preferir a Faustino al Marqués de Guadalbarbo” (*Las ilusiones*, 383).

Later on in the novel, following Costanza’s rejection, Faustino will find himself consumed by the promise of another romance, this time with the town Notary’s daughter, Rosita, who in Chapter 16 brings Faustino on a visit to land her father owns in La Nava. Reflecting Faustino’s perspective and his sense of promise, the landscape is described with a certain magical enchantment, and in enough detail to rival all the references to nature which appear in *Pepita Jiménez*. There are even descriptions of agricultural activities which add charm to the scene: “Poseía [Don Juan], en las laderas contiguas ... muchas fanegas de majuelo, que estaban a la sazón binando más de cincuenta hombres que habían venido de varada; y en la misma meseta, muchos prados, donde tenían toro bravos, vacas, novillos, ovejas y carneros” (265-266). And in the evening, the eclectic group gathers for music and improvised theatrical performances, called *juegos*. As anticipated, “D. Faustino estaba tan embelesado de la fiesta, del campo, de aquellas escenas primitivas y agrestes, y sobre todo de Rosita, que se creyó trasladado a la edad de oro; se olvidó de sus ilustres progenitores los Mendozas, de la coya y hasta de María, y se tuvo por un pastor de Arcadia y tuvo a Rosita por su pastora” (270).

In fact, the extent of the excursion’s impact on him will be highlighted in his reflections many years later. Purported to be on his deathbed, the narrator states, “Los recuerdos de Villabermeja, de la Nava, de Rosita, de Doña Ana, del ama Vicenta, acudían en tumulto en otras ocasiones a perturbar la mente del Doctor, combinándose de mil maneras, a cual más fantástica” (425). Faustino was only at La Nava once, and yet the impression it made upon him is clear.

Like Luis before him, Faustino’s “espíritu poético” (*Las ilusiones*, 394) allows him to be seduced by the scenery; and also like Luis, the seduction by Andalusia’s landscape

and in this case, commonplace agricultural activities which Faustino's poetic illusions convert into charming pastoral scenes, only precipitate his sexual affair with the woman in question, this time, Rosita. However, *Las ilusiones*, as the nature of its early chapters indicate, is not the idyll that this La Nava episode seems to suggest, nor that which *Pepita Jiménez* represents. As Agnes Moncy indicates in her introduction to the work,

If we define idyll as a series of pastoral scenes or interludes, *The Illusions of Doctor Faustino* (1875) almost becomes one.... The reader feels the tension, hopes it can happen, but knows it cannot. After several such scenes or instances it becomes clear that this tale differs from Valera's usually spirited Andalusian novels, which show how passion and determination triumph over various social forces. ("Introduction", xi)

Note how the "jornaleros" who initially are part of Faustino's pastoral fantasy, first in relation to their agricultural work (266, 268), and next in regard to the rustic social gathering—"Entre los jornaleros había dos que habían traído guitarras y que las tocaban bien, no sólo de rasgado, sino de punteo" (268)—are quickly transformed back into what they really are: gossiping townspeople. As Valera describes the group's return to Villabermeja, "El doctor iba al lado de Rosita, como encadenado por el amor y la gratitud. Rosita parecía una reina que mostraba a su favorito a los demás vasallos ... Por la tarde volvieron los señores al lugar. Los jornaleros, que habían ido de varada, volvieron también, y no quedó casa en que no se refiriese y comentase el triunfo de Rosita" (270).

From this point, Faustino is returned to reality. Thanks to village talk Doña Ana has learned about what has taken place and confronts her son, admonishing him to sever all relations with the town Notary's daughter, who she claims is not good enough for Faustino, given her inferior class. Faustino follows his mother's advice and while it is not until Rosita witnesses Faustino in the midst of his affair with María that she retaliates from her wounded pride, her vengeance is swift and brutal, commanding her father to unleash creditors upon the Mendoza household, the stress of which leads to Ana's death.

Not surprisingly the rest of the novel is devoid of beautiful scenery—including the portion in which Faustino resides in Madrid. It is the same in *Pasarse de listo*. It would seem that Valera's "corrosive portrait of an idle and self-indulgent society, intent only on pleasure" (*Juan Valera*, 124) is not compatible with passages describing charming gardens or Madrid's city parks. While it has already been argued that the absence of charming scene-setting material in *Pasarse de listo* relates to Valera's intention in the novel to focus upon characters' psychological relationship to their new environs, it is nonetheless untypical of the author to forego an occasional digression on a topic which amused him or which he found interesting. And yet as Cyrus DeCoster observes about the work as a whole, "Except for the evening *paseos* in the Retiro, the *tertulias*, and the comments on the *bufos*, there are few details characteristic of Madrid, nor are any of the settings described in any detail" (*Juan Valera*, 123).

With regard to religious festivities, another common ingredient in Valera's recipe for enhancing Andalusian landscapes, such descriptions are altogether absent from *Las ilusiones*. An event is certainly alluded to—Faustino plans to visit Costanza during a *feria* to create an excuse for his presence in her town; however, the occasion is described without any of Valera's typical flourishes: "Llegaron los días de la feria: hubo toros; hubo mucho turrón y mucho garbanzo tostado; en fin, cuanto hay en todas las ferias" (154). Considering *Juanita la Larga*, in which Valera will celebrate one of his favourite elements of Andalusian life, its religious processions and festivities, by devoting no less than three entire chapters to their depiction, such an omission in *Las ilusiones* is noteworthy. Even in *El comendador Mendoza* with relatively little setting detail and *Doña Luz* with a primary focus upon Don Acisclo's business dealings, Valera will manage to incorporate charming passages about such annual rituals. In *Pepita Jiménez*, there is also a detailed description of the "día de la cruz" festivities.

Indeed, of Valera's Andalusian novels, *Las ilusiones* appears to be alone in its absence of one of the author's favourite motifs. While in several of Valera's other works descriptions are justified because of central characters' involvement in or at least enjoyment of the festivities, in *Las ilusiones*, Faustino is described as too foul-humoured to take part: "se divirtió menos que en un entierro" (154). Thus the

narrator's unwillingness to describe the scene appears to correspond to his protagonist's lack of engagement with it. Considering the attitude of the narrator himself, however, who identifies himself only two pages earlier as Valera, in his regret about having begun Faustino's story—"Sólo el compromiso que contraje al empezar su publicación me lleva ahora a continuarla" (152)—his lack of elaboration can also be understood as reflecting his own humour in relation to the subject matter, the central theme of which, DeCoster explains in his introduction to the novel, is Valera's attempt to "analizar su generación y estudiar las causas de la prostración en que había caído España en el siglo diecinueve" ("Introducción" to *Las ilusiones*, 19)—a state of affairs which troubled the author deeply. What is more, Valera was clearly drawing upon the darker aspects of his own nature and experiences in his depiction of Faustino. He even admitted there were facets of his own character in the man, explaining how his protagonist

[e]s un compuesto de los vicios, ambiciones, ensueños, escepticismo, descreimiento, concupiscencias, etc., que afligen o afligieron a la juventud de mi tiempo ... En su alma asisten la vana filosofía, la ambición política y la manía aristocrática....

... Para pintar lo interior del alma de mi héroe, prescindiendo de lo que le sucede en el mundo, no he tenido más arte que mirar en el fondo del alma de no pocos amigos míos y en el fondo de mi propia alma, y analizar allí afectos, desengaños, pasiones e ilusiones. (451)

According to Manuel Azaña, "*Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino* es la historia de Valera, mozo, contada y juzgada por Valera, viejo. Don Faustino es el pretendiente y ambicioso Juanito Valera, a vueltas con su vocación indecisa; como 'Don Juan Fresco' es el espíritu de nuestro don Juan, escarmentado y zumbón, infundido en la apariencia de un ricacho que realmente atendía por este apodo".<sup>43</sup> Bravo-Villasante comments of *Las ilusiones*, "hay tanta materia autobiográfica que es posible imaginar a Valera haciendo recuento de su vida pasada en estas páginas" (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 195). She compares Valera's character when he was young to Faustino's, describing him as "ambicioso y indeciso" (ibid.). And on the specific influence of Valera's

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in DeCoster's introduction to *Las ilusiones*, 23; From: Manuel Azaña, "Valera", prólogo a *Pepita Jiménez*, ed. Clásicos Castellanos, Madrid, "La Lectura", 1927, 1viii.

personal circumstances and biography, Bravo-Villasante identifies numerous examples, commenting:

Faustino estudia en los mismos lugares que Valera, y cuando termina los estudios, las preguntas que se hace sobre su futuro son idénticas a las que se hizo Valera en esa situación. ¿Se pondrá de pasante con un abogado? ¿Pretenderá un empleo? ¿Entrará en la carrera judicial? ¿Se dedicará a la literatura o se meterá a periodista? Tanto la madre como él saben que servirá para todo dándole dinero con que llegar. El caudal de los Mendoza está tan disminuido como el de los Valera. Don Faustino ha gastado mucho en Granada teniendo luneta en el teatro y haciéndose ropa en casa de Caracuel. El plan que traza doña Ana para presentar a su hijo en los salones de la Corte y hacerle triunfar, recuerda la entrada de Valera en los salones aristocráticos. Hasta los diversos y simultáneos amores de Faustino: María, la inmortal amada; Constanza, la novia burguesa, y Rosita, la libre y apasionada hija del escribano, pueden representar todos los amores entre los que se debatió el Valera juvenil. (ibid., 196)

While Bravo-Villasante does not offer any insight into the possible identities of the real women who may have inspired María, Costanza and Rosita's depictions,<sup>44</sup> she does make a comparison between Valera's parents and Faustino's: "Doña Ana parece el vivo retrato de su madre; es una señora orgullosa y dominante que ambiciona para el hijo un porvenir brillante. El padre, don Francisco, es un liberal perseguido por el Narizotas. Igual que los padres de Valera, doña Ana elige para su hijo la carrera de abogado y da su negativa a que éste entre de cadete en un colegio" (ibid., 195).

Sáenz's observations about Valera's mother also suggests she was a likely influence upon Doña Ana, he describing her as "heredera de un mayorazgo casi "desplumado" ... muy culta para el nivel de su época ... tiene para su hijo Juan una firmeza de

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<sup>44</sup> According to Dorothy Eileen Sutor Rundorff, Costanza represents "a composite, drawn in part, at least, from the coquettish person of Malvinita, *la divina Culebrosa*, daughter of the Duque de Rivas" (*Valera and Nineteenth Century Currents of Thought in Las ilusiones*, 112). In addition to Costanza's similarly flirtatious nature, Rundorff cites the following description of Valera's female protagonist to support the comparison: "El talle, flexible, no como una palma, sino como una culebra" (*Las ilusiones*, 127). It is also worth noting that Valera uses the nickname "La Culebrosa", which he gave to Malvinita, in the description of his fictional heroines Manolilla of *Doña Luz* and Teletusa of *Morsamor*. For more on the similarities between Manolilla, Teletusa and Malvinita Rivas, see James Courtad's *The Letter as Creative Perfection*, 241-242.



esperanza en su porvenir superior, una seguridad en su inteligencia que quizá sea difícil de descubrir con este grado de firmeza, en otros casos, entre madre e hijo” (*Cartas íntimas*, 17).

Doña Ana is likewise described as challenged by her economic position, in her case inherited through marriage from her husband. She is also said to be “muy culta”, with the narrator explaining how she was “educada hasta con refinamiento ... de un modo que pudiéramos llamar cosmopolita ... un prodigio de erudición para lo que entonces solían saber en España las mujeres” (91). Significantly, in *Las ilusiones* there is also an emphasis upon Doña Ana’s relationship with her son, suggesting that she has an elevated view of his potential in life and that she treats him indulgently— “idolatraba a su hijo” (95). All of this is linked to what the narrator highlights as Faustino’s “concepto demasiado favorable de sí mismo” (394).

The ambition Valera’s mother had for her son is indeed evident from letters he wrote to her in his youth. Interestingly, one in particular reveals that she has given him advice—advice, however, which is in fact opposite to that which Doña Ana gives to Faustino. While Faustino’s mother encourages her son to consider marriage “por interés” as a means of resolving his poverty—“Tú tomarás dinero como quien toma alas para volar; pero volarás luego, y encumbrarás tan alto a tu mujer, que no le pesará de haberte dado las alas” (*Las ilusiones*, 116)—it is clear that Valera’s mother has very different views. As Valera writes to her in relation to his own opportunity to marry Julia Pacheco “por interés”, he states, “El tío Agustín, a quien he pedido informes y consejos, me los da muy favorables al matrimonio. Es verdad que el tío Agustín (y esto va muy bien encaminado) no piensa, como usted, que un hombre en casándose *se corta las alas*, sino que le nacen mayores como la mujer tenga dinero” (*C* 1, 175). Significantly, Valera turns down the opportunity, but not without much forethought. His options in that very moment appear to be marriage or a potential diplomatic posting to Rio de Janeiro for which he will be paid very modestly. As he remarks to his mother about the latter option, “si voy contento, es por mis ideas poéticas y no por cálculo. El cálculo lo que sí me aconseja es el casamiento, no para vivir con los bienes de la señora, sino para que ellos me sirvan de apoyo y escalón a más altas pretensiones” (*ibid.*). It appears that Valera aspires to marry, if ever, for

loftier reasons than financial ones. Nevertheless, he appears to have a good conscience about the idea of a marriage for economic advantage—claiming that he would not be taking it as a lazy solution to facilitate a life of luxury, but instead to assist him in succeeding of his own account. Whatever the case may be, Valera desists, admitting, “Todas estas ideas me convidan al matrimonio; pero la de la paternidad, la de la pérdida de libertad, la de los celos de la esposa y, a pesar de mi filosofía, hasta la de los cuernos, me asustan y detienen”.<sup>45</sup>

In light of Valera’s own experience with the subject, his depiction of Faustino in *Las ilusiones*, who is faced with similar predicaments, is relevant here. Faustino embarks on a mission to marry his cousin, but while Valera’s “ideas poéticas” keep him from going through with marriage “por interés”, Faustino’s “ideas poéticas” convince him he is in love with Costanza. This narrative change takes control away from Faustino—he does not marry Costanza in the end, but only because she rejects him. Throughout the rest of the novel, Valera demonstrates how his protagonist is lost, going from one woman to the next in search of love that will inspire him to fulfil his potential. Valera shows how Faustino is incapable of real love, and how, even when he finds a worthy subject and finally comes into money, his self-delusion—what Valera terms in the novel’s “Introducción” as “ilusiones”—and lack of application still condemn him to failure.

Finally, Bravo-Villasante remarks that “una cosa también hay de común entre Faustino y Valera: su afición y amor al campo cordobés”, going on to explain how the author’s lengthy and detailed description of Faustino and Rosita’s excursion to her father’s land at La Nava is essentially the author showing off the most beautiful aspects of his native country: “Lo mismo que Faustino se cree trasladado a la Edad de Oro y se tiene por un pastor de la Arcadia, Valera transmuta todas estas bellezas naturales hasta lograr una Andalucía poética, no menos real que verdadera, pero sublimada artísticamente gracias a la idealización de sus rasgos más bellos” (196).

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<sup>45</sup> (C 1, 176). It is not entirely clear what Valera means by “a pesar de mi filosofía” in relation to infidelity. Here, in this letter to his mother (which displays surprising candour), he appears to suggest that the potential for it should not be a hindrance in the way that the other matters are. And yet his comment about avoiding marriage to Malvinita Rivas, in chapter 1 of this thesis, suggests that the potential for infidelity represents a good reason for him to think twice about marriage to the girl, although he does make light of the matter.

While Valera may indeed idealise nature in Chapter 16 of the novel, such vibrancy depicted in this episode only serves to accentuate the bleakness of the place from which Faustino has come. Although there is no evidence that Valera ever felt trapped to the extent that Faustino did in his hometown, the following comment from his youth certainly conveys some relief at having gotten away, not to mention a similar attitude of superiority to that which Faustino and his mother exhibit toward Villabermeja's townspeople and which isolates them so much. Writing from Doña Mencía in July of 1850, at the age of 26, Valera tells his mother:

Mañana voy a Cabra, con Ramona; todos me dicen que me van a dejar admirado la hermosura y adelantos, civilización y riqueza de aquella flamante ciudad; pero yo estoy casi seguro de que aquello estará poco más o menos como yo lo dejé, salvo alguna más presunción en sus habitantes, quedándola de cultos *ciudadanos* sin haber dejado de ser rústicos y *villanos*, estarán más insufribles que nunca. Si yo tuviera que vivir en estos pueblos, pasaría mi vida en el campo y no me trataría con nadie. (C 1, 108)

According to Cyrus DeCoster, "Valera's feelings about Andalusia were ambivalent. As an ambitious young man, anxious to make his way in the world, he was unwilling to bury himself in a small provincial town except as a last resort ... Yet, when in Madrid and particularly when abroad, he looked nostalgically back at his native province, and he repeatedly expressed a desire to return for a visit" ("Valera and Andalusia", 201). Perhaps such strange inconsistencies in regard to Valera's attitude toward Andalusia—where on one occasion he extols its beauty and charms and on another denigrates its customs and people—can best be explained by his similarly contradictory stance toward Spain in general. In August of 1860, he commented to Gumersindo Laverde from Madrid, "Ha de saber usted que yo soy muy patriota por espíritu de contradicción y por orgullo cuando estoy en el extranjero; y cuando estoy en España, sin dejar de amarla nunca, suelo tener de ella muy mala opinión".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> (C 1, 703). Valera's general thoughts about patriotism are also evident in the following comment the author-narrator of *Morsamor* makes about his main protagonist: "Cualquier ser humano, como no sea depravadísimo, tiene el amor de la patria, del pueblo, de la tierra en que ha nacido y de la gente a que pertenece. Este sentimiento es tan natural y tan general que no he de hacer yo el elogio de Fray Miguel porque le tuviese" (*Morsamor*, 16).

Unsurprisingly, criticisms of Cabra and Doña Mencía tend mostly to coincide with visits to the region; while at a distance, he expresses a fondness for and pride in his region. In fact Valera's nostalgia would not wane with age. It being particularly acute in the year before his death, he mused from the capital:

Puede ser también, y de esto me alegraría yo, Dios conserve mi vida durante seis u ocho años más aún. Personas hay que llegaron a noventa y aun pasan este límite, y no se mueren. Si yo fuese, por dicha, una de tales personas, me alegraría de vivir estos últimos años, no en esta villa y corte, donde ya te he dicho que me aburro y me pongo muy triste en mi aislamiento, sino retirado en mi ciudad natal de Cabra. A veces forjo sobre esto planes más o menos vagos, y me finjo que me voy a vivir en la misma casa en que nací, en la calle de San Martín.<sup>47</sup>

### Setting and Atmosphere in *Pasarse de listo*

Just as the dismal and largely biographical themes of *Las ilusiones* restrict the author's portrayal of some of his favourite motifs, the likewise dismal and biographical nature of *Pasarse de listo* also results in Valera's restricted incorporation of pleasant setting detail. More common in Valera's fourth novel and his only work to be set entirely in Madrid, the city of his primary residence, are authorial commentaries and depictions of the social world which undoubtedly address the bleaker side of humanity. Valera is critical of Braulio's nature, but the author's focus upon the "sociedad murmuradora" (109) is also intended to underscore the callousness and cruelty of others.

It is at the beginning of Chapter 12 of *Pasarse de listo* that this malignant force emerges to make its presence known. A natural affinity between Beatriz and the Count, as anticipated, has led to a blossoming friendship about which Rosita's *tertulianos* have something to say. While Braulio is completely oblivious of the suspicions—regarding the relationship himself as innocent—the narrator explains in Chapter 12, "No eran de igual parecer los de la tertulia de Rosita. Sin odio, sin deseo de dañar, por pura ligereza y alegre malicia, suponían cuanto hay que suponer, fundándose en los siguientes datos" (106). The narrator then goes on to list through

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Amorós, *La obra literaria de Valera*, 130; see also C 7, 477.

the next page, from the gossips' perspective, the evidence against Beatriz and the Count: that the Count should have returned to Biarritz after having concluded his business instead of staying on in Madrid for the rest of the summer; that at the *tertulia* the Count and Beatriz spoke for long periods alone, in private, and that he also paid visits to her at home; that the Count did not appear to be seeing or pursuing other ladies, from any social milieu, and that for a gentleman usually so devoted to amorous conquests, this did not seem normal. In light of all these considerations, the author-narrator states, "La pasión, por consiguiente, se supuso. Y una vez supuesta, se supuso también que no podía menos de ser correspondida" (106).

The Count insists to his friend and confidant, Rosita, who approaches him enquiring about his relations with Beatriz, that all is innocent. We are told she does not believe him, and, in fact, the more he denies any wrongdoing, the more she suspects a genuine affection. As a result, matters are made worse:

El rumor, la suposición, la calumnia, si era calumnia; la hablilla, en fin, si así queremos llamarla, se movió en efecto con rapidez portentosa. Apenas quedó en la coronada villa hombre ni mujer, iniciados en la historia anecdótica de los salones ... que no diese ya por cierto, firme y apretado el lazo que unía el corazón de Beatriz y el de Ricardo, que así llamaban al Conde de Alhedín.... D. Braulio era quizás el único que ignoraba todo aquello, y la gente se pasmaba de su ignorancia. (107)

From here, the author-narrator goes on to share the gossips' opinion of Braulio:

Los sujetos más benévolos decían: "No es extraño. El buen señor está en Babia siempre. ¡Es tan distraído! Vaya: más vale así." Otros exclamaban: "Bien se conoce que el hombre es un verdadero filósofo." Otros: "¿Quién sabe? Estos varones severos no incurren casi nunca en la torpeza de averiguar lo que no les conviene. La distracción, el andar siempre por los espacios imaginarios suele traer muchos provechos." Otros, por último: "Ya verán ustedes cómo el pobrecito don Braulio adelanta en su carrera y llega a ser personaje. Su mujer hará que suba." (108)

This represents the second time in the short chapter that the author-narrator shares the gossips' views. And the fact that above he refers specifically to different groups ("Los

sujetos más benévolos”, “otros”, etc.) creates an effect of murmuring voices in the background. What is also worth noting about this stage in the narration is that it marks a shift away from the narrator’s concentration on the mind-frame of Braulio, which has characterised the bulk of Chapters 6 to 11, to a focus on the activities and perspective of what he refers to at one stage as the “sociedad murmuradora”—a faceless public, devoted to the spreading of rumours and lies, for no purpose other than for the sake of their own amusement.

In Chapters 13 and 14, Valera goes on to demonstrate the destructive consequences that the diffusion of such rumours were beginning to have. Specifically, he describes the Countess’s discovery of the allegations which make her eager to see her son, the Count of Alhedín, marry his cousin, Adela, who has recently returned from her summer holidays abroad. Predictably, the Count is not interested. At the end of a lengthy dialogue between mother and son, in which she expresses concern over his welfare on a number of levels—professionally and personally—unable to restrain her anguish any longer, she blurts out: “Tú amas, lo sé, a la que no puede ser tu mujer, porque lo es de otro... Me han dicho que estás en relaciones con la mujer de un empleadillo en Hacienda, con una aventurera que va a casa de la Condesa de San Teódulo” (122). Naturally, the Count denies it. But his mother, like so many others, sees this denial as merely a sign of a genuine affection he has developed for Beatriz. The conversation thus terminates without resolution, but with the Countess deeply concerned and the Count of Alhedín, “de muy mal humor contra los deslenguados, chismosos e insolentes que iban propalando por todas partes sus amores con doña Beatriz” (123). Notwithstanding this new development, the Count pays no heed.

By this stage, he and Beatriz have grown accustomed to attending Rosita’s *tertulia*, and neither has any intention of abandoning the habit. The narrator thus discusses the trouble they are causing themselves: “se veían de diario y en presencia de muchos hombres maliciosos, amigos de burlas y muy propensos a explicarlo todo por el lado más feo” (123). He paints the Count as stubborn; and Beatriz as naive. While the former believes there is no good reason for suspicions, the latter thinks that they are both so admired for their virtues that no one would dare get the wrong impression about their relationship. Beatriz is mistaken.

From here, the narrator summarises the gossips' beliefs that the notion of platonic friendship is laughable, that the Count's reputation as a "ladies' man" makes his relationship with Beatriz look suspicious, and that it is strange for a man as wealthy and noble as he to fall for an ordinary, small-town girl. The gossips are thus only taking greater interest in the pair, the damage they are causing gaining in momentum.

Indeed, a little way further into Chapter 15, the narrator takes the reader to Rosita's *tertulia* the evening following the Count's unsettling conversation with his mother. After the departure of Braulio, Beatriz and Inés from Rosita's, the poet Arturo, a kind of ringleader for the "murmuradores", decides to rile the Count with his playful insinuations. The Count, though able to restrain his fury for a time, confronts Arturo as soon as the *tertulia* breaks up, the result of which leads to a duel between them. As predicted, the Count emerges victorious, but tragically, the very behaviour he sought to stop by intimidating Arturo is in fact encouraged by the event. As the narrator comments:

No quedó en Madrid perro ni gato que no hablase del frenético amor del Conde por la mujer de un empleadillo en Hacienda; de su loca pretensión de hacerla respetar como criatura angélica, semi-divina, y fuera del orden y condición que naturalmente se usan; y de su afecto singular hacia el esposo sufrido, de cuyo sufrimiento tenía el Conde el imposible empeño de que nadie se percatase ni se riese. Como el Conde no había de desafiar y matar a todo Madrid, particularmente a las mujeres, la historia de sus amores con doña Beatriz, imaginada o real, pero bordada y comentada por todos estilos, circuló por tertulias, cafés, casinos y teatros. La reputación de doña Beatriz quedó así más lastimada que el cuerpo de Arturo, de resultas del lance que tuvo con él el caballeroso Conde de Alhedín, inhábil, por la persuasión y por la violencia, para convencer a nadie de su platonismo. (132)

Finally, in one last example of the "sociedad murmuradora" at work, Valera describes Braulio's collapse following his receipt of a letter from a certain vengeful Elisa,<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Elisa is one of Valera's nastiest heroines, determined to end the Count's relationship with Beatriz, because she is wrongly convinced they are having a clandestine affair. Valera makes her intentions clear when he says, "lo que le importaba era rendir al Conde, conseguir que no fuese de doña Beatriz, lograr que aquella mujer se viese abandonada" (*Pasarse de listo*, 142)—the last clause hinting at her particularly vindictive nature. She is not even entirely sure what she wants from the Count, to make him

alleging that his wife and the Count are having an affair. His fellow workers rush to the fallen man, but their show of compassion is minimal as they take obvious amusement in Braulio's situation. Again Valera gives us the effect of murmuring voices:

“¿Qué es esto, Sr. D. Braulio?”, dijo uno. “¡Amigo González!”, exclamó otro. Don Braulio no respondió. “Es un ataque de apoplejía.” “¡Qué demonio de accidente!” “¿Qué apoplejía?”, dijo otro. “Buena facha de apoplético tiene este señor, más seco que un bacalao.” “Más bien será un desmayo de debilidad,” exclamó un cuarto interlocutor, que despuntaba por lo gracioso. “Su mujer lo gastará todo en moños, y comerán poco en su casa.” (150)

Valera does not leave the reader room for interpretation. Although his colleagues came to his aid, “no eran muy caritativos” (150).

While gossip and those who propagate it is a feature of all of Valera's novels, in no other is it presented as such an insidious force. Braulio is not very admirable, but the society surrounding him is infinitely worse. However, it is not only Madrid's aspiring middle classes which Valera portrays in a very bad light; the work's first chapter is used to portray all strata of Madrid's upper classes as shallow, frivolous, and willing to go to idiotic extremes in their attempt to maintain appearances. The novel's opening line reads: “Toda persona elegante que se respeta debe ir a veranear. Es una ordinariiez quedarse en Madrid el verano” (7). From here, the author embarks on a two-and-a-half-page commentary, similarly laden with irony, to outline what he clearly regards as an absurd custom: the “supremo ideal aristocrático” (ibid.) of abandoning Madrid in summertime for the holiday resorts of France and Germany.

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“marido o amante” (ibid.)—some months before, all she wanted was to gain his attention with flirtation. What she will not stand for is that he be with another woman, and worst of all, a woman of inferior social class, a woman who is more beautiful than she: “En lo más íntimo de su conciencia, en aquel abismo adonde no llega el amor propio por grande que viva en nosotros, y hasta donde el entendimiento ofuscado penetra rara vez, Elisa se reconoció por un instante muy inferior en todo a doña Beatriz” (ibid.). Nearly the exact same is said of Inés in *Juanita la Larga* upon contemplating Juanita in her elegant dress: “se sintió en el fondo del alma muy inferior a Juanita en hermosura” (193). In this respect Elisa and Inés are alike, except that in *Pasarse de listo* Valera has his heroine's pride lead to irreparable destruction, Braulio's ultimate suicide, and not an eventual happy ending such as that which occurs in *Juanita* when Inés gives her blessing to Juanita and Paco to marry.



He describes the considerations and obstacles such an aim presents for families who consider themselves the “flor y nata” of society:

Lo más común es no tener *château*, ni algo que remotamente se le asemeje, ni en la Península, ni en la vasta extensión del continente europeo ... esta falta se suple o se disimula si poseemos una casa de campo, una casería o un cortijo, lo cual, hablando en francés, puede calificarse de *château*, sin gran escrúpulo de conciencia ... muy a menudo que la familia elegante, o con humos de elegante, carece de hogar de donde los humos procedan... Si le tiene algún amigo o pariente, la familia puede aprovecharse de la amistad o del parentesco. Si de ningún modo hay ni cortijo, se suprime la parte meramente rústica y se limita el verano a la parte hidropática, dulce, salada, o ambas cosas. Quiere esto significar que, no habiendo *château* ni cortijo donde pasar un mes, se emplea todo el tiempo en los baños, aunque nadie de la familia se bañe nunca. Basta tomar las aguas por inhalación, respirando, pongo por caso, las brisas del Atlántico en el mencionado Biarritz, en San Juan de Luz, en San Sebastián, en Santander o en Deva. (7-8)

Finally, Valera arrives at the predicament of those who cannot afford to go abroad at all. For these unfortunate souls there is still la Mancha, where, Valera, with humour describes how “lo llano y escueto y sin árboles ni matas del terreno imita la mar” (8), qualities which make it a suitable destination until the moment at which the individuals in question feel prepared to show their faces again in the nation’s capital—“sin infringir las leyes y liturgias del buen tono” (ibid.).

Addressing the plight of the socially ambitious who are unable to manage any of the above, the author remarks, “hacen como que se van de viaje, y con discreto y económico disimulo se quedan aquí, en reclusión severísima, sufriendo este linaje de martirio, para tener propicia a la deidad a quien rinden culto, que es la Moda” (8). If Valera’s mocking treatment of the theme is not clear enough from earlier examples, it is unmistakable from his application of religious terminology—“deidad”, “rendir culto”, and the reference to “Moda” with its capital “M”—the only God worshipped by Madrid’s *high life*.

The novelist concludes his commentary on the Madrid custom of summering abroad, expressing his disappointment:

Yo lo siento y lo extraño. Madrid ... no merece este abandono general.... Aquí, en verano, digan lo que quieran los que no piensan como nosotros, no hace más calor que en Biarritz o en San Sebastián; aquí, en verano, hay no pocas diversiones, más o menos inocentes, y no se emplea mal la vida. (9)

Valera did not adore Madrid in summertime. Nor does his comment above “aquí, en verano ... no se emplea mal la vida” express enthusiasm exactly, but instead his sense of loyalty (note his wording about how Madrid “no merece este abandono”, which paints the city as a victim of its dismissive, unappreciative residents), his disappointment over the preference of Madrid’s upper classes for everything French (or at least foreign), and his general distaste for affectation and shallow values (discussed further in chapter 3). These are the considerations to which we owe *Pasarse de listo*’s opening chapter, all values expressed in his correspondence. The specific theme of summering abroad also has its foundation in the author’s own experience. We may remember his complaint to Sofia from a seaside resort, in the summer of 1871, about Dolores’s desire to summer abroad: “la moda, la elegancia y el buen tono requieren y exigen salir a veranear, y mi mujer se creería la más desdichada criatura del mundo y la más humillada y vejada, si no veranease” (C 2, 482). Nine years later Valera is still complaining, this time from Biarritz: “Aquí hay mucha gente, sobre todo españoles, pero nadie se divierte. Todo está muy caro y se come detestablemente. Yo creo que la mitad de los que vienen aquí hallan su mayor placer en darse tono luego en Madrid de que estuvieron en Biarritz” (C 3, 162).

This introduction to *Pasarse de listo* may appear irrelevant, a digression before the story even begins, considering the fact that the milieu whose activities the novel goes on principally to describe is that of those who remain in Madrid for the summer months, not the upper classes who escape to various holiday destinations—irrelevant seeming, unless of course we also note Valera’s demonstration of how absurd values and pretentious behaviour are not restricted to the socially ambitious middle classes but afflict Madrid’s upper echelons as well. For Bravo-Villasante the lengthy commentary reflects the author’s tendency to impose his own views, even himself,

upon the content of his fiction. She writes: “Uno se queda embobado con la personalidad del autor que no sabe o no quiere ocultarse más que cuando le apetece, para seguir apareciendo, después en sus personajes” (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 202). Indeed, Valera’s frustration with most of Madrid’s inhabitants with whom he came into contact socially appears to have filtered into *Pasarse de listo*, with the negative portrayal of this social milieu.

*Pasarse de listo* is not the first of Valera’s novels featuring an ironic account of a local custom which consumes the entirety of a work’s first chapter. In Valera’s fifth novel, the author deals extensively with the business practices of Don Acisclo, steward to the Marquis of Villafría, the father of the eponymous Doña Luz, principal heroine of the story. While Bravo-Villasante appears unable to identify any biographical elements of Valera’s in *Doña Luz*, we know that the character of Don Acisclo and his shady management of the Marquis’s estate were based on Valera’s own experience of leaving his family’s land in Andalusia, the Alamillo, to an administrator there.

Writing to Sofía in the same year he wrote *Doña Luz*, a bemused Valera remarks of his experience:

He despedido al administrador que allí tenía, porque me saqueaba; pero es ardua, casi imposible empresa hallar a otro que no me saquee. Estos pueblos no resplandecen por su moralidad. No hay mandamiento de la ley de Dios que aquí no se infrinja sin escrúpulos; pero el más fácil y frecuentemente infringido es el séptimo. Ya, desde época harto remota, dictó un famoso historiador latino esta terrible sentencia: *hispani, latrones*. (C 3, 129)

Inspired by his frustration, and what the author once recognised as his own “razón fría, algo risueña y burlona, que no me abandona nunca” (C 1, 485) Valera devotes the opening chapter of *Doña Luz* to what Henry Thurston-Griswold describes as an “examen irónico de la costumbre peligrosa del aristócrata rural de residir en Madrid y dejar su propiedad a cargo de un administrador” (*El idealismo sintético de Valera*, 120).

Entitled “El Marqués y su Administrador”, and laced with the same humour and irony as Valera’s comment to Sofía (and indeed the same humour and irony as *Pasarse de listo*’s first chapter), it details the shady management of the Marquis of Villafría’s estate by a certain Don Acisclo—“Don” being a title he acquired after many years of being called “Aciscillo” and “tío Acisclo”, thanks to “los muchos dineros que honrada y laboriosamente había sabido adquirir” (50).

The narrator goes on to describe how Acisclo, in a manner seeming anything but “honrada”, managed to transfer the wealth of the Marquis, his Madrid-resident landowning employer, over to himself. The humour and irony are situated particularly within the euphemisms used to describe Acisclo’s actions, which clearly represent his cynical and self-interested perspective. The transferral of the Marquis’s wealth, for instance, is described as a “pase” or “dislocación” (ibid.); we are told that in his dealings Acisclo “Siempre se condujo con la mayor lealtad en la administración” (ibid.); “era muy estrecho y escrupuloso de conciencia”; “se sacrificaba” (51); and that empathising with the Marquis’s situation, before taking moves which impoverished his boss and enriched himself, Acisclo, “se afligía, ponía el grito en el cielo, caía enfermo por la pesadumbre que le daban los apuros del marqués” (ibid.). In reality, the Marquis’s frequent requests for funds gave Acisclo the perfect opportunity to set in motion a series of transactions, described in detail, be they to buy wine, olive oil or wheat from the Marquis to satisfy his immediate financial needs, while little by little consuming his boss’s entire stock and enriching himself through the profits of future sales. In the end, ruined, the Marquis has no choice but to leave his lavish lifestyle in Madrid and return to Villafría.

From here, the narrator continues to examine the arguments for and against considering the Marquis a fool, acknowledging the reality that “D. Acisclo le saqueaba” (53). Here, the humour and irony become especially salient, with the narrator explaining why the Marquis actually considered himself lucky:

Decía, pues, que en veinte leguas a la redonda ... no había más honrado y virtuoso varón que su administrador ... Otro administrador cualquiera hubiera acabado con el marqués en diez años ... Otro administrador cualquiera no hubiera hecho los

adelantos por la mitad menos, y se hubiera enriquecido más pronto, y no hubiera arruinado a su señor con tantos miramientos, con tanta suavidad y pausa, y con tan severa conciencia. (54)

The Marquis was undoubtedly reckless and irresponsible in his financial matters, but Acisclo was also opportunistic, and through calculation and cunning, managed to turn the situation to his own advantage. The narrator acknowledges this and yet also acknowledges the outcome of the Marquis's own pragmatic calculations: this thievery would have taken place with any other administrator. In fact, any other would have left him destitute far sooner. Even Doña Luz, the Marquis's daughter and his ultimate inheritor, is said to have taken this view. The narrator affirms of her attitude,

No guardaba al antiguo administrador la más ligera inquina, porque se hubiese alzado con casi todo el caudal de sus mayores ... Con cierta moral alambicada, que don Acisclo no podía conocer, acaso hubiera salvado los intereses del marqués, acaso hubiera hecho durar otros cuantos años más el esplendor de la casa; pero pedir esto por aquellos lugares era pedir cotufas en el golfo. (75)

A tongue-in-cheek account on the financial success of one man at the expense of another, the novel's opening is not so much a discussion of Acisclo's business acumen as it is a commentary on the local values and culture of small-town Andalusia. An account negative insofar as it describes common corrupt practices which would have been damaging to Valera and many of his counterparts, as DeCoster suggests, this negativity is not however felt, because of Valera's ironic treatment of the subject ("Valera and Andalusia", 210). Moreover, as Roxanne Marcus contends, "Acisclo's actions, of no negative consequence to the aristocrat, are in fact beneficial to both of these men as well as to Doña Luz" ("Contemporary Life and Manners", 456-457).

This situation contrasts sharply with Valera's pointed commentary on a similar practice in *Las ilusiones*, where the author addresses the tendency of locals to take advantage of one another, in this case referring to the matter as an "afición" of the townspeople. In Chapter 22, described as on the cusp of losing their home thanks to

the ire of a scorned Rosita, the narrator explains how Faustino and his mother, Doña Ana, had tried to manage their financial challenges:

Su caudal, mal cultivado por falta de capital, con los frutos malbaratados siempre, apenas producía para pagar los enormes réditos de aquella deuda. Varias veces se había tratado de vender fincas para pagar lo que se debía; pero en los lugares pequeños hay una afición extraordinaria a *tirar de los pies a los ahorcados*. Cuantos tienen algún dinero andan siempre acechando la ocasión de que alguien esté en apuros y quiera o necesite vender algo, para comprárselo por la tercera o cuarta parte de su justo precio. Aun así, piensan que favorecen al vendedor, pues le dan dinero, cuyos intereses son grandísimos, a trueque de tierras, que producen poco como no se esté sobre ellas y se emplee un capital de metálico y de inteligencia en su administración y cultivo. (316)

In line with the bleaker tone in general of Valera's second novel, this account of Faustino and his mother's financial problems is not handled in a tongue-in-cheek manner, the way the episode above describing Acisclo's practices is. In fact, the overall tone of *Las ilusiones* is more negative than that of Valera's other Andalusian-set works. Valera's typical approach, as DeCoster highlights in the case of Acisclo above, is to offset portraits of corruption and negativity with irony, as we have seen, but he also does it by producing ideal outcomes which serve to negate the earlier descriptions of hardship. *Las ilusiones* does not appear to feature much of either. Thus, while the gossiping, nasty side of townspeople is depicted in *Juanita la Larga* and to some degree in *Pepita Jiménez*, the dismal quality of such uncharitable behaviour is ameliorated by what proves at the novels' ends to be the whole-hearted acceptance of the townspeople in regard to the decisions Valera's main protagonists make, and their marriages, leading to a happy ending in both these novels. In *Las ilusiones* the Mendoza's ancestral mansion is saved, but Ana dies as a result of Rosita's vengeance. While *Doña Luz* does not feature a happy ending, Valera chooses, reflecting his lack of admiration for Madrid life and its people, to make an aristocrat from Madrid responsible for the hurtful deception Doña Luz experiences, not Acisclo or any fellow Villafrián. Acknowledging the significance of this choice, Roxanne Marcus writes of Luz's husband: "In sharp contrast to the benevolent yet far from

idealized portrayal of Acisclo, an individual bound to the rural scene, as a symbol of virtue and integrity, is the scathing satire that accompanies the brief presentation of Pimentel. His egotism, lust for money, and deceitfulness render him a base and ruthless urban type” (“Contemporary Life and Manners”, 457).

Interestingly, Marcus goes on to highlight the significance of Jaime’s depiction, generalising that

[c]haracters who come from the capital, such as Jaime, or those who move from Andalusian towns to Madrid and who prosper there, such as Rosita and Etelvina, symbolized for Valera the devious and empty quality of life that he depicts as predominantly and disturbingly characteristic of the mood of contemporary life in urban centres. These characters are the most offensive, deceitful, morally corrupt, and destructive in his works, even though he identifies *pueblo* life and types with the materialistic bias and artificial values of the nineteenth century and with the theme of religious intolerance and fanaticism. (ibid., 465)

Indeed, it is worth noting that while Valera may have defended Rosita in his authorial comment of *Pasarse de listo*’s Chapter 16, the behaviour he defends against is the accusation of her being “liviana”. There is little question that her actions against Faustino and Ana are reprehensible. However, it is also clear that the woman’s retaliation is motivated by wounded pride—she is a scorned lover unable to contain her anger, not an evil woman satisfying purely malicious impulses. Thus, Marcus may be correct to number Rosita among those who represent “the most offensive, deceitful, morally corrupt, and destructive” in Valera’s works, yet the impetus for her initial behaviour cannot be ignored, and it must be recognised that Valera’s portrayal of her as a corrupt figure is only shown to develop in line with her on-going residence in the capital city. Her retaliation against Faustino in the “Conclusión” of *Las ilusiones* is motivated by the pain of insult, when, having led her on, he instead chose another woman; and her jealousy—“la afrenta que le hizo el Doctor y la rivalidad de María vivían en su corazón, a pesar de los años transcurridos, y se le corroían como un cáncer” (439). It is not until *Pasarse de listo* (for the same Rosita appears as a character in both *Las ilusiones* and *Pasarse de listo*) that Valera paints her as a destructive influence, not because of her temper, but as a result of her perverse sense

of fun and deficient moral code. Referring to Rosita's supposedly good intentions in respect to her new friends, the narrator describes how

[l]e pasó por la cabeza que en su casa podría hallar Inesita un buen novio; consideró posible que en su casa saliese D. Braulio de su oscuridad...; y no le pareció tampoco inverosímil que en su casa Beatriz y el Conde de Alhedín llegasen a enamorarse perdidamente el uno del otro; pero en esto no atinaba a ver Rosita, dado que ocurriese, y que ocurriese con la debida circunspección, nada de trágico, ni siquiera de desagradable para don Braulio, quien, según ella misma había declarado, le era simpático de veras, y de quien y formaba elevadísimo concepto (91).

### **The Significance of the Autobiographical**

There can be little doubt that the closer-to-home themes of *Las ilusiones* are responsible for the novel's darker nature. Had Valera's second novel been based on the experiences of another (as are all the happy-ending novels based on stories with only a loose relationship to the author), he might have had Faustino and his mother's debts magnanimously forgiven or paid off in good time, and with Ana's health saved. In fact, this happens in *Juanita la Larga* with the two thousand *reales* of debt outstanding, which Juanita has assumed on her friend Antoñuelo's behalf, being forgiven in full by the creditor, Don Ramón, upon Juanita and Paco's announcement of their intention to marry. And in *El comendador Mendoza* the problem of a debt to be paid is resolved by the serendipitous and timely arrival in town of Fadrique, who, having returned after several decades away, discovers that his biological daughter is in trouble, right at a moment when she is being forced to consider marriage to a decrepit old man whom she does not love.<sup>49</sup> The Commander saves the day with his timely

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<sup>49</sup> Casimiro is one of Valera's few characters described as physically unappealing. Many scholars have indicated Valera's tendency to portray his characters in mainly attractive terms. There are, however, exceptions. Don Casimiro is described as old, ugly and ailing to explain why it would be unnatural for Clara to marry him. In the case of Nicolasa's father, his outward ugliness signals a man of bad character. In Don Braulio's, the exterior is again intended to underscore an interior full of defects. One case of a character described in less than ideal terms is the school teacher, Don Pascual, in *Juanita la Larga*. In contrast to Valera's men, who are usually robust and young-looking for their age, Don Pascual, a minor character, is described as a "solterón de más de sesenta años, delicado de salud, flaco y pequeño de cuerpo, pero inteligente y dulce de carácter" (179)—a kind man of integrity and good will, Pascual's physical description appears a strange exception to Valera's general rule of idealising characters physically, unless we consider the fact that he is one of Juanita's greatest supporters and is



appearance, not to mention possession of the pricey sum required to free Clara. In *Las ilusiones* Araceli's generous financial rescue arrives,<sup>50</sup> but too late, although Valera attempts to mitigate the effects of this sad outcome with the following concession: "Doña Ana logró morir con el consuelo de ver esta gran prueba de amistad de la niña Araceli, que vino a cuidarla, recibió su último suspiro y le cerró los ojos" (340). The Mendoza's ancestral home is saved, but even so, there is nothing left for the young Faustino. He moves to Madrid to live challenged for the first 17 years by poverty and obscurity, and then continues to live challenged by the rest even after he has married into money (he could not make any based on his own merits), through his ill-fated affair with Costanza and burdensome marriage to María, only to end it all by taking his own life. Unlike the case of *Juanita la Larga* and *El comendador Mendoza*, which have only a loose relationship to Valera's biographical experiences, Valera was clearly writing a different story in *Las ilusiones*: the story of his nation in the doldrums thanks largely to problematic values which produce ineffectual characters like Faustino, but even more importantly, the story of his own circumstances, for which the burden of self-doubt, limited success and money troubles into later life could produce no uplifting conclusion. As Cyrus DeCoster remarks,

Valera was not a feckless failure, but when he wrote *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino*, his literary career was just beginning to flower. His earlier volumes, although they had been critically approved, were scarcely of major importance. Nor had he held important political or diplomatic posts; these were to come later. He no doubt felt he had not taken full advantage of his talent and had not lived up to his capabilities. (*Juan Valera*, 107)

Indeed, the author's correspondence confirms DeCoster's speculation. In January of 1878, only three years after the publication of *Las ilusiones*, Valera commended

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introduced only two chapters before the scandal of Chapter 16. Valera appears to be hinting, through the man's diminished stature, that although a firm and loyal friend of Juanita, he has no clout among Villalegre's higher powers and will thus be of little help to her.

<sup>50</sup> "Araceli había prestado a la casa un servicio inmenso. Todo el dinero que tenía ahorrado, que pasaba de dos mil duros, le había traído y entregado a Respeta para que pagase a los acreedores. La venta de la alhajas de Doña Ana y de los frutos que aún quedaban en la casa había producido cerca de otros mil duros. Y por último, la niña Araceli, empeñando sus bienes, había traído hasta otros seis mil duros, con todo lo cual había nueve mil, y sobraba para salir del apuro y salvarse de la ejecución" (340). In order to drive home the extent and importance of Araceli's generosity, Valera refers once more to her "donación" in full only three pages later.

Menéndez Pelayo, a friend thirty-two years his junior, for his recent achievements, stating,

Admiro y envidio la actividad y fecundidad de usted. Hace usted muy bien en aprovechar tan discretamente el brío, la salud y la serenidad de los años juveniles. Yo perdí los míos de la manera más necia y disipada, y ahora, cuando quiero escribir, no puedo, porque me duele todo y más estoy para cuidarme que para calentarme la cabeza. (C 3, 72)

Valera would go on to achieve recognition in his diplomatic career with a prestigious ambassadorship to the Austro-Hungarian empire from 1893-1895, and further distinctions in the literary field (*Pepita Jiménez* would go on to be translated into English and published in 1886 by Appleton in the U.S., along with several of his other titles), but it is certain that in the years of Valera's first novelistic production the author did not feel he had accomplished sufficiently. His personal frustrations, as well as his frustrations with others, clearly found outlets in his novels of this period.

In conclusion, this chapter has continued to examine the influence of Valera's life upon his novels, in particular *Pasarse de listo* and *Las ilusiones*, the themes, characters and plotlines of which have a particularly strong relationship to the author's life experiences, as opposed to some of his other works which may also contain autobiographical elements but whose central themes and plots are inspired by stories and events the author heard. In spite of Valera's self-declared aim of presenting his readers with an uplifting portrayal of life, it appears in *Las ilusiones* and *Pasarse de listo* that his impulse to incorporate a little of himself, and indeed, to use his writing as an outlet for the expression of his frustrations and disappointments, proved at times so powerful that it thwarted such intentions. Both novels present a bleaker portrayal of life, as particularly evident from negative details of the backdrops and the social communities in which his main protagonists live, but also through the, on balance, less than ideal behaviour of main heroines such as Costanza and Rosita, featured in the novels, who tend toward more self-serving and materialistic values, which Valera identified with Madrid, his primary place of residence throughout his entire adult life. If Valera utilised his correspondence at times as an outlet for his grievances, this

chapter demonstrates how in relation to *Pasarse de listo* and *Las ilusiones*, Valera used his novels to the same end, in spite of his intention, perhaps, to do otherwise.

## Chapter 3

### Letters to Sofía (and Others) and Valera's Novels

The influence of Valera's relationship with Dolores on negative characterisation in his novels and the themes of marital conflict and disharmony indicate that it would be appropriate to look for other influences to account for the positive representation of his heroines and themes which prevail in his fiction. When considering significant figures in Valera's life the author's relationship with his sister, Sofía, ought not to be overlooked. As Valera himself once declared in "Importancia de la mujer", "No se limita, con todo, el influjo de la mujer sobre el hombre a manifestarse en la madre. *La hermana*, la esposa legítima, la amiga y la enamorada suelen ejercerlo todavía más poderoso. Y esto en todos los tiempos y países, en todos los grados de civilización, bajo todo régimen político y bajo toda religiosa disciplina" (my italics, *Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1411). Furthermore, Sofía was his "confidente más íntimo", according to Jesús Contreras (*Valera: Su perfil ignorado*, 198); and Carlos Sáenz goes even further, remarking that she was Valera's "centro", his correspondence with her possessing a "valor confesional íntimo, humano y auténtico, que no tienen los miles de cartas que se conservan de don Juan, con distintos y muy variados interlocutores" (*Cartas íntimas*, 22). Thus, at a minimum, a study of Valera's correspondence to his sister will offer some insight into the author's experiences and true feelings on a variety of subjects, which is important for shedding light on the provenance of themes and characters within his novels.

#### Valera's Relationship with Sofía

Valera's letters to Sofía during his early and later life suggest that the siblings were very close and relied heavily on one another for support, even if at times they were separated by great distances—she living in Paris and Valera, when not residing in Madrid, living in several foreign cities during his diplomatic postings. Most importantly, however, Valera's correspondence reveals a profound respect for Sofía and suggests that his experience of her would have provided the much needed antidote

to his experience of Dolores, one that might have enabled him to write respectfully and sympathetically, above all, of women.

Circumstantial factors were probably major contributors to Valera and his sister's strong bond. We know that Valera was only four years older and that they lived together for many years, including, at times, when they were adults. They also seem to have socialised with the same people, attended the same *tertulias* and had many of the same friends. This all might seem natural, given that they were brother and sister, though we get the impression this was not true, to the same extent, in the case of Ramona with whom, as Sáenz comments (and Romero Tobar's *Correspondencia* confirms), Valera will have a "trato casi nulo" (*Cartas íntimas*, 21). Additionally, as we learn in a letter to a Juan Navarro Sierra in January of 1847, Ramona appears to be already married and have children by the time Valera finished his Law degree and moved to Madrid.

The fact that Sofía was younger and that their father was not always present, is likely to have led Valera to take on a fatherly role, as we see in his earliest letters in which he gives advice—even to his parents—about how Sofía should approach marriage and her career as an artist.

With regard to the later years, an abundance of letters written specifically to Sofía in the 1870s, with frequent comments like "tú eres la única persona que bien me quiere que me queda en el mundo" (C 2, 532), suggest other bonding factors: Valera's feeling that his wife had come to be his greatest enemy, and the loss he and his sister had endured of nearly every member of their immediate family. Beginning with their father's death from cancer in 1859, they saw the Valera clan dwindle over the next decade and a half. Five years after her father's death, Sofía was widowed; Ramona died from a sudden illness in 1869; and finally, their mother was tragically killed in a train accident in 1872. Thus, by the early 1870s the only close relative who remained to them was their half-brother, Pepe, and it is clear from Valera's correspondence that following the death of his own father (Pepe was from Valera's mother's first marriage; Valera, from her second), his relationship with Pepe had become quite strained because of arguments over estate matters. To his friend, Francisco Moreno

Ruiz, in May of 1859, he wrote, “Mi hermano, que tiene algunas letras gordas y dice que sabe de leyes, ha venido a persuadir a mi madre de que mi padre no tenía nada cuando se casó con ella, y de que todo cuanto hay en casa es suyo; y como yo tengo una idea muy diferente, aunque confusa, no pienso ceder y quedarme sin nada, hasta ponerla en claro” (C 1, 623). Three weeks later he reflects upon the “ceguedad” of his mother, and the horrible possibility that matters may not be resolvable without a lawsuit: “el extraño proyecto que tienen ambos de hacerme pasar por un miserable y mantenerme como de limosna, me traen muy afligido” (C 1, 628).

His relationship with Sofia, on the other hand, appears to have been a stable and enduring one, not to mention an indispensable source of comfort and support. In 1884, having expressed a great deal of apprehension and sadness in relation to his pending journey to Washington, D.C., once in the U.S. capital he wrote to his sister, “Cuidémonos ambos para que nuestro proyecto de pasar en Cabra temporadas de invierno y en Villerville veraneos, llegue a cumplirse, después de tres o cuatro años de estar aquí poniéndome a flote” (C 4, 84). A year later, alluding to his sister’s own struggles, and writing of his old age, he states, “Te haré largas visitas y tu me harás largas visitas. Así procuraremos consolarnos mutuamente” (C 4, 350).

### **The Early 1850s**

Sofía is mostly a subject in Valera’s earliest letters from the 1850s, the majority of which are written to Valera’s parents, and where she is concerned, relate to her brother’s opinions regarding her future in terms of marriage and her career as an artist. Thus, we possibly learn more about Valera’s character and views than we do specifically about her character. These letters are significant nonetheless for understanding his image of her.

The very first known mention of Sofia is in a letter from January of 1847 to his mother when Sofia would have been 19 (his second in Romero Tobar’s collection), acknowledging that his sister is still in Málaga (C 1, 29). A week later he speaks of her again in a letter to their half-brother Pepe, although here he simply expresses a keen interest in knowing of any marriage plans: “Da expresiones a mamá y a mi

hermanita Sofía, de quien te ruego que me escribas qué hay de sus amores con el descendiente del jefe de los comuneros. Aquí me han dado noticias de que se casa” (C 1, 38).

The next comment relating to Sofía regarding marriage is in a letter to his father three years later, from February 1850, after he has returned to Madrid from his post in Naples, from which we can infer that Sofía has turned down the opportunity to marry a very wealthy man, a decision which Valera applauds, citing her willingness to forego the financial security of such an arrangement as a noble and rare quality for “una mujer pobre”, such as his sister (C 1, 75).

Marriage considerations appear to end for the time being, and it is not until January of 1851 that Valera re-emerges with opinions about Sofía’s future. This time he gives his father detailed advice about how she should be encouraged to approach her career. First she should paint something for the “Exposición de Madrid”. He recommends:

Si este cuadro es bueno, que no dudo lo será, los periódicos todos y las gentes de gusto harán de él grandes encomios, y en seguida el cuadro elogiado se le regala a la Reina, que nombre a mi hermana pintora de cámara u otra cosa por el estilo, y desde allí en adelante, ya puede Sofía ir a Madrid, hacer cuadros y retratos, y llevar dinero por ellos. (C 1, 130)

He acknowledges that such success might take time and a lot of hard work to achieve but energetically asserts that she is capable of attaining this:

Todavía no es más que una señorita que pinta bien, pero puede llegar a ser un pintor. Yo le aconsejo a Vuestra Merced que le compre los libros más importantes de historia y teoría del arte, y que le ruegue que los estudie, y que examine buenos grabados de los cuadros famosos de todas las escuelas. Mi pobre hermana, encerrada siempre en Granada, no ha visto ni estudiado estas cosas. Si tuviéramos dinero, la llevaría a Roma, Nápoles y Florencia. (ibid.)

Valera's ambition for Sofía and desire to see her independent is clear. He concludes his advice: "Creo que habrá Vuestra Merced comprendido mi idea y que no tengo necesidad de dilatar me más sobre este asunto. Sólo añadiré que deseo infinito ver a Sofía hecha una artista, con una brillante posición y sin deberla más que a su talento. Pero creo que, para lograr tanto, se necesita paciencia, tiempo y estudio" (C 1, 131). In addition to revealing his ambition for Sofía, this series of commentaries to his father reveals not only his hopes for her success, "deseo infinito ver a Sofía con una brillante posición", but his desire to have her arrive at it, "sin deberla más que a su talento", indicating the value he places on her independence and self-sufficiency.

A few days later, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, he writes a similar letter, if a little less detailed, to his mother reiterating the same ideas—also emphasising his wish that Sofía not marry unless she meets someone she really loves. And in a letter to his father, a week later, he talks about the family's financial situation, expressing hope that it will improve, "no por mí," Valera writes, "sino por mis pobres hermanas, y en particular por Sofía, que no está casada, ni yo deseo que se case en la vida, como no sea con un hombre que por todos estilos la merezca" (C 1, 134). Valera knows that being a woman limits Sofía's options for gaining financial security, and it is clear he does not want her resorting to marriage to acquire it.

Valera was not reluctant to express his wishes directly to Sofía either. He wrote to her a week and a half later, still in Lisbon, with the same advice and encouragement, adding that if he were at least Secretary, he would have her come to live with him, "porque esta ciudad es más varia, rica y populosa que Granada" (C 1, 140).

The values that Valera expresses in this series of correspondence—that Sofía should work hard, develop her own talents and remain independent until she meets a man whom she loves and who truly deserves her, and if this never happens, that she should remain single—are all values Valera carried forward years later, advising his daughter in a similar vein. In a letter from August of 1904, for instance, Valera responds to the news of Carmen's engagement, stating,



Celebro que tú generosamente no consideres el matrimonio como un negocio, y que prefieras a la posición y a la riqueza que pudieras adquirir, tomar por compañero de toda la vida a un hombre capaz de enamorarte o que, al menos, logre y merezca tu estimación y te agrade moral, intelectual y físicamente. (C 7, 515)

However, there does appear to be some inconsistency, as we will see later in chapter 4 of this thesis how the letters Valera directed to his sister in 1889 express an anxiety for Carmen to select a husband and that she should not “[desdeñar] cualquiera proporción regular que se ofrezca” (C 5, 166). Only a year later, he will write again on the same subject, stating, “Si ocurriese ... la dicha (pero ésta es más difícil) de que se enamore de Carmen algún ricacho y se casase con ella, el negocio sería redondo, y acabarían nuestros apuros y angustias, aunque yo me quedase cesante para siempre” (C 5, 271). It would appear that Valera’s ideals on the subject of marriage faltered at times under the unrelenting pressure of financial worries, even though his comment to Sofía—“Yo no aconsejo ni me meto en nada” (C 5, 254)—and his daughter’s engagement a full 14 years later, indicate that Valera remained true to his intention of staying out of such matters. Referring to his daughter’s plans to marry, Valera writes to Carmen in his letter of 1904, “Si nunca te he excitado a ello, es por el temor de que pudieses imaginar que yo anhelaba que te apartases de mí” (C 7, 515)—but this is only a half-truth. Valera’s sympathetic, if brief, portrayal of Doña Ana in *Las ilusiones* (discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis) highlights the author’s understanding of the barbarity that coerces a young woman into marriage for economic reasons. Valera shows in the case of his heroine that the decision to marry and the selection of a husband is an enormous one, and how the fundamentally more precarious position of the woman makes her vulnerable to mistakes when such decisions are hastily decided on. In the case of Doña Ana, her union with José, undertaken at the insistence of her father and brother, but also from her own fear of ending up a spinster, leads to a lifetime (indeed a shortened one) of isolation, poverty and general hardship.

From the end of this series of letters in September of 1851, there is then a two-year break in which Sofía is neither the correspondent of a letter nor its subject. Then in October of 1853, Valera confides in his sister about his feelings of self-loathing. He has found himself in turmoil—under pressure to marry a certain Julia Pacheco, whom

he got involved with initially out of convenience, and later, due to loneliness. His admission, “Advierte que te hablo como si conmigo mismo estuviera hablando” (C 1, 257), indicates a deep sense of trust and confidence in her—not only that she will not tell others, but that she will not judge him either. This letter is also essential for providing insight into Valera’s nature and opinion of himself at the age of 29, which arguably changed little over time—especially his feelings of being weak, underappreciated, and even misunderstood by others. He writes to Sofia:

Yo, querida hermana, hablándote con toda franqueza, me he creído, y cada vez me creo más alto por el entendimiento; pero soy tan endeble y escaso de voluntad, y la poca voluntad que tengo es tan enfermiza y vacilante, que no sólo destruye toda la virtud creadora de mi entendimiento, sino que también me atormenta y aflige de continuo [sic]. Ello es que para nada sirvo, ni serviré nunca. Si tuviera fe, me metería fraile; pero como no la tengo, puede que haga la prosaica acción de casarme; y nadie tomará en cuenta mi carácter bonachón y mi ternura de alma para explicar mi casamiento. Todos supondrán que me caso por los 80.000 duros que tiene la novia ... La novia tomó en casarse conmigo tal empeño, que no sabré cómo resistirme, aunque quiera. Yo, cuando estuve aquí de agregado, le hice la corte, casi sin pensar, y por pasar el tiempo. Pude romper cuando me fui al Brasil, y aún pude romper no escribiendo. Pero al verme en el Brasil solo, con poco dinero y menos comodidades, viviendo como San Alejo en el hueco de una escalera, melancólico y desabrido a pesar de las gracias de don José Delavat, y suponiendo con mi imaginación biliosa lo porvenir más negro y feo, y temeroso de lo que acaso sea con efecto, me di a entender que el casarme me estaría bien, y escribí a Julia. Ahora que veo de cerca el casamiento, me asusto y retrocedo. Sin embargo, todos me aconsejan que me case. Verdad es que nadie tiene de mí la opinión que yo tengo, porque como yo creo estúpida la mayor parte de las gentes, las gentes me pagan creyéndome mentecato, y para nada. Yo necesito que me animen y todos me desalientan. (C 1, 257)

Clear from the nature of this letter is a shift in tone and content, from his concern for Sofia to concern for himself; and his apparent confidence that his sister will read with interest whatever he writes. This episode, in which Valera confides in Sofia, about his

supreme confidence in general and yet at the same time, fear of commitment and sense of victimhood, foreshadows a pattern that will emerge in the 1870s: Sofía's role as a sounding board and a confidant in relation to Valera's troubled marriage.

The above passage is also significant for reflecting what Sáenz at one point describes as Valera's "cabeza turbulenta y ... carácter básicamente angustioso" (*Cartas íntimas*, 18); not to mention his need for the acceptance and approval of others. His statement "Yo necesito que me animen", which indicates his feeling that nobody is encouraging him, recurs in different forms in Valera's letters, as do his claims of being a loving person who struggles to have such sentiments reciprocated. We may remember his claim *vis-à-vis* Madeleine Brohan: "En verdad que soy yo muy infeliz, porque, siendo yo tan amoroso y tierno, rara vez o casi nunca hallo quien aprecia mi amor y mi ternura y sepa pagarlos" (*C* 1, 502). Consider also Valera's numerous expressions of disappointment with conjugal life.

Years pass and again we neither see a letter written to Sofía nor hear news of her in a letter written to anyone else. This is not necessarily attributable to a lack of interest in her on Valera's part. They were living together from time to time, which might explain some periods when no letters appear addressed to her. Of course, as Leonardo Romero Tobar also suggests, the collection remains incomplete as some letters were probably destroyed, while others have remained inaccessible for publication (Introduction to *Correspondencia* 1, 12). Indeed, during certain periods the two appeared to have corresponded almost daily.

Whatever the case may be, Valera did write to his mother a few years later, in January of 1857, during his posting in St. Petersburg, and in one letter he claims that the Duke of Osuna was being cold to him—probably, he suspects, because Sofía had not responded to a letter that he wrote to her. He explains, "No hay cosa que más lisonjee al Duque que el que le escriban las damas, aunque sea para pedirle dinero, o que se case con ellas, como hacen a menudo algunas sin vergüenza, y como Sofía la tiene, y no le pedirá nada de esto, se quedará el Duque doblemente satisfecho de recibir sus cartas" (*C* 1, 374). This statement is perhaps intended to be more of an observation on the behaviour of other women than praise of his sister. Nonetheless, in making such

comparisons Valera reveals his belief that Sofia is more principled and dignified than others.

## **The Late 1850s**

### **Sofia's Marriage to the Duke of Malakoff**

The next interesting set of correspondence spans the period after his return from Russia. Sofia has announced that she will be marrying the Duke of Malakoff, “un soldadote terrible” whom Valera claims, “tendrá que suavizar un poco” (C 1, 581). He is confident she can do this and is without reservation regarding her decision to marry a man so much older than herself (the Duke was 64, Sofia 30), as he believed his sister possessed a quality that was *espiritualista*, as he termed it, that would allow her to be happy in such an arrangement. Defending Sofia’s decision, Valera wrote to their brother, Pepe, in August of 1858:

No he podido menos de extrañar la tibieza y poco contento con que han recibido Vds. la nueva del casamiento de Sofia, que, a mi ver, no puede ser mejor. Es verdad que el novio nació en 1794, pero hace cuatro tomó a Sebastopol y no sería tan viejo ni tan incapaz cuando hizo esto. Yo soy muy materialista y aprecio la hermosura y la juventud; pero no lo soy tanto que no comprenda que un hombre, aunque sea viejo y feo, pueda interesar y hasta enamorar locamente a una mujer, cuando está circundado de una aureola de gloria. El valor y el ingenio valen más y son más amables y seductores que la belleza. Así pues, entiendo, o mejor diré, estoy seguro de que Sofia, poniendo a un lado la elevadísima posición y el dinero del novio, que algo es también en el mundo y que hasta los más interesados tienen y cuentan por algo, se casa con el duque de Malakoff y con sus 64 años más contenta y satisfecha de corazón que si casara con un mozo elegantísimo y precioso como los señoritos de por ahí. Esto te lo digo a ti sólo para que veas el modo que yo tengo de considerar este negocio y lo nada que se me da de las críticas tontas que pueden hacer en Málaga. (C 1, 585)

Many years later, Valera would express similar views, proclaiming, “todo hombre de cincuenta años que no haya sido vicioso y que sea de buena casta y condición, puede todavía enamorar a las mujeres, sin que éstas incurran en extravagante delirio. Nada más frecuente que esta clase de amores” (Bravo-Villasante, *Vida de Juan Valera*, 239). Rafaela of *Genio y figura* expresses a similar opinion. Defending elderly admirer the Baron of Castel-Bourdac against criticisms that his amorous pursuits are no longer appropriate given his age, his loyal and generous friend declares, “Mucho disto yo de seguir semejante parecer ... Hay belleza, elegancia y distinción para todas las edades, con tal de que no falten la salud y aseo” (222).

Although according to Valera his wife did not feel the same way as Sofía, Rafaela or himself, the author’s theory about a woman’s ability to find older men attractive would prove accurate in relation to others he knew. During his posting as Minister in Washington, D.C., already in his sixties, he met and began an affair with Katherine Lee Bayard, daughter of the then U.S. Secretary of State. The young woman of twenty-eight fell in love with the sexagenarian and according to Bravo-Villasante it would appear as a result of him announcing his plans to repatriate to Spain, committed suicide in the foyer of the Spanish Embassy (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 247). His correspondence of the period documents the development of their relationship as it does his emotional response to news of her death.

The very first letter in which she is mentioned is that dated the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1885, and is directed to his wife, with Valera describing Katherine as

Muy docta, sabe filosofía y la lengua de los gitanos y dice y piensa las cosas más singulares. Cuando se electriza se cree tan cargada de electricidad que asegura haber encendido a veces un poco de gas con la chispa que sale de su dedo meñique. Esta señorita, aunque tan eléctrica y tan excéntrica, no anda, ni con mucho, tan suelta como las señoritas de aquí suelen andar, y gusta más que de flirteos de tratar asuntos graves. (C 4, 281)

A week later, he writes to Sofía of Katherine’s “platónico entusiasmo por mí”, commenting also, in one of his first references to his wife’s jealousy, “Si Dolores

llegase a saber de este y otros flirteos, se echaba a la mar y se venía aquí nadando a hacer escenas” (C 4, 286). Referring to a similar comment, Eduardo Abud raises questions about Dolores’s attitude toward her husband, remarking, “No entendemos bien esta relación por parte de ambos” (“La vida amorosa de Juan Valera conocida a través de su obra epistolar”, 77). Having cited a letter in which the author confides in his sister, “Hace doce años, (yo te lo cuento todo, como tú me lo cuentas todo) Dolores no quiere *ser mi mujer*” (ibid.; see also C 4, 282), Abud remarks with puzzlement: “Valera dice que su mujer se molestaría y hasta cruzaría el Atlántico para estar con él, si supiera de las tertulias que hay en la embajada, a la que concurren muchas damas de buen ver. Pero esto no se corresponde con la mujer que describe Valera en sus cartas, al parecer a ella ya no le debe de importar lo que su marido (oficial, sólo en papel) haga” (ibid.). On the other hand, if one considers the numerous examples and references to Dolores’s bitterness and irrationality,<sup>51</sup> it does seem plausible that a woman who appeared to show little love for Valera could, at the same time, be angry at his infidelity. After all, she allegedly had expectations that he should provide the resources enabling her to live a luxurious lifestyle;<sup>52</sup> if she felt that he was failing her in this regard and then discovered that, not fulfilling his duty, he was also flirting with women, it is very likely she might have felt doubly insulted.

In any case, a month later, on April 24th, Valera writes to his sister again, this time expressing concern about the endurance of his position, “porque sigo siendo el compañerito muy amado, a pesar de mis sesenta años, de la hija mayor del secretario del Estado, la cual es de lo más extravagante, independiente y extraordinario en todo, que a duras penas puede imaginarse” (C 4, 301).

It is the letters of the following next three months, however, which are particularly interesting, as they document an apparent escalation in terms of sentiments, at least on Katherine’s part. On May 28<sup>th</sup> for instance, Valera remarks, “Yo no sé si es extravagancia de miss Bayard o si estoy aún verde y lozano; pero ella se ha enredado

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<sup>51</sup> The following is a particularly apt example: “Uno de sus furores y manías, expresada ahora casi de diario, es la de que siempre estoy bien de salud, y dice que me desea una buena y dolorosa enfermedad” (C 3, 474).

<sup>52</sup> “Imagina que yo debía hacer por ella prodigios de actividad para ganar más dinero o el milagro de pan y peces para que cundiese el que gano y bastase a todos sus antojos, despilfarros y desorden” (C 3, 438).

conmigo con la mayor decisión” (C 4, 314). In the next, he refers to his “extrañas relaciones” with the young woman and their absurdity given that he is sixty, blaming it all on his wife and her insults (C 4, 324). On the 30th of June, he writes, “Es singularísimo el afecto que le ha entrado por mí a esta señorita Bayard” (C 4, 333), musing about why his wife cannot love him when others find it easy to; and two weeks later on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, of the “amoríos, que hoy me pesan” (C 4, 343). While the cited letters are of minimal interest aside from revealing what seems to be a developing bond between the two, above all on Katherine’s side, it is a letter only four days later, on July 16<sup>th</sup>, which really stands out. Sofia has clearly expressed worry to her brother about something; perhaps the possibility that Katherine might go public with their relationship? We know Sofia did not foresee tragedy, because it was Valera himself who raised the point about the trouble which may arise when he is transferred. In a statement of tremendous foreboding, he remarks:

De mis amores con la miss de que te he hablado no tienes que temer, ni temo yo, esos males de que me hablas, miss K.B. es razonable y juiciosa en esto. En lo que no lo es, y aquí mi temor, es en el romanticismo de la pasión, y mi recelo consiste en que ha de llegar un día en que yo, por un motivo o por otro, tenga que volver a Europa, lo cual, dando [sic] el punto sublime a que ha llegado este asunto, ha de traer muchas lágrimas y sentimientos. (C 4, 350)

“Lágrimas y sentimientos” he was prepared for, but not suicide. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, Valera informs his sister, “he sido apeado, como yo recelaba”,<sup>53</sup> and on the 18<sup>th</sup> he informs her of the horrible news. Clearly defensive and putting forward as the cause of her actions a depressive dark side, the most notable aspect of Valera’s letter is the intensity of his confusion, anxiety, guilt and sense of threat:

Aquí vino la nueva por telégrafo, que publicaron los periódicos. La pobre miss Catalina Bayard ha muerto de repente. Imagina mi dolor y la situación horrible, insostenible, en que aquí me veo. Tranquilízate. Yo espero resistir a este golpe, y

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<sup>53</sup> In a letter from Brussels dated the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1887, Valera refers to the need to renew “amistades y hago ver que aún puedo y valgo algo”, citing that he otherwise risks being kicked out of Brussels the way “me echaron de Washington” (C 4, 638). In another letter, later in the year, dated the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1887, Valera cites his “insignificancia” as being the reason for which he was forced from his U.S. posting (C 4, 759).

sobrevivir para mis hijos. Miss Catalina Bayard, llena de talento, de chispa, de gracia y de saber, tenía las ideas más espantosas de pesimismo, amaba, deseaba la muerte, era su preocupación, su idea constante. Lo que es yo, por esta mujer, me hubiera quedado aquí, y aún hubiera renegado de la patria y me hubiera hecho yankee. Ha sido una cosa tremenda. (C 4, 436)

In another dated the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, Valera writes to his sister as if responding to some accusation:

De nada, absolutamente de nada me remuerde la conciencia. Yo ni he engañado, ni he seducido, ni he prometido lo que no podía cumplir. Yo no tengo la culpa de desesperaciones, de locuras, de pesimismos, de horrores. Para curarlos y evitarlos hasta me hubiera yo quedado aquí de cualquier modo. Y en cuanto a mi flaqueza en dejarme querer, me parece que no es tan fácil hacer del Hipólito o del Joseph, cuando tiene uno todavía su alma en su almarío. (C 4, 447)

Valera would never have renounced Spain for Katherine Bayard, or any other woman. For Abud, Valera's claims that he would have done so is proof that the author and diplomat reciprocated Katherine's feelings (79). But Valera's defensive, over-exaggerated reaction suggests he did feel guilty about something, perhaps because he did not fully reciprocate her feelings; or perhaps because even if he did, he knew a transfer was inevitable and that he had not handled matters carefully enough in allowing a young woman of such fervent passions, with the allegedly depressive tendencies he describes, to become so attached to him. One thing is certain: Valera enjoyed the attention and admiration of Katherine and other Washington women, deriving a much-needed strength and confidence from it which compensated for the disdain he had found so depleting in his marriage to Dolores up to that point. This benefit alone would have likely kept Valera in contact with Bayard—even if emotions of the type she professed for him he could never return.

None of Valera's novels depicts tragedy quite as Valera knew it, but six out of his eight completed works feature the *niña-viejo* theme: *Pepita Jiménez* (Pepita and Gumersindo, and almost Pepita and Pedro), *Las ilusiones* (Costanza and the Marquis



of Guadalbarbo), *El comendador Mendoza* (Fadrique, the Commander and Lucía), *Pasarse de listo* (Beatriz and Braulio), *Juanita La Larga* (Juanita and Paco), and *Genio y figura* (Rafaela and Don Joaquín de Figueredo). And it is in this last novel, the story of Rafaela, that Valera does portray a man receiving news of a lady friend's suicide; however, the circumstances of Katherine and Rafaela differ: the former was an educated woman from a distinguished Delaware family with whom Valera was in the midst of a relationship, while Rafaela is a former prostitute, whom the Viscount, an old client, got to know during their time in Lisbon, and with whom he has only been reacquainted recently following twenty years out of contact.

Present in the Viscount's response to Rafaela's death is a fondness and sympathy toward the woman, but the fact also that he does not regard her as an equal. On completing his reading of her *Confidencias*, the man is appropriately in anguish, contemplating the likelihood that his friend has committed suicide (he has not yet had a chance to confirm her decision); however, the narrator immediately goes on to qualify his reaction with the statement, "Tenía por Rafaela cuanta estimación, cuanta amistad y cariño que puede tener un gentil caballero por una mujer fácil y alegre, aunque, por otra parte, de corazón noble y leal y de muy buena pasta" (259). In fact, on being reunited with her in Chapters 26 and 27, the Viscount's first thought is about the pleasure he would get from "mayores y más dulces intimidades", as in the old days: "Rafaela, en verdad, hacía involuntariamente que la deseara el vizconde, porque estaba más guapa y más interesante que nunca" (186). When he approaches her with the proposal, she turns him down. He finally manages to convince her, but she commits suicide before their rendezvous, planned for twelve days hence. The Viscount is said to reflect, following her death, upon the strange request she had made of him: "En extremo le pasmó el deseo concebido y formulado por Rafaela de poner término y corona a la larga serie de sus livianos amores con un amor puro, fiel y constante" (259).

Valera did not view the German women from Berlin whom he wrote to Cueto about in 1856 (as discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis) as incapable of multiple dimensions and the ability to assume identities beyond women who sleep with men for pleasure and

gifts. In *Rafaela*, Valera presents a woman of more admirable conduct,<sup>54</sup> albeit from a lower station in society, and shows that if she is prevented from this next step of transcending her initial identity, it is not as a result of her own prejudices, but as a result of others’.

Valera is not arguing that *Rafaela* should have inspired the love of Juan Maury. In his Postscript to the novel, he cites her refusal to pursue the aristocrat for a serious relationship as proof of her generosity: in the eyes of society, she would have only destroyed his reputation. What he does show is the complexity and humanity of a woman who has arguably been denied both: first by the Viscount who sees her suicide as shocking and cannot understand the sudden change in her attitude regarding sexual dalliances, and then ironically by the critics to whom Valera in his Postscript saw it necessary to explain that even a woman like *Rafaela*, in spite of her ignoble beginnings, is capable of dignity and a desire to better herself. Human dignity, Valera tells *Rafaela*’s detractors, is a matter which transcends all classes:

El honor, con todo, tiene algo de aristocrático y privativo de ciertas clases ... Otro sentimiento hay, con más profundas raíces en el corazón humano, más general y más poderoso: el sentimiento de la propia dignidad por el mero hecho de ser hombre, aunque sea plebeyo y humilde; sentimiento que tiene también por base la religión cristiana, la cual nos enseña que cada criatura racional de las que viven sobre la tierra, por plebeya y oscura que sea su estirpe, tiene un alma hecha a imagen y semejanza de Dios, y que puede y debe aspirar a ser perfecta como su Padre que está en los cielos.<sup>55</sup>

As Valera goes on to explain, *Rafaela* had not initially been instilled with such values, but as time went on, “la educación le fue desenvolviendo y fortaleciendo en su alma, y

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<sup>54</sup> The German women are described as sleeping with men for gifts, as well as pleasure; we may also remember the suggestion that *Rafaela*, who slept with men for sustenance, was not charging adequately, if at all, for her services.

<sup>55</sup> Here we have another apparent statement of religious faith by Valera, and yet his private correspondence indicates that he was a sceptic. Nonetheless, it is understandable why the author refers to Christian teachings. He was trying to explain *Rafaela* in terms that his audience would understand and accept. Moreover, while Valera may not have had faith, he did appreciate certain religious concepts. As Robert Trimble maintains: “[Valera] felt that he could accept the ideas of any religion when he saw it enriching human experience” (“Introduction” to *A Translation of Morsamor*, X). Here, Valera argues that Christianity encourages individuals to value themselves and to strive for self-improvement, ideas which appealed to our author.

entonces le puso de manifiesto con claridad horrible las manchas indelebles que la afeaban” (272). Indeed, in Chapter 15 of the novel, she is described in her “anhelo de toda clase de perfección” (121), that “soñaba con una vida honrada y limpia” (ibid.). Rafaela’s sense of dignity is also quite pointedly expressed early on in her *Confidencias*. Referring to the journey she made from America back to Europe, she declares concerning her experience of briefly having returned to Spanish soil: “a pesar de todo mi patriotismo y de mi amistad hacia el padre García, me repugnaba permanecer en España. Dicen algunos autores que las mujeres como yo suelen tener *nostalgia del fango* ... Al contrario, yo recordaba bien todos los sitios, y al pasar por algunos se me encendía la cara de vergüenza” (217).

The power of human dignity is at the crux of Valera’s portrayal of Rafaela and explains why in her *Confidencias* to the Viscount, of the events in her life “que profundamente la modifican” (194), she cites her friendship with the Baron of Castel-Bourdac among the first as having been so pivotal to the transformation she has undergone, a transformation which has rendered her unable to continue with the frivolous affairs she once thought nothing of. The Baron is introduced in Chapter 26, whereupon he is described in some detail at the Señora de Pinto’s gathering as a devoted gentleman friend. In her *Confidencias*, Rafaela explains the older man’s significance to her and how they met. She introduces the theme stating, “Voy a contarte una curiosa aventura, que, si bien tiene mucho de ridículo, no puedo ni debo pasar en silencio, porque sus consecuencias fueron serias para mí y han influido bastante en los ulteriores sucesos de mi vida” (219). Then, following a summary of his personal qualities and reputation, she recounts how the Baron negotiated an embarrassing incident in which he made an amorous advance but found himself unable to carry through with it. To avoid humiliation, he feigned recognition of a medallion around her neck, claiming he had given it to a certain young woman he had met forty odd years ago in Andalusia—the idea being that the woman was Rafaela’s mother and that Rafaela is the product of their relationship. Rafaela obliges in embracing the lie, and from this new father-daughter bond, she experiences, “un sentimiento jamás experimentado por mí: algo de más fervoroso que la amistad; algo en que no entraba por nada el vehemente anhelo de los sentidos y algo que no era tampoco eso que llaman amor platónico y puro” (227). Rafaela is never explicit about

the exact effect this experience had upon her, but its significance is clear: the Baron is the first man in Rafaela's life, who, being at an age that she could, she does not sleep with. Through this very fact and through his continued admiration and affection for her, in spite of their sexless relationship, Rafaela is able to transcend her own initial understanding of herself in which male attention and interest always translated into the offer of her body. The Baron was not uninterested himself in a physical relationship—neither his lack of interest, nor her refusal to offer herself would have been realistic—but through insinuations of his impotence Valera makes such a physical relationship between the two impossible, opening up a new world to Rafaela, one in which she is not merely a woman to whom men come for a good time, physically. But then a number of other events take place, reminding her she cannot escape her past: Juan Maury's refusal to recognise their daughter as his own, and that daughter's decision to become a nun, through shame of having Rafaela as her mother. The Viscount's reappearance and request for another sexual affair represents the last of such events, but it makes no difference; she has already made up her mind to die.

Perhaps one of Valera's most significant observations during the late 1850s, as a way of shedding light on Sofia's character, has to do with her frugal decision regarding her choice of wedding portrait. In a letter from August of 1858, Valera writes:

Extraño mucho que tú, que eres artista, y ves que se gasta la Emperatriz en pañuelos, con perdón sea dicho para tus mocos, 450 francos en cada uno, no hayas tenido el valor de gastarte el doble en tu imagen, en una obra de arte, en un objeto, en fin, que aun prescindiendo del amor al arte, debieras desear por aquella justa y razonable coquetería, que no sólo las mujeres sino hasta los varones debemos tener, y tenemos, que no fuese un mamarracho o *ecce-micuo*, sino que más bien te idealizase y presentase hermosísima. (C 1, 589)

Valera highlights his sister's singularity with the above statement, claiming that other women, even men, would not have forgone such a luxury and, furthermore, need not do so. He refers to "aquella justa y razonable coquetería", what is essentially vanity, suggesting that it is excusable for both sexes to exercise a certain degree of it. In fact this type of modesty displayed by Sofia, and upon which Valera comments, is not a

prevailing trait among Valera's principal heroines. If any exhibit the quality, it is Doña Luz; yet this has more to do with her austere nature than any other factor. While most of Valera's heroines are depicted as naturally beautiful and graceful and proud of their physical appearance to the point even of narcissism, it is said of Luz, that she cares for her body "sin sibaritismo, con la severidad de quien cumple un deber" (*Doña Luz*, 56).

### **Their Father's Illness**

Only six months later, in April of 1859, Valera is forced to write to Sofía's husband to inform him of their father's illness. Valera is very clearly worried about how his sister is going to take the news: "Vous savez avec quelle ardeur elle aime son père et toute sa famille" (C 1, 612). This devotion to her family is confirmed in letters that follow.

From the next letter, for instance, it is clear that Sofía was eager to make the long journey home to be with her father, although Valera tries to discourage her, suggesting that leaving Paris would cause unnecessary upheaval and, besides, their father had not even wanted Sofía to know: "No puedes tú comprender bien cuánto rabió el día que supo que te habíamos dicho que estaba enfermo y lo que caviló sobre los malos ratos que estarías pasando ... No imagines que papá padece" (C 1, 614). Then he continues, insisting that whatever guilt she is feeling has no foundation:

Papá tiene 77 ó 78 años y más desea que vivan y sean felices sus hijos que vivir él. No tienes razón en acusarte de egoísta ni en arrepentirte de haberte casado porque no puedes cuidar a tus padres. Estos, y papá muy singularmente, no creo que hayan tenido mayor satisfacción jamás que la que tuvieron el día que te vieron, más que honradamente, ilustremente establecida. (614-615)

From only these few lines, we learn a lot about Sofía's selfless nature, sense of duty and devotion to her parents. She also believes in God, we discover from the next letter, as Valera begins a comment with "aunque carezco de la mucha fe que tú tienes..." (C 1, 616). A letter written many years later, in 1883, will also confirm her faith. In a rare confidence to his wife about Sofía and her problems, Valera states of

his niece: “te diré que Luisa está medio loca. Se ha metido a filósofa y dice que es atea. La madre con este ateísmo pone el grito en el cielo y suspira y llora, tratando de convencer a Luisa de que hay Dios” (C 3, 607).

Many of Valera’s heroines are depicted as believing in God, although Valera distinguishes between having faith and being religious. Having faith he appears to have regarded as universally positive. In fact, one of the major flaws expressed about Faustino in *Las ilusiones* is his inability to believe in anything outside of himself: “el Doctor no poseía la fe sino a medias. Creía en sí mismo, y no creía en nada exterior que le llamase, moviese y estimulase” (279). On the other hand, Valera’s most uncharitable and even hypocritical characters are often said to be religious. We have seen this in relation to Blanca, but Inés of *Juanita la Larga* and the Countess of Majano are portrayed in this way also. Of the Countess, Valera is direct about his opinion of her. Described as “la dama más austera y descontentadiza de Madrid” (*Las ilusiones*, 378), he explains how she adored her sister-in-law, Costanza:

Y nada tenía que censurar en ella, salvo un poco de tibieza en rezos y devociones; pero el estímulo de formular esta censura se embotaba en el corazón de la Condesa del Majano, quien, como casi todas las mujeres devotas, era muy avara, con los presentes y limosnas que Constancita daba para las iglesias, conventos de monjas y casas de caridad, de todos los cuales presentes era distribuidora la Condesa, luciéndose así y pasando por generosa sin gastar un cuarto. (ibid.)

It is clear that “rezos y devociones” are not what counted in Valera’s eyes, but an internal moral compass of the sort which characters like Fadrique, Juanita and Rafaela display. That is not to suggest that all his religious characters are fanatical or hypocrites; some of his most admirable characters are self-identified Catholics and church-goers, and yet their affiliation with the Church does not impede them, on occasion, from dispensing with the rules to follow their own consciences. As Carmen Bravo-Villasante remarks of Valera’s heroines specifically, “Todas ... obran de acuerdo con un canon interno, aunque las pueda perjudicar; y ello es lo original y lo atrevido” (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 295).

In addition to having a strong faith, Sofía is generous, too. In the postscript to one of Valera's letters, following their father's death, he wrote: "Tus ofrecimientos me han hecho llorar de ternura. Gracias, hermana, gracias, pero de nada te prives por nosotros que nada necesitamos" (C 1, 618). This is not only a quality that manifests itself at the death of family members; we gather from Valera's comment in a letter from August of 1861—"Mucho te agradezco las ofertas que me haces, pero no te prives de nada por mí, que no me hace falta" (C 1, 724)—in a letter discussing debt and the family's economic situation, that she offers financial help on other occasions, too. For Carmen's baptism she gave more than could be expected—even from a generous sister, Valera claims. We also know from the letters following both of Valera's parents' deaths that generosity was not to be taken for granted; their half-brother Pepe is described, on more than just one occasion, as being "avaro" and "ruin" (C 2, 502). A letter from May of 1879, indicates further instances of financial help from Sofía, with Valera writing, "Ayer recibí la letra de 800 francos que ha venido como socorro del cielo. Perdona este nuevo saqueo de tu hermano, que deseo con todo empeño que sea el último" (C 3, 142). Years later, on preparing for his new diplomatic assignment in Washington, D.C., Valera will fret about not having the means to make the journey. Again, Sofía will come to his rescue. As he informs his wife, "te escribo para decirte que ya *sali de mi cuidado*, esto es, que ya solté a Sofía lo del adelanto y que he tomado los dineros necesarios para terminar mi viaje" (C 3, 608). And still, many years after that Sofía will continue to offer him assistance, even though it is abundantly clear from Valera's correspondence that neither was she in sound financial shape. In June of 1890, for instance, he will refer to a potential visit to her over the summer holidays, stating, "te doy gracias encarecidas por tu propósito y ofrecimiento de pagarme el viaje, aunque me aflige haberte sido siempre tan gravoso, sobre todo desde que tuve la tontería de casarme tan mal. De soltero tendría yo algo ahorrado, si no habría hecho fortuna, y por lo menos no tendría los apuros y angustias en que vivo siempre" (C 5, 249-250). A letter written to Sofía in 1888 confirms that the author had little choice but to turn to his sister. He explains his wife's position:

Cuando yo tengo turrón, mi mujer gasta sus rentas, las de su madre, y todo lo que yo tengo, y aun a veces más; pero, cuando estoy cesante, ella no me socorre, ni yo quiero que me socorra, de suerte que me veo ahogado. Yo contraigo deudas, yo

vendo algo de lo que tengo, y Dolores, llena de juicio nada vende ni disminuye gran cosa su capital, de lo cual me alegro mucho. De lo que no me alegro es del método fácil y inconscientemente egoísta que emplea. Ella no comprende además, con esta egoísta separación de bienes, que en realidad, haciéndome a mí mucho daño, ella también se le hace ... porque es mi mujer. (C 5, 91)

Thus, we can gather from letters of this period that Sofía, unlike Dolores, was a generous and devoted family member, in addition to being a modest and principled woman. In the next period, we learn even more about her from Valera's comments relating to her role as intermediary between him and Dolores Delavat before they married.

### **The Late 1860s and the 1870s**

#### **Sofía's involvement with Dolores**

Although up to this point only Sofía's virtues have been evident, she did not always prove cooperative with her brother. During the spring and summer of 1867, we know that the siblings were in close contact, even visiting one another, and it seems that because of Sofía's residence in Paris, Valera relied on her to convince Dolores that his affection for her was sincere. It is clear that she had been unimpressed with his initial approach to courting her: "No concibe que Valera se haya entendido con su madre y no con ella" (Abud, "La vida amorosa de Valera", 76). Consequently Valera wrote to Dolores, "Dos o tres días ha, recibí una carta de su hermano de Vd. y mucho sentimiento de lo que en ella me decía sobre que usted extrañaba y tildaba de *rara* mi manera de proceder, y, lo que es peor, sobre que usted recelaba que yo no la quisiese" (C 2, 316). A few days later Valera explains to her that although he cannot visit her in Paris yet, "mi hermana estará ya en París, donde supongo que habrá visto a Vd. y le habrá hablado, pues así se lo encargo con empeño en todas mis cartas" (C 2, 319). It seems that Valera tried to involve Sofía hoping that she would resolve matters between them while professional matters retained him in Spain.



Initially, Sofía appears unwilling—if we can trust that Valera was telling Dolores the truth, and not simply trying to gain sympathy. He explains why his sister, to whom he had written, “para que fuese a excusarme con Vds.,” has not fulfilled his wishes: “ha dado en la manía de menospreciar de una manera extraordinaria a este pobre país, no ha comprendido mi excusa, y de rabia contra mí no ha querido ir a darla” (C 2, 323).

Suddenly an image of Sofía as a critical and independent-minded woman emerges. Valera seems to suggest that Sofía refuses him help on the basis that she did not approve of his decision to remain in Madrid, even though, according to him, he had no choice. Additionally, he suggests she holds Spain in contempt, a point which seems to upset the author, putting him on the defensive: “A ella le parece esto peor que una horda de gitanos, pero no cae en que yo pertenezco a esa horda, y en esta horda es donde tengo alguna posición y algún nombre, de suerte que tengo que tomar por lo serio esta Academia y estos hombres” (ibid.).

The situation described above and Valera’s depiction of his sister in this particular instance provide a sharp contrast to the image of her as good-natured and helpful up to this point. Most of Valera’s correspondence seems to indicate her as the most easy-going of all of the women in his life. Rather than getting upset easily with others, she usually worries that others were upset with her, as revealed, for instance, in a letter he wrote to her in June of 1873: “No creo que mi hermano esté enojado contigo, cuando eres tú la que en todo caso pudieras estar enojada. Si no te escribe, es porque no tendrá qué decirte” (C 2, 537), he reassures her.

Might Sofía have been angry with her brother over another matter? Might she have been simply frustrated with the Spanish way of life? We cannot know for certain. And yet at the same time that repeated comments throughout Valera’s correspondence promote an image of Sofía as mild-mannered, we do discover from other letters that she was very critical of Spain. Valera reflects on this, stating: “Aunque en momentos de mal humor diga yo mal de España, lo que es en mi estado normal disto mucho de pensar como tú piensas” (C 2, 267). He seems to make excuses for her attitude, however, claiming that “en Francia se desprecian tanto nuestras cosas, que el ambiente de desprecio hacia ellas circunda hasta a los que no quieren despreciarlas” (C 2, 416).

And of course, her complaints never reach the same level of anger and irrationality as that of his wife and mother-in-law who were “no sólo hablando mal,” according to Valera, “sino pateando, llorando y rabiando porque viven en España” (C 2, 404). For Dolores, all it takes is very hot weather and “sube de punto, raya en el frenesí la irritación de mi mujer contra España” (C 2, 394).

Whatever the cause of his sister’s initial refusal to assist him in convincing Dolores of his sincerity, he is more disappointed than critical, and shortly thereafter, from a letter to Dolores’s mother, it appears that Sofía has changed her mind. Valera writes to his future mother-in-law in November of 1867:

He sabido por carta de mi hermana que ha visto a Vd. y a Dolorcitas de quien ha quedado encantada, haciendo mil encomios de ella. No sé cómo ponderar a Vd. el contento que esto me ha causado. Mucho deseo saber que a Dolorcitas le ha parecido también simpática y agradable mi hermana, y será grande mi satisfacción cuando vea que son Vds. muy amigas. Hasta por egoísmo de hermano he de alegrarme de esto porque Sofía, con tantos años como lleva de estar en París, no tiene aún íntima amistad con nadie, y vive en cierto modo aislada; culpa en parte de su carácter bastante encogido. (C 2, 324)

Sofía has clearly come through in Valera’s estimation, behaving graciously toward his future wife and mother-in-law. The above excerpt is also interesting, however, as for the first time there is mention of Sofía’s reserved character and reclusive lifestyle—his reference to her having lived “tantos años” in Paris and “aún” she has not a single close friendship. Sofía lives in isolation, thanks to her nature which he describes as fairly “encogido”. It appears from this statement as if Sofía might be isolated, to some degree, against her desire and in spite of her need for social contact. The only heroines of Valera’s described as withdrawn are María, Faustino’s *inmortal amiga*, and Clara of *El comendador Mendoza*, both portrayed as “damaged”—the former owing to her life on the run from her father, the bandit Joselito *el seco*, and because of what Paul Smith reminds us is her shame over her illegitimate origins (“Valera and the Illegitimacy Motif”, 806), the latter because of her mother’s austerity and imperious qualities. Valera’s mother also had imperious qualities, although there is no evidence

to suggest that she was religious like Blanca or even religious at all, with Sáenz describing her as, “escéptica hasta la medula” (*Cartas íntimas*, 18). Thus, if Sofía was in any way adversely affected by her mother’s domineering nature, it would have been unrelated to the kind of guilt that plagued Blanca or the fear she was instilling in Clara. In regard to Sofía’s apparent timidity, it is worth noting in any case that none of Valera’s other principal heroines is depicted similarly. Rafaela, in certain respects the closest to Sofía in circumstance, given her residence in Paris and the fact that she is a widow, is indeed depicted as lonely, but only because of others’ inability to accept her, and not because of her innate disposition, which earlier in the novel is described as “tan alegre” (*Genio y figura*, 114) and out-going.

Valera’s letter to his mother-in-law also allows us to read between the lines. Perhaps Valera was only being polite in his comments about Sofía being “encantada” by Dolores, but assuming that he was telling the truth—as he did subsequently marry her—we have to conclude that Sofía really did find Dolores charming and pleasant. If this is the case, might it reveal anything about his sister’s judgment? Valera did go on to marry Dolores, one would presume, believing she was a nice, reasonable person, so to conclude Sofía had poor judgment when her brother evidently had the same, would not be fair. On the other hand, it is a possibility that Sofía, so kind and good-natured, did not detect any of these underlying negative qualities because of her innocence or because she did not possess them herself. Years later, in 1882, Valera’s request for his sister’s company on vacation will indicate that this might very well have been the case. Referring to his wife, the author writes, “Ella es insufrible; pero tú eres tan buena y tan dulce que todo lo aguantas” (*C 3*, 375).

Equally, it is possible that Valera’s negative perception of Dolores was not shared by others, although Valera seems certain it was. His reference to the maids’ frustration with his wife suggests he was not the only one who struggled with her—others dealing with her presence on a day-to-day basis found her hard to tolerate (*C 3*, 473). In November of 1884, he also claimed that his mother-in-law, whom he regards more fondly now than in the past, has left Dolores to be in Brussels with her son: “Esto me prueba, que dicha señora, idólatra de mi mujer, no ha tenido ya paciencia para sufrirla” (*C 4*, 213). Notwithstanding this, years later Sofía is still singing her sister-in-

law's praises. During Dolores's shopping trip to París in the autumn of 1879, Valera writes to Sofía, "Con mucho gusto he recibido tu carta del 4 y no menor le he tenido con los elogios que haces de mi mujer" (C 3, 169). In his next letter it is clear that Sofía's praises have been even more emphatic. He responds, "ha sido una verdadera satisfacción el ver que Dolores, durante su permanencia ahí, te ha cautivado, y el leer los elogios que de ella haces" (C 3, 174).

What also becomes evident from Valera's reply is Sofía's concern about having overstepped the bounds of propriety with certain comments made in her last letter. Sofía has been drawn in to discussions with Dolores about her and her husband's finances—"Dices en tu carta que mi mujer se verá obligada a *manger encore de son capital et une fois qu'il n'y aura plus que deviendront tous*. Yo no sé qué sucederá entonces; sólo sé que nada he tomado yo del capital de Dolores" (C 3, 175). A sensitive subject for Valera, he nonetheless accepts his sister's involvement, reassuring her: "Por ninguno de los consejos e insinuaciones de tu última carta me enojo contigo, pues sé que nacen del cariño verdaderamente fraternal que me tienes" (C 3, 174). What is interesting about this letter (other than the fact that Sofía chooses to communicate with her brother in French rather than Spanish) is Valera's lack of offence at his sister's willingness to consider, and address, Dolores's position. A testament to his respect for Sofía and the value he places on their friendship, he accepts her comments in the best possible light, and defends their financial arrangement, not without suggesting of course that his wife is two-faced and manipulative: "Ella sabe ser amable cuando quiere" (ibid.). So great is Valera's belief in the goodness and intentions of his sister—and perhaps the manipulative faculties of his wife—that Sofía's involvement spurs not an angry response, but a polite declaration that she has not been told the full story.

Following the November 1867 exchange, there is then a break of a year and a half between Valera's last letter in which Sofía is spoken of and the next one having to do with her, of which she is the recipient, dated June of 1869. Most of the forty-eight extant letters in between are to his wife, and friends Francisco Moreno Ruiz and Gumersindo Laverde. It is not until their sister, Ramona's, illness in the summer of

1869, that Valera and Sofía's once-frequent correspondence seems to resume. In these exchanges we discover his belief that she is a good role model and a diligent mother.

On June 27<sup>th</sup> Valera responds to a letter she wrote to him "felicitándome en los días de mi santo" (C 2, 388) and mentions news he has received of Ramona's illness. Then, suddenly, Ramona dies and he writes to Sofía, truly shaken: "Tú sabes lo mucho que yo la amaba y comprenderás cuán doloroso me ha sido esta pérdida. Ya creo haberte dicho que tengo el desconsuelo de no haber llegado a tiempo a Cartagena, para verla antes de morir" (C 2, 390).

### **Antonia, Ramona's Daughter**

The most significant topic of these letters is actually his niece's upbringing. Valera is concerned about Antonia and suggests to Sofía that the girl would benefit from being in her care:

Antoñita, que es excelente muchacha, ha sentido mucho la muerte de su madre. Esta niña (dicho sea entre nosotros) será una lástima que se quede con su padre. Convendría que tú la tuvieses contigo; que hicieses para ella madre. Mucho puede ganar a tu lado y mucho puede perder si sigue errante con el papá, o si se queda aquí sin él, o si va de nuevo a Adra. (C 2, 389)

Later that week, Valera writes to his sister again, elaborating on the reasons he thinks Antonia should live with Sofía:

Es una chica de mucho talento y de un carácter como a mí me gustan: franca, decidida y cariñosa.<sup>56</sup> Lo malo es que está perversamente educada. Su flojera sobre todo da lástima, porque no se emplea en nada, y de puro floja ni se lava, ni se mira, ni se adorna, ni aprende nada, desatendiendo igualmente el alma y el cuerpo. Más adelante, cuando pase tiempo de la muerte de su madre, es menester corregirla. (C 2, 390)

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<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that these three are the prevailing traits of several of Valera's principal heroines, "franca" and "decidida" denoting strength of character and conviction; while "cariñosa" brings to mind a gentler disposition, fundamental to which is a generosity of spirit and altruism.

Significantly, Valera does not suggest Antoñita should live with him or his mother on a permanent basis. This may in part be because of their difficult financial situations, but assuming that Alonso would be able to provide for her fully as is claimed—“Parece que el ingenio va bien y Alonso se promete de él grandes cosas. Si así fuere, como deseo, la niña tendrá una fortunita” (ibid.)—the financial issue should not have been the main concern. It is more likely that Valera saw his sister as a good example and mother figure, with her daughter, Luisita around nine years old at this time, as evidence.

From a letter of December 7th, 1869 proof of Sofía's diligence as a mother is evident. Having declined an invitation to visit her brother in Madrid, Valera questions her decision: “Me han dicho los niños Caicedos que uno de los motivos que tú dabas para no venir por aquí es que no querías que Luisita dejase de asistir a los cursos. Tú no sabías, sin duda, que aquí estamos remedando a Vds., los franceses, y tenemos cursos también para la educación de la mujer” (C 2, 401).

Three days after Valera's July letter asking Sofía to take in Ramona's daughter we discover that his sister has generously offered to have Antonia come live with her (C 2, 391). This letter also represents the first occasion in which Valera makes reference, however subtle, to marital problems. Toward the end of it, he tersely states: “Con nada de mi mujer puedo, ni debo, ni quiero contar” (ibid.), and quickly moves on to other matters.

### **Sofía's Role as Confidant**

Only four days later and nineteen months into their marriage there follows Valera's first major complaint (that we know of) about his wife to Sofía, and this marks the beginning of his sister's important role as confidant. Dolores is described as “egoísta”, “inconsiderada” and “frívola” (C 2, 394), not to mention temperamental and even irrational in this letter which represents the first of many where Valera will vent frustration over what he regards as his wife's unacceptable, and at times even

shameful behaviour. It also represents one of the major avenues through which we develop an image of her—an image that sharply contrasts with our image of Sofía.

A week and a half later, Valera alludes to the women's contrasting characters. Complaining of Dolores's unfriendly behaviour toward his bereaved mother, Valera portrays his wife as rude, spoilt and selfish. He writes to Sofía,

Mi madre está aburridísima, tristísima, desconsolada y sola. Está para no vivir en Doña Mencía, sin la compañía de uno de sus hijos siquiera. Yo le insto para que se venga conmigo a esta Corte, pero mamá no quiere y reconozco que en parte tiene razón. Mi mujer, ora sea por mala crianza, ora por desidia, ora por tontería, es lo cierto que no ha consentido nunca en ir a verla, ni aun le ha escrito dándola el pésame por la muerte de Ramona, ni le ha ofrecido esta casa nuestra para que venga a hacernos una visita. Mi mujer es una criatura insufrible. Pero, en fin, sea como quiera, mi madre no puede ni quiere venir conmigo, sino de paso. Tú, que eres tan buena, debes hacer, y creo que harás con gusto, el último esfuerzo a favor de tu madre, llevándotela a París contigo, y que pase la pobre a tu lado los últimos años de su vida. (C 2, 397)

Following this lengthy lament, he reveals to Sofía what his mother has written to him about the matter: “Yo no quiero estar en Doña Mencía sola, abandonada, sin tener quien me quiera, ni a quien volver la cara. Mi hija Sofía me cuidará y me cerrará los ojos, porque es piadosa y al fin soy su madre” (ibid.). Both Valera and his mother's show of confidence in Sofía's generous nature reinforce the dutiful, selfless image that has been illustrated through other situations, if not also the degree to which she was leaned upon by family members for all forms of help—help Sofía seemed willing to give, but help which may have burdened her, contributing to the recurring bouts of melancholy from which she appeared to suffer.

Sofía also appears to be gentle in comparison to both her mother and sister-in-law, with Valera referring to the former's “obstinación” and suggesting that his wife is simply out of control. “He llevado a mi mujer a La Granja y ya me arrepiento de haberla llevado a La Granja,” he writes. “Ha rabiado hasta el frenesí, hasta hacerme

temer si estará loca” (C 2, 397). In light of Valera’s claims, we can understand how much he must have appreciated Sofia’s good nature, as his mother, in contrast, appeared to be quite stubborn and his wife was having temper tantrums only three weeks after his sister’s death. It was not only his wife that was causing problems, however, but his mother-in-law as well. He wrote to his sister of his daily struggles with these “dos seres irracionales” (C 2, 405).

While Valera was writing such letters to his sister, we discover that she too was having a difficult time. She was depressed, and Valera seems concerned and willing to go to great lengths to improve her spirits:

Hace muchos días que no recibo carta tuya y como sé, por las noticias que me da mamá y por las que me ha dado la condesa del [sic] Montijo las últimas veces que la he visto, que te quejas muchísimo de tus males, sobre todo de tus males de espíritu, estoy en extremo cuidadoso, y deseo cada día más fervientemente que nos veamos... ¿Quieres que vaya yo a buscarte? Los médicos me han aconsejado para mi garganta que vaya a Aguas-Buenas. Desde allí podría yo fácilmente alargarme hasta París. Yo preferiría que tú vinieses por aquí, sin que yo fuese; pero no me es imposible ir, si tú no vienes ... Podré ir por ahí y deseo [ir] por ahí, a verte, aunque tenga que volverme enseguida. Nuestra madre está afligidísima con las cartas que le escribes y te cree enferma. Si no fuese por sus 80 años y por su pobreza, ya se hubiera la pobre encajado en París. (C 2, 424)

While there appears to be no detail about the cause of her melancholy, many more references to it in the future will indicate this as a recurring challenge for Sofia.<sup>57</sup> What is not entirely clear is the extent of its gravity, or its cause, although we have suggested earlier that she may have been burdened by trying to meet the needs of others, and it is also possible to glean from Valera’s comments that loneliness and isolation might have been aggravating factors, if not the prime causes. On one of several occasions in which Valera pleaded with his sister, now a widow, to move to

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<sup>57</sup> There is a very early reference to Sofia suffering from some mystery illness, depression perhaps, in September of 1852. Writing to Serafín Estébanez Calderón from Brazil, Valera states that he is “lleno de tristeza y cuidados por cierta enfermedad de mi hermana, que es lo que la lleva a Madrid con mi madre, donde ruego a Dios (a pesar de mis filosofías tenebrosas) que me la ponga buena, porque ella es muy querida mía, y si Vuestra Merced la ve y habla con ella, verá que merece serlo de todos” (C 1, 190).



Madrid, he writes, “Aquí vivirías con tu familia y amigos antiguos y no estarías ni con mucho tan triste y aislada como estás y debes de estar en París, por más que lo disimules o lo niegues” (C 2, 486). Also noteworthy is his intimation that she tries to hide her emotions—a habit which suggests pride. There are, of course, many indications that she was a proud woman. We have evidence that she was independent, dignified, unwilling to marry for money, and had strong ideas regarding her daughter’s upbringing, as well as critical views of Spain. Valera makes another comment, however, in talking of her possible visit that suggests Sofia might have a proud temperament. She cannot stay with the Condesa de Montijo because of the latter’s difficult character, he recognises, but she probably would not enjoy the company of the other women anyway. As Valera comments, “las ninfas que rodean a esta vieja Calipso, en su ínsula carabanchelera, suelen ser unas cursilonas, que te cansarán y enojarán a la larga” (C 2, 450). This comment is of particular note because it is Valera’s first, comparing his sister to other women, in which he refers to her attitude to others. It also suggests she is unable to tolerate affectation—a sensibility she shares with her brother, as we will discuss further in chapter 4.

Sofia’s role as Valera’s confidant continues to grow into the 1870s, as his feelings of hopelessness worsen alongside multiplying problems. He is surrounded by difficult women, one of whom is his mother, and though he professes to love her very much, this affection only adds to his problems, since he is concerned over her well-being. He would like her to spend some time with Sofia, though it sounds as if she is too busy meddling in others’ affairs to leave Doña Mencía.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, he relies on Sofia for help, asking her to take responsibility: “Yo ya está visto que no puedo tenerla en casa. A mi madre le gusta el mangoneo y con las dos fieras de mi suegra y de mi mujer andaríamos siempre a la greña” (C 2, 461).

In his letters of the early 1870s, Valera is also particularly distressed by financial problems as he worries not only about his own but about his mother’s debts and the administration of the Alamillo which he and Sofia will come to inherit. Thus, he complains constantly to Sofia, lamenting the fact that his wife is irresponsible and wasteful and that his mother is not managing her money well. Sofia by comparison

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<sup>58</sup> Of her possible stay with Sofia, Valera remarks: “Esto la distraería y al menos durante ese tiempo no mangonearía y haría desatinos en el lugar” (C 2, 460).

must have seemed perfect to him, if for no other reason, because she was the only person not adding to the chaos and distress in his life. Through all of this, their bond grew stronger: “apenas habrá persona en el mundo a quien yo quiera más que a ti”,<sup>59</sup> he wrote. He also resumes his pleas for her to move to Madrid so that they can console one another. His troubled relationship with Dolores is all too apparent, and he knows that his sister is depressed, from a letter she wrote to his wife, consoling her on the death of her grandmother.

Then, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1872, a letter to Francisco Moreno Ruiz informs us that Valera’s mother has died tragically. Referring to the train crash which claimed her life, Valera writes: “Doy a usted mil gracias por el sentido pésame que me envía por la muerte de mi madre. La muerte fue horrorosa. Parece que el cadáver se encontró espantosamente desfigurado por la violencia del golpe y por el fuego. La impresión dolorosa que nos ha causado esta desgracia ha sido grandísima” (C 2, 494). Several months later, Valera confessed to Sofía: “por más que miro en torno mío, cada día me persuado más de que tú eres la única persona que bien me quiere que me queda en el mundo” (C 2, 532). Valera having lost his other sister, father and mother—who in spite of the latter’s difficult character had also been a source of support—Sofía was the only family left to him other than his wife, mother-in-law and infant children.

Thus, as can be expected, the siblings continued to grow closer. It seems she even invited him to live with her on a permanent basis. He declined her offer, but they continued in contact. They also planned visits to see one another during the year 1874, when Valera was writing *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino*: his last letter to her in that year, dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, mentions his intention of sending her the novel once completed; he also thanks her for lending him 1600 francs (C 2, 568).

Valera and Sofía clearly had a very strong bond, one that would have developed even had there not been so much tragedy in their lives. Before Ramona’s death in 1869 and their mother’s in 1872, the two were close and seemed to enjoy one another’s company. As Valera commented in the spring of 1867 to friend, Gumersindo Laverde,

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<sup>59</sup> (C 2, 487). Although prefaced by “apenas habrá”, this statement of Valera is as strong as can be, in terms of sibling affection. We can deduce from it that he loved his sister more than his mother and wife, leading to a likely accentuation of Sofía’s role as a model for Valera’s morally attractive heroines.

“Estoy hoy bastante melancólico. Vengo de despedir a mi hermana, la duquesa de Malakoff, que se acaba de ir a París, dejándome aquí sin su compañía que me era agradable” (C 2, 286). Valera and his sister also had similar interests and concerns, as is evident by a range of topics that he discussed with her, including politics, current events and literature.

He and his wife, in contrast, never had this connection: “vivir con esta chica, que se aburre de mí y no le divierte mi conversación ni a mí la suya, es como vivir con nadie” (C 2, 489). Nor did Dolores ever seem to take much of an interest in her husband’s work. As Cyrus DeCoster and Matilde Galera Sánchez remark in their introduction to *Cartas a su mujer*, the main themes of Valera’s correspondence with his wife relate to finances, marital disputes and “cosas superficiales y menudas: da detalles sobre su vida diaria y cuenta cotilleos sobre amigos y parientes”—there is little discussion of his literary and intellectual activities (13).

Sofía, in contrast, took a great deal of interest in her brother’s affairs, evident from numerous comments throughout the years, too abundant to enumerate in full. For example, in August of 1861, he writes, “He recibido tu cariñosa carta y mucho contento por los elogios que haces de mi obrilla y por el cariño que me muestras” (C 1, 723); in April of 1879, of the praise his latest academic speech has earned from her: “Esto me anima a enviarte ... un ejemplar de mi novela *Doña Luz*” (C 3, 139); and in March of 1887, of her flattering remarks about a tome containing some of his plays and short stories (C 4, 659). A week later, he promises to send her *Apuntes sobre el nuevo arte de escribir novelas*, his essay addressing Naturalism in French literature (C 4, 666). Fourteen months after Sofía’s death, in January of 1893, Valera will tell his niece Luisa of his recent appointment as Spanish Ambassador to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and how Sofía “hubiera tenido la satisfacción más viva al verme llegar a puesto tan importante. Esta consideración me hace recordarla con mayor pesar y lamentar más su pérdida” (C 5, 452).

## **Dolores versus Sofía**

The general impression we get of Dolores from Valera is that she was selfish, volatile, irrational, insecure and spoilt. Sofía in contrast, was selfless, good-natured, caring and modest. Where family was concerned, she was also a devoted and generous daughter and sister, not to mention mother and aunt. While Dolores never sent a letter of condolence to Valera's mother when Ramona died, let alone invited her to visit them, Valera saw in his sister an excellent mother-figure for their troubled niece, Antonia. In contrast, he questioned Dolores's judgment as a mother, expressing concern that his children, although charming, would turn out to be "dos modelos perfectos de mala crianza" (C 2, 453).<sup>60</sup> Finally, and perhaps, most importantly, Sofía is portrayed as lacking the frivolous preoccupations of his wife, whom he paints as both materialistic and in constant need of others' praise: "el caso... es su manía" (C 4, 662), he once snidely remarked.

Regarding others' perceptions of the two women, comments throughout Valera's correspondence suggest that Sofía was well respected by others: "Todos me preguntaron por ti" (C 2, 442), and even a Don Javier who wrote to their uncle, noted Malakoff's obvious affection for Sofía, "de un hombre tan escéptico y tan frío," Valera wrote to her, "nos han hecho comprender lo mucho que el Mariscal te quiere y nos han causado muy grande satisfacción" (C 1, 619). According to Valera, Dolores on the other hand, inspired mockery from many of those in day-to-day contact with her, including their servants who laughed at her tantrums. In fact, Valera worried that she and her mother would end up isolating themselves even from friends: "son dos criaturas insufribles por todos estilos: tontas, imprudentes, egoístas y capaces de romper con todo el mundo... No hay nadie más que las aguante" (C 2, 404).

## **Sofía's shortcomings**

While Sofía was a very important person to Valera and a woman whose qualities he clearly valued and appreciated, she was by no means perfect, from Valera's viewpoint. Well aware of his sister's shortcomings, Valera's correspondence into the

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<sup>60</sup> When this was written, in 1871, his third child, Carmen, had not yet been born.

1880s consistently addresses one of her biggest flaws, dually revealing what he also regarded as his own: “debilidad”. In a letter from February 1882, Valera writes to his sister: “Nosotros somos sobrado benignos y hemos nacido para que nos muelan y nos exploten, pero todo debe tener sus límites” (C 3, 376). It would seem that Sofía found it difficult to stand up for herself. While it is not clear exactly what Valera is referring to in this particular instance, later letters will reveal that she had challenges akin to those of her brother: only in Sofía’s case they were with her grown-up daughter, not her spouse. Valera will compare their situations in a letter of October 1882, writing:

Mis condescendencias con mi mujer, que me maltrata, que me detesta, que me desdeña, tienen mucha menos explicación que las tuyas con tu hija, que al cabo es tu hija ... Algo, sin embargo, debemos hacer para mitigar los malos efectos de nuestra debilidad con nuestras *tiranas*. Tú debes no dejarte arruinar por completo, y yo debo procurar lo mismo. (C 3, 466)

Evident from the above passage is the fact that Sofía’s problem is also very serious, Valera’s reference to both Dolores and Luisa as *tiranas* indicating the degree of power and control his wife had over him, and Sofía’s daughter over her, respectively. Additionally, as in the case of Valera, his reference to “Tú debes no dejarte arruinar por completo”, indicates that money is at the heart of the issue: both siblings are being financially compromised by dependents who do not respect them. Of course, Luisa ought not to be a dependent at this stage: already an adult, she is also married.

Although it becomes clear, particularly in Valera’s correspondence from Washington, D.C., that Sofía’s son-in-law, the Count Zamoyski and his “prodigalidad” is a major contributor to Luisa’s financial problems, and thus the demands being made upon Sofía, the questions raised about Luisa’s character indicate that she alone was probably a source of a lot of her mother’s grief. In a letter which is thought to have been written in January of 1881, referring to Luisa’s wedding, which has been called off, Valera writes to his wife, “Parece que Luisita es imposible, de mal carácter, de caprichosa y consentida. El polaco tuvo que salvarse por pies. Según Carlos Mesía la chica es insufrible y Sofía que la ha mimado tanto tiene la culpa” (C 3, 233). At other points he will indicate that he considers his niece a difficult character, referring to her

as “*arisca para lo que no le agrada*” (C 4, 561), and on one occasion as “*crispada de nervios*” (C 5, 166), a further indication of her prickly nature. A few years later, in the midst of his niece’s separation from the same Count, he will himself suggest that Luisa is spoilt, apportioning a good deal of blame to her mother.

In a letter which highlights his own weakness and suggests it as the reason for which his wife lacks respect for him, he makes a similar parallel between Sofía and her daughter, writing, “*Si Luisa no hubiera estado tan mimada y consentida, no se hubiera casado con el polaco, sino con algún hombre de bien, completo, cariñoso y rico, del cual no hubiera procurado nunca descasarse*” (C 4, 329). A somewhat harsh statement, Valera goes as far as suggesting that his sister, in indulging Luisa, is in some way responsible for ruining her opportunity to find a loving and respectful spouse—an odd comment from a man who held that everyone is responsible for their own life’s outcome (C 4, 657).

It seems that though she was an excellent mother in certain respects, Sofía was not able to embody, in Valera’s eyes, all of the qualities necessary for raising a well-rounded daughter—her husband’s death, at Luisa’s young age, making her responsible for all aspects of her daughter’s education and development. According to Valera, Sofía’s “*excesivo cariño maternal*”<sup>61</sup> combined with her weak character did neither mother nor daughter any favours.

In addition to Sofía not being able to cope with her daughter, she was also struggling with her son-in-law, who was reportedly beating Luisa (C 4, 175) and abusing his mother-in-law, if only verbally (C 4, 228). Clear from the manner in which many of Valera’s letters begin, Sofía wrote to him repeatedly about her upsetting circumstances. From one of Valera’s replies in particular, we can see that Sofía continues to struggle with the problem. He responds, “*Yo te compadezco porque soy débil y muy mirado y he sufrido mucho. Si no tuviese tan suave condición no te*

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<sup>61</sup> (C 4, 651). He refers to it on many occasions; here actually, Valera cites it as the cause of his sister’s exaggeration regarding Luisa’s ill health. Incidentally, three and half years earlier Valera had also referred to some illness of Luisa’s about which Sofía was upset. He called the symptoms, “*a la verdad poco visibles*” and suggested it was in his sister’s head. (C 3, 602)

compadecería, pues consideraría que todo lo que sufres es porque te da la gana de sufrirlo” (C 4, 228).

“Ármate de resolución” (C 4, 175), he urges her in a previous letter, encouraging Sofía to refuse support to her son-in-law—“no des un real, ni albergue, ni nada”—and to seek help from her brother-in-law. In his letter of four months later, dated the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, Valera largely repeats the advice, but this time, encourages her to be even braver:

Sacúdete y desahógate y despotricate con él, sin alterarte, y con frescura ... Además tú estás en tu casa, pagas tus criados, y debes tener alguno que sea forzado y que te quiera bien. No debes temer, por lo tanto, que el polaco te pegue, y, si se propasa a hacerlo, ten prevenido al criado para que le arrime unas cuantas bofetadas que le hundan, y en seguida quéjate a la policía de que tu yerno está loco, ha querido maltratarte, y tú gracias a la fidelidad y buen ánimo de un criado, te pudiste salvar. (C 4, 228)

He obviously feels very strongly about his plan because further on in the letter he repeats his recommendation: “Quéjate a todos, ten un criado fiel para que te defienda, y hazte respetar de ese insolente, hasta haciéndole dar una pateadura, si es menester” (ibid.).

A month later, a letter to his sister shows that the “guerra civil” continues and that she is “muy contrariada y triste” (C 4, 247). Two months after that, in March of 1885, Valera expresses his view that a divorce would be easier to secure than an annulment (C 4, 282). This subject will continue to appear in Valera’s letters to his sister, as Sofía regularly sought advice from her brother, and also used him as an outlet for “desahogos”, in the way that he so often used her. Additionally, this period of correspondence indicates the vital role Valera himself played in helping his niece secure the annulment that she and her mother regarded, when compared with divorce, to be the more desirable outcome. Romero Tobar’s collection contains numerous letters mentioning various figures Valera wrote to on the matter, including a letter he drafted for Sofía to a Cardinal Benavides (she appears unconfident of her ability to

express herself in Spanish, so Valera wrote it for her: “tú lo modificarás como gustes” [C 4, 615]), soliciting his help in securing a successful outcome for Luisa’s petition to Rome.

In July of 1886, a letter written from Brussels indicates a new turn of events: the Count Zamoyski, with the aim of defaming Luisa, has published personal letters his wife had written to him, discussing friends and acquaintances in a mocking manner. Valera responds to this upsetting news, attempting to assuage Sofía’s concerns, suggesting that it is he who will be judged badly for having aired such private material. The author remarks: “Calculo que toda persona decente la considerará como la vomitadura de un perro rabioso, como la obra inmunda de un loco sin vergüenza ... Cada cual, en el seno de la confianza, bajo sigilo, y tal vez en momentos de mal humor, censura a las personas que le son más queridas” (C 4, 527). This last comment is very significant, considering occasional inconsistencies in the way Valera refers to certain people in his own letters (such as his mother-in-law, whom he describes as insufferable in the 1870s but as an “excelente señora” in 1887 [C 4, 622] and sympathetically in the years which follow). It emphasises the importance of not only taking into consideration Valera’s humour and the context in which comments are made, as Oltra Pons (“La mujer norteamericana”, 72) and DeCoster (“Valera en Washington”, 218) suggest, but equally, the relevance of drawing conclusions from a mass of evidence, looking for Valera’s prevailing attitude with regard to people or subjects. We can take as a fact, for example, that he and his wife had a very strained relationship, given the multitude of letters referring to it, spanning long periods of time, even decades. In any case, in Valera’s next letter referring to Luisa’s disintegrated marriage, he advises his sister that she and his niece should continue in their pursuit of a legal separation, at least, and avoid being side-tracked by suing the Count for defamation: “De no buscar al Conde y darle de palos o matarle, lo mejor, a mi ver, es no hacer caso, y decir con tranquilidad, si alguien saca la conversación, que está loco, y que además no tiene vergüenza” (C 4, 552).

It is clear from a letter Valera writes in March of 1887, that not only have such events been emotionally draining for Sofía, but that Luisa’s lawsuit has been financially burdensome, too (C 4, 662). And yet Sofía’s money worries will not disappear after



Luisa's annulment is finally secured (their victory is confirmed by a letter Valera wrote in July of 1888); Sofía's daughter will continue to pose a drain on her mother's resources in the two years before the latter's death. Five letters written between the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1889 and the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1890 refer specifically to the stress caused to Sofía by her daughter's spending habits. In one dated the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1889, Valera writes: "siento todas las desazones que te da tu hija con sus rabietas. La culpa en parte la tienes tú que la sufres. Tú no necesitas de ella, y ella necesita de ti y de tu dinero. Ya se ablandará y dulcificará si no abres a cualquier capricho suyo la bolsa" (C 5, 136). The following 4<sup>th</sup> of July, it is clear that Sofía's problems have not abated, with Valera writing, "me pesan las extravagancias de Luisita de que eres víctima. Es lástima que haya malbaratado tu collar de perlas. Me parece que debes tú tener más voluntad y no consentir en que se gasten más que las rentas, sin tocar el capital ni disminuirle" (C 5, 160). Just as Sofía's complaints will continue, so will Valera's advice for her to stand up for herself. In a letter from the following 25<sup>th</sup> of April, he will tell his sister, "no puedes figurarte cuánto me aflige verte tan angustiada a causa de las locuras y de gastos de tu hija. Procura no tomarlo tan a pecho y aprieta además cuando puedas los cordones de la bolsa" (C 5, 239). A letter dated the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1890 will be the last on the subject. In it, Valera refers to "los gastos a que te induce Luisita" (C 5, 284). Less than two months later in a letter of November 14<sup>th</sup> Valera will indicate that Sofía has died suddenly (C 5, 297). To friend Francisco Moreno Ruiz, Valera will explain the cause: "Sofía estaba bien. La causa imprevista y repentina de su muerte, al volver a Paris de su casa de campo de Normandía, ha sido una pulmonía, de la que recayó, degenerando en tífus" (C 5, 298). This is not perhaps as emotional an account of his loss as one might expect. He appeared to reserve his outpouring of grief for another letter, written three days later. Referring to his sister's death, he told his friend, the Baron of Greindl:

Mi hermana Sofía era, yo creo, la persona que mejor y más entrañablemente me ha querido en el mundo. Imagine usted, pues, cuánto me habrá dolido su muerte, no sólo por el cariño que yo la tenía, sino por egoísmo también. Ahora me parece que me falta en esta vida quien más se interesaba por mí, y aun viviendo lejos, me acompañaba. (C 5, 298)

In light of Valera's experience, and often frustration, with both his own and his sister's weakness, it should not be a great surprise that one of the defining traits of his heroines, his dearest fictional creations by his own intimation, is their strength (mental, emotional and physical), determination and self-respect. If Valera and clearly one of the most beloved people to him were constantly dogged by their inability to stand up for themselves, Valera celebrates the value of doing so through several of his heroines, most notably, Luz and Juanita.

### **The Impact of Sofía on Valera's Fictional Heroines**

At the time of the "guerra civil" (C 4, 247) between Luisa and the Count Zamoyski which was battering Sofía so relentlessly, in a bid to encourage his sister to defend herself, Valera wrote: "el sufrimiento y la humildad son virtudes cristianas hasta cierto punto; más allá de ese cierto punto, son vicio, o lo que es peor, tontería" (C 4, 228). No other statement, invented or plucked from the pages of the author's own correspondence could more accurately embody the central theme of *Juanita la Larga*: the eponymous heroine's fight to demand the respect of the entire town and more demonstrably of its powerful men and most powerful woman, Doña Inés, after they take their expectation of her subservience too far.

*Juanita la Larga* tells the story of a young village girl and her efforts to gain genuine respect for the first time, after outraging the local community by overstepping the bounds of propriety for a person of her humble social class and background. Having been given the gift of a beautiful silk fabric, by Don Paco, the secretary of the local government, the young girl, with her skills developed through her role as the town's seamstress, makes an elegant dress and wears it to a Holy Day mass, inciting the anger and censure of Villalegre's townspeople and the priest, Father Anselmo, described as "muy severo en su moral, muy religioso y muy amigo del orden, de la disciplina y del respeto a la jerarquía social" (*Juanita la Larga*, 107). Juanita's refusal to submit to the will of Villafría's higher powers and their humiliating treatment of her following the scandal represents the author's belief in an individual's right to dignity and respect.

While Juanita does indeed withdraw from her regular activities, dedicating herself entirely to work and behaving obediently for the next year at the right hand of Doña Inés, the town tyrant, it is all a proven part of her grander scheme—a scheme that does not negate the honesty and integrity with which she is consistently portrayed early on in the novel. The narrator shows that Juanita, who is described as a self-respecting young woman, has no choice but to dupe and manipulate Doña Inés, who, in trying to force the young girl to become a nun, will, if she has her way, ruin Juanita's life.<sup>62</sup>

Equally, Juanita does not accept the insulting manner with which the most powerful men in Villalegre—Don Álvaro, and more persistently Don Andrés—treat her; they, as Francisco Caudet remarks, given the girl's more modest social position, consider her a "presa fácil" ("Prólogo" to *Juanita*, 19). At the culmination of Andrés's most daring attempts to seduce the girl, he lunges at her, giving Juanita no choice but to retaliate boldly and forcefully. As Teresia Langford Taylor explains: "A meeting staged with Don Andrés depicts Juanita straddling his body, pinning him to the floor, and thereby physically forcing him to 'repent' and 'respect' her" (*The Representation of Women in Valera*, 58). While Taylor then goes on to claim that Juanita degrades herself in this act (*ibid.*), she is in fact elevated by it, gaining esteem from those who before the event showed her none. In fact, strength and courage were qualities Valera pleaded for Sofía to exhibit in relation to her son-in-law. Valera may not have encouraged his sister to physically confront the Count—in fact his advice is that she take a more passive role,<sup>63</sup> seeking the support of others but also allowing him to incriminate himself by hitting her (*C* 4, 228). Nonetheless, what Sofía's and Juanita's circumstances do share in common is Valera's insistence that both women stand up to the men who are taking advantage of them.

Apart from the obvious physical courage, Juanita's actions demonstrate bravery on another level, too. She faces up to Doña Inés, proclaiming once and for all in Chapter

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<sup>62</sup> In this regard, Inés is unique, representing the only one of Valera's protagonists (other than Elisa in *Pasarse de listo*) who actually acts as the principal source of hardship and challenge to another woman. Blanca, in *El comendador Mendoza*, is another obvious example, except that the pressure she puts her daughter under to marry Casimiro emanates from guilt and a desire to keep her daughter from inheriting money that does not belong to her, not a competitive drive or basic meanness.

<sup>63</sup> Valera may also be encouraging passivity to avoid riling the Count too much, knowing that he is capable of physical violence against women as he has already demonstrated in relation to Luisa. Andrés, on the other hand, never threatened violence against Juanita, his lack of respect manifesting itself in his unwelcome advances.

22 who she really is: “Tú no me conoces todavía ... Tú te has empeñado en creermecordera y soy leona” (369). Having insinuated to Inés that inappropriate and unwelcome advances are being made to her—“Todos me menosprecian, me tratan mal y piensan peor de mí” (ibid.)—she also convinces the woman to accompany her to her home, and once there, locks her in her bedroom so that she might witness from a window the events that will unfold in the adjoining room. In this scenario, Juanita reveals herself to be daring and astute. The end result, the respect of all, confirms the righteousness of her actions.

Just as Juanita proves that it is good and right to stand up for oneself, another of Valera’s heroines, Doña Luz, also refuses to accept being badly treated.

*Doña Luz* tells the story of a young woman of the same name, whose resolution never to marry is challenged by the arrival in town of two men, Father Enrique and Don Jaime. Although Enrique’s vocation makes any romantic relationship unthinkable, Enrique and Luz discover themselves to be kindred spirits. This, and their inability to connect with the vast majority of the townspeople or to have a genuine interest in the village goings-on, leads to them spending most of their time together and to the formation of a special bond. In the end, Enrique falls in love with Luz, becomes ill from the emotional turmoil his suppressed feelings are causing him and dies. In the midst of Enrique’s developing troubles, Don Jaime, an eligible bachelor, has also arrived in town. A handsome and sophisticated *madrileño*, he suddenly reminds Luz of the refinement of her early childhood in the capital. The nostalgia brought on by such memories, not to mention what Valera clearly regards as her natural attraction to Jaime, given his looks, charm, and similar breeding, leads her to break the resolution she had once made never to marry. Not long after the couple’s nuptials, however, a secret is brought to light: the illustrious Don Jaime Pimentel y Moncada has only married Luz because of the knowledge that she would come to inherit a fortune. They are already husband and wife, and Jaime has a lot to offer her, too; but refusing to accept such deceit Luz definitively banishes Jaime from her side.

Other references in Valera’s correspondence suggest that his sister Sofia suffered from depression: during one period he claims that she is “sentimental y llorosa como

siempre” (C 3, 601); he suggests she is isolated in Paris due in large part to her own nature; and in response to a letter she writes to him before a visit to him in Lisbon, he reveals her apprehension about the trip, because of fear of the sea (C 3, 328). Not only do Valera’s letters reveal that Sofía is someone who struggles to stand up for herself, but they suggest a range of other weaknesses, fears, even neuroses—not necessarily significant if it were not for the fact that Valera witnessed their compromising effects upon his sister, and of course the compromising effects of his own weaknesses on his own life. In Valera’s analysis of why his wife lacks respect for him, he lays the blame on himself when writing to Sofía in June of 1885:

Si yo, ya que hice la necedad de casarme con una tonti-loca, la hubiera desde el día de la boda enseñado los dientes y convencídola de que no se jugaba conmigo, hubiera empezado por infundirla miedo primero, luego respeto, y por último, amor, pues al fin se ama a quien se respeta y se teme. (C 4, 329)

Valera’s heroines, by contrast, if they are any way challenged, tend to be resilient, strong-willed and intrepid. If, as in the case of Doña Luz, for instance, they are withdrawn, it is not to do with timidity or shyness, but a deliberate choice born of pride or a lack of interest in the people around them. As the narrator explains of Luz: “Había ido a las ferias de los lugares cercanos y a algunas romerías, y no esquivaba la conversación de las gentes, aunque con tan juicioso y bien templado decoro, que atinaba a desechar la familiaridad excesiva, sin ofender al vidrioso y sin alentar al audaz y confiado” (*Doña Luz*, 58). And further on, “Alguien podría sospechar pero no probar su invencible repugnancia a todo lo vulgar y plebeyo” (*ibid.*, 59).

Most of Valera’s heroines, however, are portrayed as out-going, gregarious and as eager hosts of *tertulias* and other social events. Pepita, Rosita, Costanza, Lucía, Beatriz, Manolilla (a minor character in *Doña Luz*), Juanita, Inés of *Juanita la Larga*, Rafaela, and Teletusa and Donna Olimpia of *Morsamor* are all such heroines. Inés of *Pasarse de listo* is similarly social, although, relative to the others, extraordinarily confident. Describing her composure among new friends, the narrator states: “Su serenidad olímpica, su calma divina, no la abandonó ni un instante... estuvo en la tertulia como pudiera haber estado una princesa real, para quien todas aquellas

magnificencias eran elemento propio, o más bien, quedaban por bajo del elemento que ella respiraba y en que su alma vivía” (*Pasarse de listo*, 92). Pepita, Rosita, Costanza, Lucía, Manolilla, Beatriz, Rafaela and Teletusa are also portrayed as having a particularly optimistic, cheerful disposition. Significantly, Rafaela is not only depicted as being like this thanks to her natural disposition: in her “Confidencias” she describes how she wills herself to be happy: “No soy yo alegre y regocijada por mera y espontánea energía de mi espíritu. Lo he sido y lo soy también porque me decreto la alegría” (*Genio y figura*, 230). While Valera’s letters suggest that Sofía was very popular, repeated comments reveal her recurring bouts of melancholy.

Furthermore, unlike Sofía, who appears daunted by sea travel, Rafaela makes more than one transatlantic journey by ship between the Old World and New, her installation in Rio de Janeiro and attempts at a career as a performer demonstrating her resilience; through her debates with hothead Pedro Lobo, Rafaela displays her comfort with confrontation and an ability to defend herself against a man described as a “fanático de americanismo” (*Genio y figura*, 100). At one point, after Rafaela refuses to see him, her maid gives her a letter from Lobo: “Ella la recibió y la leyó con hondo disgusto, y si no tuvo miedo, fue porque de nada le tenía” (*ibid.*, 130). Juanita la Larga’s bravery is exhibited by her taking on the town’s most powerful figures, the culmination of which involves her tackling Andrés and pinning him to the ground. Rosita is described as a commanding character: “dominando despóticamente en su casa, mil veces más libre y señora de su voluntad y de sus acciones que una reina no constitucional” (*Las ilusiones*, 249). Other Valeran heroines, Pepita and Luz, are said to be skilled in their horsemanship, with *Doña Luz*’s narrator stating of the protagonist: that she would ride, making “saltos peligrosos en su caballo negro, durante dos o tres horas” (*Doña Luz*, 82). Her emotional strength is displayed through her contemplation of a tortured Christ portrait: “El cuadro era tal que una mujer más delicada, menos briososa que doña Luz, ni le tendría en su cuarto ni le miraría con tanta frecuencia” (*ibid.*).

Thus, where Sofía may have had some impact upon Valera’s heroines is in the author’s appreciation of her more positive qualities—generosity and a caring nature are frequently displayed by his female characters—and in the author’s reflections,

even unconscious, about his sister's defects, which he does not transmit to his fictional heroines.

### **Valera's Female Protagonists versus their Male Counterparts**

While Valera's heroines tend to be symbols of strength and resilience, his male protagonists are frequently portrayed as the opposite. This has already been demonstrated in relation to Faustino and Braulio and even Don Valentín; but Valera also depicts "debilidad" in his main protagonist, Don Paco, of *Juanita la Larga*, a far more developed character than the peripheral Don Valentín. Virtually all of *Juanita's* second chapter is devoted to background information on Villalegre's "secretario del ayuntamiento" and Don Andrés's right-hand man, whose far-reaching achievements belie his modest job title.

In addition to being highly accomplished, at fifty-three Paco is also described as very attractive. Thus he has every reason to be confident and assert himself, yet according to the narrator the man is described as "dulce, pacífico y algo débil de carácter" (*Juanita la Larga*, 130).

The plot complication occurs when Paco is attracted to Juanita, a young village girl, and yet is not free to pursue his interest, the principal obstacle being his daughter, Doña Inés, and "la casi seguridad del furioso enojo ... cuando llegase a saber que él tenía un compromiso serio con Juanita" (ibid., 138). According to the narrator, Inés has a terrible temper, such that "inspiraba a su padre terror pánico y siempre trataba de huir de su enojo como de una espada desnuda" (138). References to this inverted hierarchy, where child bullies parent, are frequent, as Inés is depicted without inhibitions, without even the slightest deference natural to a child addressing a parent. Paco reflects on the "yugo antinatural que le había impuesto su hija" (289), and yet he struggles to do anything about it.

Valera derives a good deal of humour from Paco's powerlessness within the pair's relationship, which mirrors the author's own powerlessness within his marriage to Dolores. Even Inés's disdain toward her father—"Era tal la distinción aristocrática de

doña Inés que, sin poder remediarlo, hasta en su padre encontraba cierta vulgar ordinariéz que la afligía no poco” (108)—resembles the disdain Dolores appeared to feel for Valera. We remember the author’s claim about his wife finding him “poco elegante” (C 3, 174); reportedly, she even accused him of being *cursi* (C 4, 483), an insult we can be certain he did not take too seriously.

Certain aspects of Inés’s character are also reminiscent of Dolores’s. There is the suggestion that Inés is harshly critical and uncharitable in her outlook on others: “A los que comían bien, doña Inés los censuraba por su glotonería y despilfarro, y a los que comían poco y mal, los calificaba de miserables, de hambrones y de pereciendos”<sup>64</sup> (*Juanita*, 155). Comments abound in Valera’s correspondence as to Dolores’s harsh criticisms of others. Compare his comment cited in chapter 1 about her being “[la] más dura censora de mis faltas y debilidades” (C 4, 273). She is also described as relentlessly critical of Madrid and Spanish people, as we highlighted in chapter 1 in relation to the discussion of Etelvina.

Like many of Valera’s heroines, Inés is purported to be religious, and yet her behaviour is not very moral. There are insinuations that she is having an extra-marital affair with Don Andrés<sup>65</sup> and she behaves in a manner cruel and unbecoming of a Christian, humiliating Juanita before all the villagers. Later, when she takes the girl under her wing, she tries to coerce Juanita into becoming a nun, claiming that her virtue is under threat, when earlier suggestions that she harbours jealousy toward Juanita—“se sintió en el fondo del alma muy inferior a Juanita en hermosura” (193)—indicate that Inés is at least as interested in eliminating any competition. Although Valera’s wife lacked religion in any sense, she was perceived by the author to be, like Inés, self-righteous and controlling. Following the death of his son Carlos in 1885, the author wrote to his sister about Dolores’s resistance to his other son, Luis, coming to stay with him in Washington: “Si mi mujer fuera generosa y no se complaciera en jorobarme, se quedaría con Carmen y me enviaría a Luis por acá; pero ella dice que yo

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<sup>64</sup> “Sujetos que aparentan grandes caudales, siendo pobres” (155n).

<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, Inés and her husband Don Álvaro have a relatively conflict-free marriage, which seems strange when one considers how tyrannical and “devout” she is and how base he is described as being. On the other hand, Inés’s willingness to put up with her husband is explained by her fixation with her status and luxury, a lifestyle she owes entirely to her husband, the “más ilustre caballero del pueblo” (*Juanita la Larga*, 102).



no cuidaría a mi hijo, y además que no soy moral. Es capaz de suponer que yo le pervertiría” (C 4, 330). Perhaps the greatest similarity between Inés and Dolores is in their disrespectful attitude toward their father and husband respectively, born of the women’s uncharitable dispositions but also, as Valera would see, of the men’s weakness.

While Paco stands up to Inés in Chapter 18, he ultimately loses the battle, being depicted in Chapter 26 as courting Doña Augustina at his daughter’s behest. If he and Juanita do end up marrying at the novel’s end, the happy outcome is owed entirely to the young girl’s cunning and fortitude. Juanita deftly manoeuvres her indentured servitude with Inés, such that she manages to convince the latter of her worthiness, marrying Paco, and with his daughter’s ultimate blessing. It is a slightly unrealistic end, considering the portrayal of characters and their attitudes up to this point: as Marta González Megía describes, the novel can be broken up into three phases: the first spanning chapters 1 to 15 in which “todo es perfecto, cada uno tiene su sitio y todos están conformes”; the second, “realista”, from 16 to 27, “en que los acontecimientos discurren por el camino de la lógica”; and the third, concluding with chapter 45 and an epilogue, featuring “el tratamiento idealizado de la valentía de don Paco con el bandido y la energía inverosímil de Juanita con don Andrés” (“Introducción” to *Juanita la Larga*, 43). Inés’s change of heart with regard to her father and Juanita’s wish to marry might also be considered “inverosímil”.

Indeed, a number of significant differences obviously exist between Valera’s real-life experience and how it is presented in his fiction. Most notably, the woman representing aspects of Dolores’s character is Don Paco’s daughter, not his wife (Paco is a widower at the start of *Juanita*). This narrative change is not so strange when one considers that the author viewed and spoke about Dolores frequently as if she were a child. According to Bravo-Villasante, Valera did indeed see her that way (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 156). And considering the lack of romance between Valera and his wife, or even friendship on a mature, adult level, it must also be noted that the couple’s age difference, twenty-two years, does represent almost one full generational gap.

Valera's recognition of his age as a major reason in his wife's inability to love him, and the author's growing fixation upon his ageing in general, are other life factors expressed through his protagonist Don Paco. The beginning of Chapter 8 depicts Paco inspecting himself in the mirror and making calculations in response to Juanita's comment in the previous chapter that he is old enough to be her grandfather (initially Juanita does not appear to take the older man's interest in her seriously); however, as the story progresses, Valera has Juanita warm to Paco, and by the novel's end the girl has fallen in love with him. Once again, Valera idyllically portrays the *espiritualista* quality he believed women to possess, and which he indeed experienced first-hand, if not in relation to his wife, then from the young American ladies during his posting in Washington, D.C. And yet Paco is no more confident in his pursuit of Juanita than Valera appeared to be in his later years. It is said of Valera's protagonist early on in the novel, "Fundado en la propia modestia, que le hacía formar un pobre concepto de su persona, hallaba que con sus cincuenta y tres años, treinta y seis más que Juanita, no podía ya enamorar a la muchacha, la cual o desdeñaría su cariño o sólo por interés se movería a corresponderle" (*Juanita la Larga*, 128). Consider Valera from Washington, who, surrounded by young adoring women did not appear, at least initially, to believe his age would, or even should, permit his involvement with them romantically. Early into his posting he refers to his age in a letter to Menéndez Pelayo, remarking on the "unas cuantas señoritas amigas, todo de amistad pura e inocente ... propios de mi edad y estado" (C 4, 109). Nine months later, he alludes to it again, writing to his sister, "me siento muy viejo. Sin embargo, tal es la manía de *flirtation* de las señoritas americanas ... que siempre hay unas cuantas que *flirtean* conmigo, lo cual a mi edad, no pasa de ser una extravagancia absurda, sobre todo en ellas" (C 4, 266).

The impact of Valera's life experiences cannot just be felt in relation to Paco's weakness before a sanctimonious and controlling woman or in his affection for a younger one. Valera sees through the lens of his own experience in writing of his hapless protagonist, Paco, when the man witnesses a kiss between the beloved Juanita and his boss, Andrés, and devastated, flees from Villalegre, disappearing for two days into the countryside. Valera himself had once known such infatuation and despair. During his diplomatic posting in St. Petersburg, he had met and become quickly

entranced by French actress and singer, Madeleine Brohan, as we discussed in chapter 1. As our author tells his boss and friend, Leopoldo Cueto, following her abrupt termination of their affair,

[i]maginé que había estado cinco o seis días en el Cielo, que había probado todas sus glorias y que en lo mejor de ellas había venido San Pedro y de puntapié me había plantado en la calle. Me entraron ganas de matarme, pero no me maté, como ya usted supondrá al leer esta larguísima carta. (C 1, 483)

While Paco's relationship with Juanita has not reached the stage of romance at the time of his cruel discovery, he is equally distraught by the sudden and brutal way his illusions have been shattered: "No quería conceder en su espíritu que Juanita fuese una pirujilla, y, no obstante, tenía que dar crédito a sus ojos" (*Juanita la Larga*, 285).

Valera's first indication that Brohan was pulling away came when she refused to see him one night: "no me quiso recibir porque el Duque, Baudin y otros estaban allí y sospechaban ya nuestros amores" (C 1, 481). As he recounts to Cueto, like an addict withdrawing from a drug, "lloré de rabia, y me di de calamochadas y me burlé de mí mismo, y me enfurecí y me enternecí, y tuve un dolor de estómago espantoso, y los nervios, y en toda la noche no dormí una hora" (*ibid.*). Following the betrayal, Paco is also described as similarly tormented:

Iba pasando y volviendo a pasar por su cerebro como tropel de diablos que giran en danza frenética, no consentía que lograra un instante de reposo. En vez de dormir se revolcaba en la cama, y sus nervios excitados le hacían dar brincos ... Como no podía sufrirse, pensó con insistencia en matarse. (*Juanita*, 287)

Once Brohan's decision to break off relations with Valera appears irreversible, Valera's passions, like those of his protagonist, also lead him to consider suicide:

He comprado aquí un puñal de allá, de Georgia o de Persia, grande, ancho, adamasquinado y truculento ... Tiene este puñal una canal profunda en el centro de la hoja, sin duda para que la sangre corra por allí ... Esto y más observé yo

antenoche en mi puñal ... porque no cesaba de sacarle de la vaina y pensar en la muerte teatral y aparatosa que pudiera darme con él.... (C 1, 484)

The description of Paco musing about the best way to end his life, if a little more humorous, is no less dramatic: “Una vez se le ocurrió encaramarse en la cima de un escarpado peñasco, precipitarse desde allí de cabeza y hacerse una tortilla” (294).

Valera of course did not kill himself and it is in his explanation of the rationale that prevented him from taking his life that we see further correspondences between Valera’s account of his own situation and that of Paco. He writes to Cueto:

Acaso fue flaqueza de corazón, o la razón fría, algo risueña y burlona, que no me abandona nunca, ni en los momentos de más pasión, y que mezcla siempre lo cómico a lo trágico ... Por último, en vez de pensar que era una gentileza vine a tener por cierto que era una tontería el matarse por tan poca cosa, y que, a quererme matar, no habían de faltarme mejores ocasiones en lo futuro ... Si uno tuviera que matarse cada vez que el suicidio viene a propósito ... sería menester tener seis o siete vidas al año, para ir las sacrificando cuando conviene. (C 1, 485)

With the same humour and objectivity that Valera applies to his own situation, his protagonist, Paco, reflects upon his own: “Si no quedaba muerto al punto y sólo se rompía un brazo, una pierna o las dos, ¿no le dolería mucho, y quedándose vivo añadiría los dolores físicos a los dolores morales de que había querido libertarse?” (*Juanita*, 294)

Indeed, Paco is said to see the side “más cómico que trágico” of his situation (*ibid.*, 286)—and he is also gifted with the same humorous clarity, the same “razón fría” which Valera claimed never abandoned him. Reflecting upon the ridicule he is likely to endure if he shows his face again in Villalegre, with remarkable perspicacity given his purported emotional state, Paco concludes, “Era ... muy duro matarse sin gana, y sólo para que la gente tome a uno en serio, le compadezca y no le embrome” (*Juanita*, 293).

In the end, the perfect outcome presents itself: Paco witnesses and intervenes in a robbery, the novelty of which distracts the inhabitants of Villalegre from focusing upon his return to town, and indeed, the cause of his flight in the first place.

Not all of Valera's male characters who take after their creator represent the weaker aspects of his character. Biographers and scholars have pointed to others such as the Count of Alhedín (*Pasarse de listo*), Don Juan Fresco (*Las ilusiones* and *Doña Luz*), and Don Fadrique (*El comendador Mendoza*) in identifying a more attractive, or at least, more confident facet of the author's nature. Bravo-Villasante suggests that while Braulio may represent a less attractive aspect of the author, the Count of Alhedín represents the positive side. She states:

Valera no siente simpatía por esas imágenes tristes y vacilantes de sí mismo que se le ofrecen en alguna ocasión y las castiga con crueldad. En cambio, el aspecto brillante, seductor, atractivo del conde de Alhedín, que es el otro Valera, tiene toda su aprobación. Se complace en describir al hombre mundano, divertido en la conversación, al hombre que hablando encanta y deslumbra. (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 201)

In the case of Don Juan Fresco, Valera himself made the link between this fictional persona and his own character. Writing to Juan Moreno Güeto from 1897, he remarks:

Es probable que, dentro de pocos días, *La Epoca* publique en folletín *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino*, que tanto enojaron al Don Juan Fresco de ahí, de quien yo sólo tomé el apodo, creando un personaje hartamente diferente, personaje que me ha servido luego para encarnar en él toda la parte fresca o toda la faz desenfadada y alegre de mi propio carácter. (C 6, 264)

In much the same way, as Bravo-Villasante indicates, that Valera represented himself in the two vastly different characters of *Pasarse de listo*'s Braulio and the Count of Alhedín, so he did something similar in his characters Valentín and Fadrique of *El comendador Mendoza*. The author depicts the former as having been destroyed by his wife, an outcome which Valera avoided only by grace of diplomatic assignments and

his wife's disdain for Madrid and love of summering abroad, which gave the couple ample opportunity for frequent and lengthy periods apart. Nonetheless, in the following statement about Valentín, Valera is clearly reflecting upon his own experience of the debilitating effect having a wife like Dolores or Blanca can produce: "Tenía don Valentín cerca de sesenta años de edad, pero parecía mucho más viejo, porque no hay cosa que envejezca y arruine más el brío y la fortaleza de los hombres que esta servidumbre voluntaria y espantosa, a que por raro misterio de la voluntad se someten muchos, cediendo a la persistencia endemoniada de sus mujeres" (*El comendador Mendoza*, 390). Fadrique, on the other hand, represents a more assertive Valera, able to exert his will over the imperious Blanca. But there are other similarities also between author and creator. As Trimble remarks, "Don Fadrique refleja el optimismo y el escepticismo de don Juan Valera. Como niño no pudo aceptar muchas cosas seriamente, y cuando mayor, podía ver lo ridículo y lo cómico en todo" (*Valera en sus obras*, 83). For DeCoster, Fadrique's "belief in the perfectability of man, in liberty and in justice" (*Juan Valera*, 113) emanates from the author's similar philosophical stance.

Interestingly, it also appears to be the case that Valera's protagonists representing the weaker aspects of his nature are the primary subjects for his psychological analysis. Faustino, Braulio and Paco are such figures in the novels in which they feature. Among Valera's more self-assured male characters, only Fadrique is a principal character, and yet he is not the principal focus of psychological study—instead it is Blanca.

*Morsamor*, Valera's eighth novel, is also a case in point. In it, Valera tells the story of Friar Miguel de Zuheros (or Morsamor), as discussed in chapter 1, and his attempts to relive his youth following his consumption of a rejuvenating potion intended to offer him a second chance at achieving the fame and fortune which eluded him in his early life. Unsatisfied ambition is the subject of this novel, and with it, the egoism which fuels such ambition. As with Valera's earlier works addressing the author's own challenges through those of a troubled male protagonist, in the case of *Morsamor*, Valera again centres his psychological analysis upon a male character. Morsamor's most shared traits with his creator are his pride, which converts to arrogance when he

is feeling low (*Morsamor*, 49; see the letter Valera wrote to Sofia [C 1, 257] cited earlier in this chapter), and his ardent patriotism, but perhaps most of all, his tendency to brood and allow melancholic thoughts to assail him regularly. Morsamor is frequently unhappy (perhaps even more so than Valera), a point upon which his page, Tiburcio, remarks following the death of Morsamor's wife, Urbasi. Tiburcio tries to make him see how lucky he is to at least have his wealth, which frees him from the enslaved existence of others, who toil to sustain themselves without the opportunity to pursue their ambitions. But Morsamor complains that "me considero tan infeliz que preferiría volver a ser un pobre fraile, despreciado, viejo y enfermizo, o ser un ruin y hambriento pordiosero" (203). Tiburcio does not let him away with such self-indulgent sulking, but goes on to remind him of his previous life: "¿Has olvidado acaso ... cuánto te atormentabas en el claustro? No me parecías allí virtuoso penitente, ministro del Altísimo, sino energúmeno o criatura poseída de un enjambre de demonios" (ibid.). As the narrator goes on to conclude of the men's exchange: "Así cuidaba Tiburcio de consolar a Morsamor, no probando que era dichoso, sino tratando de probar que otros habían sido más desdichados" (ibid.).

Indeed, Tiburcio intervenes at other points during the narrative, representing the voice of reason, and sometimes displays an amusing ironic logic such as that which the narrator, in summary, refers to above. In this regard, Tiburcio possesses a similar sense of humour to that of his creator. We may remember the sudden clarity with which Valera responded to his own anguished reflections in his letter to Cueto about his break-up with Madeleine Brohan. He suggests that he may as well preserve his life now, for if he really wants to kill himself, the future is sure to present far better reasons for doing so (C 1, 485).

Once again, in *Morsamor*, Valera will split his personality, giving it two bodily forms: Morsamor, who is prone to self-indulgent sulking, and the witty, wise and level-headed Tiburcio who focuses on enjoying life and takes nothing seriously enough to be upset by it. As Father Ambrosio explains to the man regarding his intention to send Tiburcio along with him on his adventures: "yo he observado que tú eres sobrado serio y esta seriedad continua a la larga a ti mismo te aburriría. Importa, pues, que la temple y modere un sujeto algo cómico y jocoso, como lo será el mencionado hermano" (60).

This pattern by which Valera holds the flaws of his male characters up for examination is also exemplified in *Pepita Jiménez* whereby the novel's structure—with nearly the first half of it narrated through letters, representing a first-person account of a young seminarian's experience returning to his native village after an adolescence and early adulthood away—places that character, the 22 year-old Luis de Vargas, and not the young Pepita, in the spotlight, and in doing so reveals a proud nature which is misleading the young man in relation to finding a suitable career. He wants to be a priest but what is behind this desire? Following his romantic lapse with Pepita, on responding to her pleas that he not give up his plans, Luis reflects on the mistake he would be making in continuing to pursue that path:

Jamás hubo en mí virtud sólida, sino hojarasca y pedantería colegial, que había leído los libros devotos como quien lee novelas, y con ellos se había forjado su novela necia de misiones y contemplaciones ... A pesar de toda tu hermosura, a pesar de tu talento, a pesar de tu amor hacia mí, no, yo no hubiera caído, si en realidad hubiera sido virtuoso, si hubiera tenido una vocación verdadera. (*Pepita Jiménez*, 159)

Luis and Valera are not exactly alike. The former is described as proud like Valera, and yet he also displays an obstinacy—"Don Luis era pertinaz, era terco; tenía aquella condición que bien dirigida constituye lo que se llama firmeza de carácter, y nada había que le rebajase más a sus propios ojos que el variar de opinión y de conducta" (*Pepita*, 132)—quite at odds with what Valera's actions and personal reflections reveal about himself. And yet although the author never had serious ambitions for the priesthood (he also never spent his childhood in a seminary), the same pride exhibited in Luis which causes him to envisage a future for himself in much grander and poetic terms than the humbler role of husband, father and landowner which ostensibly proves a more suitable choice, is indeed reminiscent of Valera's pride, not to mention "ideas poéticas" in youth.<sup>66</sup> Felicitously, as indicated from the passage cited above, Valera has Luis overcome inappropriate ambitions to choose a more fitting life for himself,

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<sup>66</sup> "Momentos tengo en que soy católico ferviente, y siento arranques de meterme fraile y de irme a predicar el evangelio a la Oceanía o al centro de África" (*C* 1, 485).



one which fills him with happiness, and only the occasional niggle of disappointment—especially when he compares himself with the late Vicar:

En el ánimo de Luis han hecho impresión esta vida y esta muerte ejemplares de un hombre, menester es confesarlo, simple y de cortas luces, pero de una voluntad sana, de una fe profunda y de una caridad fervorosa. Luis se compara con el vicario, y dice que se siente humillado. Esto ha traído cierta amarga melancolía a su corazón; pero Pepita, que sabe mucho, la disipa con sonrisas y cariño. (*Pepita*, 178)

It would seem that, unlike Valera's wife, Pepita proves both capable and willing to see her husband through trying times of personal and professional disappointment. Pepita's support of Luis is again reiterated two pages later, as his father reports once more of his son's adjustment to his new life in the novel's Epilogue, entitled "Cartas de mi hermano". Pedro explains: "Hay ocasiones en que su vida de ahora le parece vulgar, egoísta y prosaica, comparada con la vida de sacrificio, con la existencia espiritual ...; pero Pepita acude solícita a disipar estas melancolías, y entonces comprende y afirma Luis que el hombre puede servir a Dios en todos los estados y condiciones" (180). Not only does Pepita console Luis, but Valera confirms the role she has in setting him straight: "Pepita acude solícita a disipar estas melancolías." Luis feels better, more cheerful and resigned, but he is also enlightened by her influence, which enables him to "comprende y afirma ... que el hombre puede servir a Dios en todos los estados y condiciones". In this way, Pepita represents a model wife to Valera, and indeed, a model female in general, helping the man in her life to see things the way they should be.

While Valera's male characters do not exactly face harsh censure from the author—James Whiston's observation about Valera having a "fair-minded approach to the defects of his characters" in *Pepita* (*Pepita Jiménez*, 29) really applies to his treatment of characters in all his novels—his male characters are never recipients of the same degree of favour or praise. Fadrique and Pedro of *Pepita* (discussed in chapter 1) might represent exceptions; however, in the case of the former, the most developed, exceptional and referred to aspect of the man's character is his cheerful and optimistic

nature. If we consider the tragic dimension which, DeCoster notes, Blanca offers to the work (*Juan Valera*, 114)—he also remarks that in spite of her limited “on-stage” presence the force of her personality is such that she is, “ever present ... the motivating force behind every conversation and action” (*ibid.*, 115)—we can understand not only why Valera wanted to portray Fadrique with such balancing qualities, but why he had to, and why the author had little choice but to narrate the novel from the perspective of a character with such an uplifting disposition.

In certain ways, *El comendador Mendoza* and *Pasarse de listo* are not so different, featuring irremediably miserable characters who must die so that others can move on with their lives. In *El comendador*, however, such bleakness is dissipated by Valera’s complete shift of focus, following Blanca’s death, to Fadrique and Lucía’s courtship and the union of the novel’s two most pleasant characters; by the end, Blanca is all but forgotten. In *Pasarse de listo*, by contrast, the distance between Braulio’s death and the novel’s end is short, diminished even further by the continued assessment of the man’s vices (in accordance with the view of his sister-in-law, Inés), the very topic of which ends the novel.

Even Valera’s heroines depicted as having questionable conduct and motivations are treated respectfully. Rosita is wrathful, but Valera clearly admires her strength of character; Blanca is cruel but she is likened to a noble animal; Pepita is described as having ordered others “despóticamente” (*Pepita*, 150), but Valera makes clear that this is a consequence of the oppression she has endured—from the onerous obligation of having to “obedecer a ciegas a su madre y a su primer marido” (*ibid.*). Costanza is a coquette and is dishonest to her husband and yet she is described as having been a model wife for seventeen years to the much older Marquis de Guadalbarbo. Rafaela commits suicide like Faustino and Braulio before her, but Valera allows her to do it in a manner a hundred times more dignified than her male counterparts, by showing her to be methodical, calm and composed during her process of reasoning as it is documented in her sixty-page journal, *Confidencias*. The difference in the way these endings pan out leaves the reader feeling as if Rafaela’s decision required strength, in contrast to Faustino and Braulio’s dramatic and impetuously arrived at acts of suicide. Rafaela ponders for a lengthy period about the next course she should take: “Aquella

extraña mujer había premeditado el suicidio desde mucho tiempo antes. Todo lo había dejado bien dispuesto, sin olvidar pormenores” (*Genio y figura*, 261), while Faustino, on the other hand, in a momentary decision shoots himself in front of his daughter and uncle-in-law. Braulio, in despair, believing his wife is having an affair, makes no attempt to confirm the truth or address offending parties, but instead runs off to Segovia to throw himself head-first off the viaduct.

Valera rarely elevates his male characters in the manner he does his heroines. While Valera’s depictions of his male characters often focus upon their flaws (Faustino, Braulio, Paco, Morsamor and Luis are prime examples), the potential shortcomings of his heroines often become evident in spite of his focus upon their positive attributes. What is more, Valera tends to focus upon the minutiae of what makes them so special, not showing the same inclination in relation to his male characters. Juanita is a prime example of this. And it is the degree to which she is extolled as well as the range of his praises which affirm Valera’s affection for his heroine.

Noting her appearance in the church wearing the silk dress she has made, in Chapter 16 of the novel the narrator describes her walk as “marcial y decidido su paso, pero al mismo tiempo majestuoso y modesto” (192). As González Megía remarks, “Valera es el más fiel admirador de su personaje, e insiste en ciertos detalles accesorios” (192n). According to González, this description is peculiar, however, with Valera’s word choice, “algo más vaga e inexacta que la del capítulo X: ‘marcial’ y ‘decidido’ con sinónimos parciales, pero ‘majestuoso’ y ‘modesto’ casi se oponen” (ibid.). In fact a similar discrepancy appears before. In Chapter 10 the image is simple: “un andar sereno, a grandes pasos, noble y llena de gracia” (150), but that of Chapter 4, contrasts sharply: “Cuando andaba tenía un aire marcial a par que gracioso”—decided but playful, ‘a par que’ suggesting a contradiction of sorts even within this single description. And yet “marcial” and “gracioso” also stand at some distance from the description in Chapter 10, of “noble” and “serena”, particularly when Valera’s description of her other physical activities continues with, “corría como un gamo; tiraba pedradas con tanto tino que mataba los gorriones, y de un brinco se plantaba sobre el lomo del mulo más resabiado o del potro más cerril” (117), suggesting a tomboyish nature and impressive athleticism, and matching her prevailing mood, “de

ordinario alegre y burlón” (275). It would seem that Valera, in his refusal to deny his heroine a single charming or admirable quality, insists on endowing her with all of them.

In conclusion, Valera in his critical essays once suggested that among the women in his life who had influence upon a man, his sister is an important figure. Indeed Sofia, in particular, appears to have been a significant person in Valera’s life. Not only did she fill the void engendered by Dolores’s contempt, supporting her brother emotionally and at times financially, in contraposition to his wife, who quite the contrary of offering him love and backing, appeared to jeopardise him financially, professionally, and undermine him personally, according to his own claims; but Sofia also offered Valera a positive female model, and even a standard against which he could judge Dolores’s less admirable values and unexemplary conduct. Sofia’s positive behaviour is likely to have exacerbated Valera’s disappointment with his wife, his sister representing an ideal in terms of her kindness, generosity and good will which Valera constantly lamented was absent from Dolores.

And yet Valera’s assessment of Sofia was not entirely positive: his correspondence testifies to what he saw as her shortcomings (as well as his own). While he regarded Sofia as a caring, devoted and generous family member (as opposed to Dolores whom he claims was selfish, petty and uncharitable), he was disappointed by her lack of emotional strength, resolve and fortitude, which in many cases led to her being poorly treated by others. In this respect, Valera’s disappointment with his sister and her experiences appears to have influenced the depiction of his fictional heroines. Strong women who stand up for themselves are represented by the eponymous heroines of *Doña Luz* and *Juanita la Larga* to the point where the women’s determination to gain self-respect (or in Luz’s case, to regain it) dictates the very plotline of the novels in question. As well as these two cases, virtually all of Valera’s heroines display the strength of character, fearlessness and emotional resilience, which his sister lacked, and which earns them respect and enables them to overcome challenges and unhappy circumstances. These heroines demonstrate that when the author turned his pen to writing novels, he indeed spent a good deal of his energies improving upon the

hardship and disappointment he experienced, not only at first-hand, but also indirectly through the troubles and suffering of a sister who was the primary love of his life.

## Chapter 4

### “Altruistic Faith” and Valera’s Extraordinary Heroines

Dolores and Sofía were not the only women who influenced the material of Valera’s novels. This chapter will look at the role and significance of other inspirational figures such as friend and would-be lover Lucía Palladi, as well as another woman by the name of Rose Cleveland, who had an indirect impact upon Valera’s later-period fiction with her article “Altruistic Faith”, which expressed an ideal we know Valera admired. While our examination of “Altruistic Faith” will have no obvious relationship to our study of Valera’s correspondence, his interest in Cleveland’s article—reflected in comments he made in his critical work and fiction—will offer us, as his correspondence does, further insight into the author’s values and beliefs, which were pivotal to shaping the material of his novels. As previous chapters, chapter 2 in particular, have explored some of Valera’s heroines of more ordinary moral stature, this chapter will also complement our study of his fictional women through the examination and assessment of his more extraordinary heroines, as well as through the discussion of potential biographical sources for them.

#### Lucía Palladi

A woman in Valera’s life whom both his biographers and correspondence identify as having been of major significance is Lucía Palladi or “la Muerta”, as she was nicknamed by the Duke of Rivas because of her pale, sickly complexion. As numerous Valera biographers and scholars have noted, this woman had a profound influence on Valera, perhaps the greatest of any female non-family member he had known.

Explaining Valera’s attraction to the cultivated woman of Romanian descent, whom he met and fell in love with in Naples during his first diplomatic posting (1847-1849), Manuel Lombardero states:

Valera quedó, en efecto, cautivado por la personalidad y los amplios conocimientos de Lucía, con la que no sólo era posible sino que resultaba interesante hablar de literatura, de historia, de filosofía y, sobre todo, de la cultura clásica de la que, tal vez por su ascendencia moldava donde el alfabeto cirílico no resulta extraño, era entendida y entusiasta. (*Otro don Juan*, 41)

Although, much to Valera's frustration, their relationship was devoid of physical intimacy, she, at ten years his senior, appeared to be a sort of a mentor to whom he looked for guidance and encouragement. Her significance in this regard is evident from numerous references to her and their relationship in his correspondence, including the following one, in which Valera highlights the extent of "la Muerta's" influence upon him during their time in Naples. In April of 1850, he wrote to his father,

Dice usted cuando estoy enamorado no me ocupo de nada, pero no tiene usted razón. En Nápoles no he escrito por otros mil motivos que ahora conozco lo vanos que eran, pero lo poco o mucho que allí he trabajado ha sido por el amor. He compuesto algunos versos a la señora y he estudiado griego por ella, y esto tengo que agradecerle. Además, esta dama me da, sobre poco más o menos, los mismos consejos que usted, y cuando escribe, parece una doctora *in utroque*. (*C* 1, 82)

Not surprisingly, given the significance of this relationship, we see a comparable relationship in his fiction. In *Genio y figura* a similar dynamic is mirrored in Rafaela's relationship with the Paraguayan, Pepito Dominguez, whom she meets on the boat journey back to Europe. Similarly to the way Valera regarded Palladi, Rafaela explains in her *Confidencias* that Pepito viewed her as "Algo como encyclopedia viva" (*Genio y figura*, 202) and as inspiration for the challenges before him.

Also noteworthy is the fact that she is older than him, which is remarkable because relationships of a romantic nature in Valera's novels are usually characterised by the male character being older, often substantially. In this regard, Valera's novels appear

to have represented his ideal as it existed at his more advanced stage of life,<sup>67</sup> when he was self-conscious about his age and was discovering nonetheless that, much to his surprise, younger women were still capable of finding him attractive.

While Rafaela's lessons include a far racier component than those of Palladi, and her influence is obviously exaggerated, these differences can, as in other cases of Valera taking inspiration from real life, be taken as him re-drawing life as he wished it had been.

### **“Altruistic Faith”: An Essay and Concept**

In addition to the influence that Valera's relationship with Lucía Palladi may have had on Rafaela's depiction, the influence of another woman, named Rose Cleveland, is also evident. In Chapter 7 of *Genio y figura*, the narrator credits Rafaela's “fe *altruista*” with the civilising transformation she is able to effect in Joaquín, stating,

A su rara discreción y al entrañable afecto que había inspirado debió Rafaela los mencionados triunfos; pero los debió también a sus lisonjas, llenas de sinceridad y fundadas en fe *altruista*.

Seramente no es lícito afirmar que Rafaela se enamorase de don Joaquín; pero sí puede, y debe afirmarse, que le cobró grande amistad y le estimó en mucho... dándole encarecidas alabanzas, le adulaba, le enamoraba y le animaba a la vez.... (*Genio y figura*, 80-81)

During his time in the U.S. capital, Valera had become familiar with an essay entitled “Altruistic Faith”, authored by Rose Cleveland, sister of the then U.S. president of the United States, Grover Cleveland, and “encontró noble su concepción de la mujer

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<sup>67</sup> Valera was fifty when his first work, *Pepita Jiménez*, was completed. In his youth, he appeared mainly drawn to older women: the Cuban poet Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, ten years his senior, whom he met at age 17; the Marquise of Villagarcía, six years older, whom he met at 25; and of course Lucía Palladi, also ten years older than him.



como la inspiración del hombre”.<sup>68</sup> Valera commends Cleveland’s essay in his critical works, “Nueva Religión” of *Nuevas cartas americanas* (1888),<sup>69</sup> “El Gusano de Luz” (1889, which reviews a novel of the same name), “Las mujeres y las academias, cuestión social inocente” (1901) and “La importancia de la mujer” of *Meditaciones sobre la educación humana* (1902).<sup>70</sup> Significantly, however, he distorts the meaning of what Cleveland writes in order to support his own more traditionalist agenda. In “Las mujeres y las academias”, for instance, Valera praises Cleveland’s study, stating, “Me ha causado muy honda impresión ... Convence y entusiasmo con la elocuente descripción que en el hace de un maravilloso destino de la mujer, sin independencia y como auxiliar del hombre. En el hombre pone ella la *fe altruista*, creadora de prodigios, y adivina la aptitud del hombre, señala su misión, presiente su gloria y le da bríos, alientos y esperanzas para conseguirla” (*Oc* 2, 868). But Valera’s claim is only half accurate: the part of it referring to Cleveland’s concept of “divination”, or an individual’s ability to direct another based on his or her inherent understanding of that person’s nature and aptitude (what Cleveland refers to as the “intellectual dimension” of “Altruistic Faith”, 52), is at the heart of her concept. What she does not make any reference to, however, is Valera’s idea of a “maravilloso destino de la mujer, sin independencia y como auxiliar del hombre.”

As an introduction to her concept of “altruistic faith”, Cleveland begins her piece with the story of Cadijah, the older wife of Mahomet, whom we know little about—her name evoking only images of her husband, the great prophet. Cleveland explains how Mahomet was singularly devoted to his first wife until the time of her death, whereupon he married a younger woman, Ayesha, who was beautiful but arrogant and at one point incited him to declare her the better wife because of her youth. He responded to this “with an effusion of honest gratitude, ‘No, by Allah! there can never be a better. She believed in me when men despised me’” (“Altruistic Faith” in *George*

<sup>68</sup> (DeCoster, *Genio y figura*, 38n, 80). DeCoster notes that this theme would also appear in one of Valera’s short stories, “El cautivo de doña Mencía”, written the same year (1897) as *Genio y figura*. María Duarte Berrocal, also makes note of this fact, referring additionally to his story “La buena fama” (1894) in her article (“Valera y la mujer finisecular”, 138). However, both scholars’ attempts to link “Altruistic Faith” with Valera’s fictional works end here; and neither appears to have read Cleveland’s essay. They merely refer to it in the terms that Valera did.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Duarte Berrocal, “Valera y la mujer finisecular”, 137.

<sup>70</sup> He also refers to Cleveland among several other American writers, men and women, in his letter of literary criticism to Emilia Pardo Bazán, entitled “Con motivo de las novelas rusas”, when he argues that while American literature may not be entirely “nueva”: “vale por ahora más que la rusa; es más rica en calidad y en cantidad” (*Oc* 2, 718).

*Eliot's Poetry*, 46). Cleveland goes on to write, "From Mahomet's own lips.... Cadijah offers to us a splendid and immortal example of the *effectual, fervent faith of one soul in another*" (ibid.). She then observes,

We repeat our creed, "I believe in God, the Father," but we do not always realise that this creed includes, "I believe in myself," and "I believe in other people." Yet ... a true belief in God is threesided, and the glory of the God-side was never meant to obscure the brightness of the other two sides, but rather to render them conspicuous....

... Our lives are not laid out in vast, vague prairies, but in definite domestic door-yards, within which we are to exercise and develop our faculties. Altruistic faith in the abstract is most valuable, but it is, at best, but a passive rather than an active possession. We cannot touch humanity at large except as we touch humanity in the individual. (48)

Crucially, Cleveland goes on to indicate that the practice of "concrete altruistic faith", as she calls it, is not a preserve of the female sex; although she admits that society generally regards this to be the case: "I myself confess to a lurking suspicion that it is oftener a woman than a man who is a Cadijah ... Men, as a rule, are very much occupied in believing in themselves. Woman is confessedly altruistic, but not exclusively so. Carlyle had his Cadijah in his wife; George Eliot had hers in her husband" (49).

And this is clearly where Valera misrepresents, for the convenience of his own argument, Cleveland's ideal—an ideal based on the concept that one individual, irrespective of his or her sex, can and should put their faith, and power of "divination" in another, man or woman. She also explains that to practise "altruistic faith" one need not be married to their subject—"this faith, though not inconsistent with the estate of holy matrimony, is yet not dependent upon that estate" (ibid.)—and that neither is a love for the person required:

To-day I met a woman who has discovered an aptitude for exquisite dress-making in a drudging shop-girl. The shop-girl has been simply a "hand," and this clever

and good woman proposes to put this discovery of hers behind a brown-stone front, and fling out for her her true name in the magic *Mlle.* and *Modes*, which transform a sempstress into an artist. This woman does precisely the thing for the shop-girl which Cadijah did for Mahomet: she believes in her when other people do not. (59)

If further proof be needed of Cleveland's disinclination to charge women with the responsibility Valera argued she had, Cleveland herself did not abide by Valera's principle of a "maravilloso destino de la mujer, sin independencia y como auxiliar del hombre" (Valera, "Las mujeres y las academias," *Oc* 2, 868). When Valera as Minister in Washington was acquainted with her, Cleveland was a spinster, to use a term of the day, serving as first lady to her brother, who was a bachelor until half-way through his first term in the White House; however, once he married, she resigned her post and within three years, in 1889, began a long-term lesbian relationship with an Evangeline Simpson. The relationship was interrupted in 1892 when Simpson became engaged and married to an Episcopal Bishop, but resumed in 1902, a year after his death. From that point, the two women went to Italy, settled there in 1910, and lived out the rest of their lives, until Cleveland died in 1918 and Simpson in 1930. Today they are buried side-by-side.<sup>71</sup>

There is no indication from Valera's correspondence that he might have known the life Rose Cleveland would go on to lead, but it does seem deeply ironic that he used the essay of a woman who was most certainly a feminist—she was well-known during Valera's time in Washington to be a "bluestocking", "a serious, academic woman with little patience for those women who focused only on clothing and entertaining" (*ibid.*)—to argue, as he did, against feminism. Nonetheless it is entirely understandable why Cleveland's work touched him so profoundly. At the very heart of Cleveland's ideal is the need for all individuals to receive support and kindness from others, but also to experience "recognition", which is what Valera appeared to crave from others, but did not always receive, whether from the Spanish public, to the extent that he wished, or from his wife. As Cleveland concludes her piece:

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=23>

I deem it true that deeper than the craving for health, or wealth, or love, is the craving for recognition, the deep desire to be known for what we truly are; to hear from some human lips our rightful name—poet, preacher, painter, clerk, dressmaker—whatever, by testimony of the conscious power within us, we feel ourselves most fit for; to *hear* this name, that at last we may answer to it, and find and keep our undisputed place. (“Altruistic Faith”, 59-60)

The general idea behind “Altruistic Faith” must not have been new to Valera. Costanza’s thoughts about Faustino recognise the power she has as a woman to develop greatness in a man: “Amado por ella, animado, estimulado por ella, Faustino hubiera realizado todos sus sueños de gloria. Sus ilusiones hubieran sido realidades ... Se representaba a sí misma como la musa, el impulso, la inspiración, el resorte enérgico y fecundo en milagros y creaciones, de un hombre que tal vez hubiera llenado de gloria a su patria” (*Las ilusiones*, 382); however, Costanza only muses on what might have been. She determines, from that point on, to raise Faustino from the prostration his low self-confidence has resulted in; but she is not capable of giving all that is required (and neither is Faustino capable of receiving it). It is not until Valera’s later novels that Valera will bestow his heroines with the true generosity of spirit required to fulfill both elements of Cleveland’s concept: “divination”, which directs an individual onto their rightful path; but no less important, that crucial part which lies merely in the will (“Altruistic Faith”, 52): faith, a willingness to believe in another and express that belief in them when neither they nor others prove capable of doing the same.

Although Pepita Jiménez, of Valera’s first novel, directs Luis away from a false calling, that their destinies match is merely fortuitous; he does not discover his rightful role as husband, father and landowner as a result of Pepita’s altruistic intentions, but because she wants him as her husband. In *Las ilusiones*, Doña Ana, a loving mother and full of faith in her son, lacks the “divining” capacity vital for directing Faustino’s energies toward a worthwhile outcome. This emanates from her own snobbery, which leads her to dismissing compromises Faustino may need to make in respect of his future, given their poor financial situation. What is worse, her snobbery leads to her son’s own attitude of superiority, creating tragic consequences for them both. (After

all, would Faustino have been so casual in his dealings with Rosita if he had regarded her as an equal?) In *El comendador Blanca*'s capability of divining the right path in life for her daughter is hindered by her priority of expiating her own sins. In *Pasarse de listo*, Beatriz is so focused on personal goals that although she loves Braulio, she is blind to the depth of his personal challenges, more profound than the lethargy and the lack of ambition which she perceives; they involve a debilitating insecurity over her love for him. In *Doña Luz* the eponymous heroine is so consumed with preserving her own integrity she does not extend her attention very far to others; when she does develop strong bonds with two men, first her friend, Father Enrique, later her husband, Don Jaime, she proves incapable of seeing beyond the surface to discover their real needs and motivations: Father Enrique falls in love with Luz and dies from the strain that his suppressed emotions are causing him; Don Jaime, whom she perceives as an equal because of exterior appearances, his elegance and good breeding, proves little more than a liar and a thief. Valera appears, if unintentionally, to show in his earliest novels that self-absorption, a natural impediment to the practice of "altruistic faith", often brings negative consequences.

And yet sometimes motives with a self-serving basis can have positive outcomes: one of the consistent "flaws" of Valera's self-absorbed heroines is their desire for a subject to love. This desire, and in some cases, search for a subject, can have very positive consequences for both parties involved. Pepita serendipitously encounters Luis when he returns to his native village, where she lives as a widow, in mourning. Her interest in Luis leads to a growing affection between the two, which represents perhaps the only reason the young man desists from following a path unsuited to him. In *Morsamor* Valera demonstrates through Miguel de Zuheros the catastrophe that can result from an ill-conceived religious vocation; Luis is lucky to have escaped a commitment he eventually would have found ill-fitting. In *Las ilusiones* Faustino and María's union, at the end of the novel, leads to the male protagonist's heretofore lifelong problem of relative poverty being resolved, allowing Faustino to pursue all the professional glory about which he had dreamed. Were Faustino a better man, María's devotion to her husband and the financial security she offered, would have been his making. In *Doña Luz*, the eponymous heroine's desire to love has negative consequences but only because she fails to identify a worthy subject.

## Woman as Civilising Influence

One point on which there is little question is Valera's lifelong belief in the woman as a civilising influence upon man. Following his return from Naples in 1849, and once more established in Madrid, he complained in a letter of 1850 (at the age of 26) to his father about the lack of suitable company, stating, "no crea usted que los señoritos principales de esta corte son prototipos de finura, etc., porque no es así, ni puede ser ni será mientras las mujeres estén tan mal educadas y sean tan ignorantes y vulgares en nuestro país" (C 1, 88), indicating his belief that women have the primordial role in society.

In light of such beliefs, as well as Valera's aesthetic ideas, it should come as no surprise that Valera's novels abound in female characters who are quite the opposite of "mal educadas", "ignorantes" and "vulgares", even when their male counterparts sometimes are. After all, if Valera viewed the novel's role as to uplift and inspire, and if he essentially viewed women's role in civilised society as to uplift and inspire, it makes sense that much of his fiction would feature women in primary roles with the qualities necessary for this—at least with those qualities he personally valued most.

Along these lines, several of his works portray women working actively as civilising influences, embracing the role that Valera felt was so necessary for the good of society. In his fifth novel, *Doña Luz*, the eponymous heroine is said to inspire both men and women of her town:

Aunque no se bajaba al nivel de nadie, por una dulce, franca y generosa simpatía, procuraba elevar a las gentes a su nivel. Así había logrado infundir respeto y no odio: y las señoras y señoritas del lugar, en vez de tomarla por blanco de sus sátiras, solían tomarla por modelo, con lo cual los usos, costumbres y trato social, se habían mejorado bastante. Los mozos eran más reverentes con las mujeres, y algunas de éstas imitaban ya a doña Luz, no sin maña, en modales y compostura y hasta en el primor y atildamiento con que ella tenía los muebles y alhajas de su tocador, salita y alcoba. (*Doña Luz*, 57)

The eponymous heroine of *Juanita la Larga* is also described as having a profound influence, but given her lower rank in a status-conscious community it cannot be as pervasive as Luz's and is instead restricted to a single individual—her childhood friend, Antoñuelo. Described as “zafio, mal educado, travieso y atrevido; tenía pocos alcances y una voluntad tan realenga que ni a su padre se sometía” (*Juanita la Larga*, 238), Juanita has a special sway over the boy, exerting a positive influence where no others can: “Juanita había adquirido y conservaba tal imperio sobre aquel muchacho, que lograba que la respetase, la temiese y la obedeciese como un perro a su amo ... la tenía por un ser superior ... ídolo para Antoñuelo ... también su oráculo” (239).

Juanita's good influence is tenuous, however: “no bien Antoñuelo se hallaba ausente de Juanita, el influjo bienhechor desaparecía, y los instintos brutales y las malas pasiones acudían en tropel y desataban o rompían las ligaduras y arrojaban al olvido los buenos consejos y preceptos que Juanita había dado” (ibid.). On hearing the accusations gossiping townspeople are making that Juanita has accepted inappropriate gifts from Don Paco, Antoñuelo's illusions about her perfection shatter, leading him to go off the rails, robbing money from the shopkeeper, Ramón. For Valera, Antoñuelo's vulnerability is linked to the nature of Juanita's influence over him. As the narrator explains, the boy has his friend on a pedestal, fulfilling his need for worship. When she disappoints him (for example, when he discovers she is not perfect or who she says she is), his world crumbles: Juanita's fall in Antoñuelo's imagination is like any less vulgar subject discovering that God does not exist.

Faustino of *Las ilusiones* is depicted in a similar manner to Antoñuelo, although his circumstances differ, given that he comes from an aristocratic lineage and is ambitious (“Quería vivir, pero vivir de una vida grande, noble, poderosa, fecunda; de una vida que dejase en pos de sí un rastro luminoso e indeleble”, *Las ilusiones*, 280). Referring to Faustino's failure thus far to achieve his goals, the narrator explains the protagonist's predicament from the youth's perspective, stating, “Sólo un estímulo poderoso le faltaba. Sólo le faltaba un agente que pusiese en actividad aquellos bríos; un objeto que infundiese en su espíritu la fe, el amor, el entusiasmo suficientes” (280-281).

While Antoñuelo has Juanita, problematically Faustino is without an object: “Costancita había sido una coqueta sin corazón; Rosita, aunque graciosa, discreta y apasionada, no podía adecuarse al ideal soberbio de sus aspiraciones; la *amiga inmortal* permanecía casi invisible” (281). Eventually Faustino will be reunited with María, many years into his obscure existence in Madrid and the two will marry; but Faustino’s unhappiness will remain with him, leading him to have an affair with Costanza, hurting María fatally. The only woman he allegedly ever loved “entrañablemente” (433), she will die of heartbreak. As described in the novel’s “Conclusión”, “extinguida la antorcha que le guiaba” María’s death is shown to bring an end to the faith (although only temporary) she had inspired. Faustino, in seeing the pain and destruction he has caused, and having no spiritual guidance to fall back on, takes the only step he feels is left to him by committing suicide.

Of all of Valera’s heroines, Rafaela of his seventh novel, *Genio y figura*, has by far the most profound and far-reaching influence upon others—although this is so in spite of her status as the most humble in origins of any of Valera’s heroines.

Rafaela’s inspirational, civilising influence does not only extend to Pepito Dominguez, she is shown to exhibit the same energy in relation to various other characters. Having described, in earlier chapters, the “milagros” Rafaela has worked upon her husband, Don Joaquín de Figueredo, the narrator goes on to state in Chapter 10, “Harto notarán los que lean con atención este relato, que el más marcado rasgo de carácter de Rafaela era su propensión a ser didáctica” (*Genio y figura*, 95). The excessively idealised treatment of her which began with full force when the Viscount recounted his first sighting of her in Chapter 4 is continued here with an account of how members of her house staff were improved by association with her, as if by a spell. Her personal maid, for instance, is described as “remilgadísima y empalagosamente afectada” on entering the house to work; however, Rafaela is said to “curarla ... por tal arte, que a los pocos meses de tener a madame Duval a su servicio, se había ésta convertido en persona natural y sencilla, de trato franco y agradable, el cual ya como antes no se quebraba de puro fino” (96). And there are others, too:



De aquí que los criados de su casa, blancos y negros, la respetasen y la amasen, resultando todos más instruidos y hábiles a poco de entrar a servirla. El cocinero guisaba mejor. El cochero mulato ... hubiera podido pasar por el cochero del Príncipe de Gales... El jardinero negro había llegado a saber tanta botánica como Spix y Martius, doctísimos investigadores de la flora brasílica. Entre los mozos de caballeriza descollaba, cual hábil palafrenero, el ínclito y triunfador Trajano, negro *mina* que tenía singularmente a su cuidado los dos hermosos caballos ingleses en que solía pasear la señora. El maestresala, que era asturiano, se había pulido tanto en su oficio, que hubiera podido escribir, en consonancia con los adelantos de la época presente, una *Arte cisoria* más bonita que la de don Enrique de Villena. Y, por último, los otros criados de comedor, aunque eran negros, servían con primor en los banquetes, y todos se habían acostumbrado a llevar zapatos de continuo, y a no ir descalzos de pie y pierna, según la común usanza de entonces. (96-97)

Her most impressive and comprehensive transformation is, of course, that of her husband, Don Joaquín de Figueredo, in whom she infuses a deep sense of self-confidence, thanks to her “lisonjas, llenas de sinceridad” (80) and “encarecidas alabanzas” (81). She is not in love with Joaquín but her caring qualities, and profound generosity, enable her to behave toward him as if she is. This ideal is absent from Valera’s relationship with Dolores, whom he describes as a “censora acerba” (C 5, 230) and unwilling to assist him on the most practical of levels: “ni con sus obras, ni con su dinero, ni con su crédito” (C 3, 594). Indeed, Valera’s wife seemed unable to exhibit “altruistic faith” in relation to her husband. She neither believed in him, nor cared to try, as it would seem from the nature of his complaints. Aside from her lack of support and interest in his literary career, it is also evident from their correspondence, following the death of his mother, that at one point she was insisting upon the sale of the Alamillo, Valera’s family estate in Andalusia. The author is both defensive and emotional in his reflection upon the significance of this land to him. “Hay ... mil razones que se oponen a que lo venda yo, y no le venderé sino forzado,” he writes to Dolores,

Entre estas razones está la de que mi padre crió y cultivó aquella finca, y la educación mía, y mi carrera, y el que Sofía haya llegado a ser Duquesa de Malakoff

y Marquesa de Caicedo Ramona, y yo Senador y Ministro Plenipotenciario y Subsecretario y todo lo poco que he sido, todo se debe al Alamillo y al cuidado de mi pobre padre, que lo entendía algo mejor que mi madre y sabía hacer producir a aquello para que mi madre viviese en Madrid. Claro está que si me obligan, si la necesidad aprieta, venderé al Alamillo como venderé la camisa y hasta el pellejo; mas por mi gusto no lo venderé. (C 2, 506)

According to DeCoster and Sánchez García, during their 38-year marriage Dolores would only ever set foot in Valera's "patria chica" once (*Cartas a su mujer*, 45).

Although Rafaela is the most hands-on in her civilising approach, even forcefully so—"Tenía Rafaela la habilidad de insinuarse en los espíritus, de dominar las voluntades y de hacer eficaces sus amonestaciones educadoras sin ofender el amor propio de los educandos" (96)—all three heroines are demonstrated as playing similar roles: Luz inspiring both male and female members of her town to behave in a more dignified manner; Juanita influencing her childhood friend to act honourably; and Rafaela improving many facets of the male and female members of her international milieu, and, in light of her lofty aims in relation to reforming Joaquín's financial practices, Brazil and the human race in general (82-83). While Rafaela's background suggests she would be a much less plausible candidate for such a lofty commission, Valera demonstrates an on-going dedication to excellence in every aspect of her being—"Rafaela era insaciable en su anhelo de perfección" (78).

Finally, Donna Olimpia of *Morsamor* is also described as having a civilising influence, although unlike the three heroines just mentioned, she plays a significantly smaller role in her novel than the others do in theirs. *Morsamor* is a novel of much action, in which not even the main protagonist himself receives the extent of narrative attention one might expect, following the novel's beginning section, "En el claustro", which introduces the character and his problem of unsatisfied ambition. During the course of his adventures, a great deal of focus is directed at the description of historical events and figures and local colour (Morsamor and his crew visit numerous ports and distant lands on their journey), not to mention philosophical ideas. The

women of *Morsamor*—Doña Sol, Donna Olimpia, Teletusa, Beatriz and Urbasi—are all, to differing extents, but secondary characters.

Nonetheless, Donna Olimpia is relatively significant, since it is in relation to her that Valera presents his protagonist's character problems, as they are fuelled by egoism. Donna Olimpia's merits frustrate Morsamor: "su talento, su belleza y la fuerza misteriosa que había en todo su ser para dominar y cautivar a cuantos la veían y trataban, si bien complacían a Morsamor cuando pensaba que era suyo aquel tesoro, le ofendían más a menudo al considerar que su brillo atraía las miradas, la voluntad y la admiración de las gentes, y a él le dejaba obscurecido y como eclipsado" (*Morsamor*, 131). And while he is in love with Olimpia, he is also ashamed of what this love signifies: "Si hubiese robado a doña Sol de Quiñones, y a despecho de la Reina y de todo el mundo, la tuviese a bordo, el caso, aunque pecaminoso, sería digno de él; pero llevar a donna Olimpia, que lo mismo se hubiera ido acaso con otro cualquiera, era triunfo tan miserable, que en vez de lisonjear su amor propio, le lastimaba y abatía" (*ibid.*). Morsamor craves distinction in his life: the desire to be recognised for his courage and accomplishments; but his need to distinguish himself in matters of women and love is no less powerful.

Olimpia also represents *Morsamor*'s most developed heroine and one through whom Valera does incorporate the theme of woman as civiliser, as in *Doña Luz*, *Juanita la Larga* and *Genio y figura* before. Olimpia does not work her magic upon Morsamor himself, but upon Prester John<sup>72</sup> (known to his people as King David, according to the narrator) and the citizens of Abyssinia. Following Olimpia and Teletusa's disappearance from Morsamor's ship the two women set off on their own adventures, eventually ending up in North Africa, where the King falls in love with Donna Olimpia, and the two marry. As the narrator goes on to detail,

Censuró y condenó las muy frecuentes borracheras de onfacomeli, bebida de que se abusaba mucho en Abisinia.... Con más eficaz energía se opuso aún a que los

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<sup>72</sup> According to Romero Tobar, "El Preste Juan de las Indias es un personaje mítico que empezó a ser citado en Europa a partir del siglo XI. Primero se le creyó rey de una tribu asiática, más tarde se le situó en Abisinia y fue considerado como un monarca cristiano en el mundo de los infieles" (*Morsamor*, 145n).

súbditos de su esposo comiesen carne cruda, y sobre todo, a que los refinados y sibaríticos la comiesen invirtiendo los trámites.... Nuestra heroína logró modificar también el desorden abominable con que solían terminar los banquetes.... El desenfreno era tal, que el pudor de donna Olimpia hubo de sublevarse, transmitiendo tan honrada sublevación a su esposo ... Un poco atenuó también donna Olimpia lo sobrado servil de algunas etiquetas o ceremonias de aquel ambulante palacio, impidiendo que en lo sucesivo se pusiesen todos de rodillas, besasen la tierra o prorrumpiesen en jaculatorias o breves y fervorosas oraciones, no sólo cuando el *Negus*, sino cuando cualquier rumor, como suspiro, tos o estornudo, indicaba su cercanía. (254-255)<sup>73</sup>

The inclusion of such detail appears gratuitous, considering the superficial aspects of the civilisation which Donna Olimpia changes. And yet Valera appears to be highlighting, with the accomplished and admirable Prester John and his unquestioning embrace of Donna Olimpia, Morsamor's arrogance in believing himself to be too good for the Italian adventuress.

Fittingly, at the same time that Valera portrays his heroines as civilisers he portrays his most extraordinary ones yet. While all of Valera's principal heroines tend to be idealised in some way, Luz's exceptional qualities are manifested in her most basic of characteristics: "La salud de doña Luz era insolente de buena. Ni un dolor de cabeza nunca" (*Doña Luz*, 73), to more significant ones: "Madrugadora, activa, acostumbrada a dar largos paseos, y a estar en casa empleada en algo útil, la ligereza y el brío de su cuerpo corrían parejas con su beldad y con su gracia. Cuando quería, bailaba como un sílfide; en el andar airoso, semejaba a la divina cazadora de Delos, y montaba a caballo como la reina de las Amazonas" (57).

The novel is replete with such exaggerated statements about her. This idealisation is also achieved through her comparison to other women, conducted always in a way that elevates her above them. As Gilbert Paolini points out, unique in her small town of Villafría, "Doña Luz está dotada de cierta calidad ennoblecedora y aparece superior a todos los que rodean. Los personajes de la novela, lo mismo que el lector, la

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<sup>73</sup> According to Romero Tobar, the *Negus* was the Emperor of Abyssinia (255n).

perciben sobre un pedestal y casi etérea” (“El mundo artístico y psicológico en *Doña Luz*”, 321). Even her name shows her superiority. DeCoster, for instance, maintains that it is highly symbolic, for “luz” is “light”, “representing the highest level of ascetic ascendance” (*Juan Valera*, 129). Trimble, in addition, finds significance in the name, claiming that “En realidad ninguna de las heroínas de Valera puede competir con ella en su belleza, ni la incomparable Pepita, porque en doña Luz, hasta su nombre difunde su lindeza, y eso es un regalo del autor” (*Valera en sus novelas*, 113).

For the same reason that Luz is superior, however, she is also cold. As the narrator describes: she fears to “contaminarse” with those who do not share her values (*Doña Luz*, 57); she attempts to be polite and yet “desechar la familiaridad excesiva” of the townspeople (58); the young men regard her as an “inexpugnable fortaleza” (ibid.); “Era difícil hablar a solas con ella” (59). Thus, while Doña Luz may be an inspiration to people in her town, her pride and even her ambition for perfection render her engagement with them minimal and even limits the potential for her influence. As the narrator explains of Luz, “su filantropía no podía extenderse a más que a dar la mano a los que estuviesen en condiciones de trepar hasta donde estaba ella, y no a aquellos que estaban tan bajos o tan hundidos en el lodo que, en vez de alzarlos, se dejaría ella arrastrar cayendo en el lodo también” (71). In this regard, Doña Luz lacks the true generosity of spirit embodied in Rose Cleveland’s concept of “altruistic faith”.

### **“Altruistic Faith” in Valera’s Life**

While there is not much evidence to suggest that Valera mixed much with members of other social classes (except to sleep with prostitutes), he certainly was a practitioner of “altruistic faith” among younger members of his own background who were embarking upon literary careers of their own. Valera’s correspondence with Menéndez Pelayo, for example, testifies to his friendship with the much younger man and his role as mentor. As Miguel Artigas Ferrando and Pedro Sáinz Rodríguez remark in their introduction to *Epistolario de Valera y Menéndez Pelayo*, in spite of the two men’s vastly different circumstances,<sup>74</sup> Valera embraced the relationship:

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<sup>74</sup> Valera was a man of the world, and at 51, old enough to be the father of the 20-year old bookish, and, up to that point, cosseted Menéndez Pelayo who was introduced to Valera by their mutual friend and the latter’s mentor, Gumersindo Laverde.

“Vió desde el primer momento en su nuevo amigo una formación literaria muy completa y armónica, rara en los jóvenes de aquella época, animada y vivificada además por un ideal artístico” (8). Valera encouraged his new friend to work hard and the two embarked jointly upon a project: “Tendiendo, sin duda, a mantenerle enhiesta la voluntad, como la madre amorosa que para animar al hijo desganado finge que también ella come, le propone trabajar en colaboración, y acuerdan ... traducir juntos una trilogía de Esquilo”.<sup>75</sup>

An especially compelling case of Valera’s “altruistic faith” in another can be seen in his relationship with Rubén Darío. Valera became acquainted with the young writer and his work, *Azul*, through his nephew, Antonio Alcalá Galiano y Miranda, who met the Nicaraguan during a diplomatic posting in Valparaíso (Lombardero, *Otro don Juan*, 314). An initially sceptical Valera appraised *Azul* before the public in 1888, declaring of Darío: “Hay en usted una poderosa individualidad de escritor, ya bien marcada, y que, si Dios da a usted la salud que yo le deseo y larga vida, ha de desenvolverse y señalarse más con el tiempo en obras que sean gloria de las letras hispanoamericanas” (*Cartas americanas*, 291). He goes on to acknowledge the author’s literary influences—“lo primero que se nota es que está usted saturado de toda la más flamante literatura francesa”—but commending him, he continues: “Y usted no imita a ninguno: ni es usted romántico, ni naturalista, ni *neurótico*, ni decadente, ni simbólico, ni parnasiano. Usted lo ha revuelto todo, lo ha puesto a cocer en el alambique de su cerebro y ha sacado de ello una rara quintaesencia” (ibid.). Edelberto Torres, author of *La dramática vida de Rubén Darío* comments upon this aspect of Valera’s critique, remarking on his “intuición maravillosa” (Torres, *Vida de Darío*, 132). For Darío’s biographer, Valera signalled one of the young writer’s chief traits: that the Nicaraguan was not (perhaps somewhat like Valera himself) easy to classify.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> (ibid.) Valera raises the subject in one of his earliest letters to Menéndez Pelayo. (See C 3, 98.)

<sup>76</sup> “Valera ocupa una posición única en la literatura española del siglo XIX, escriba novelas, cuentos o cualquier otra cosa. Todo cuanto hace es *valeresco* y queda forzosamente fuera de las clasificaciones usuales. No es posible sumar a Valera a los otros grupos de noveladores, románticos o realistas, con quienes convive; lo que de ellos pueda tomar parece siempre irónico bajo su pluma” (José Montesinos, *Valera o la ficción libre*, 1).

In fact, the two letters Valera wrote to Darío, published in *El Imparcial*, were among many letters Valera wrote in the immediate years following his reading of “Altruistic Faith” in which he reviewed the work of numerous Latin American writers. Although Valera would suggest that *Cartas americanas* was a patriotic initiative aimed at bringing little known authors from the former colonies onto Spain’s shores, and in some cases informing the Americans about literary matters back in Spain, as Courtad points out, Valera “was essentially the first Spaniard to connect the Old World with the New and [he] opened the door for many Latin American writers in the Mother country” (*The Letter as Creative Perfection*, 78). We can also be certain that Valera was on some level influenced by Cleveland’s ideas. After all, what did Valera do if not put his “altruistic faith” in Darío and others whose work he commended, bringing them into the public light and declaring them writers to be read and celebrated? Cleveland’s essay was not only the presentation of a concept but a call to action: “Let us enlarge and ennoble our capacity of altruistic faith”, she wrote, “—the capacity to be, in some life or lives, a Cadijah. There are those waiting for us to be this to them.... There are those waiting for our recognition before men shall recognize them—nay, before they shall recognize themselves. From our lips their rightful name must fall, if it ever be heard” (“Altruistic Faith”, 57). Clearly, Valera was very much responsible for Darío’s “rightful name” being heard. He declared Darío to be a writer of distinct originality who would have a major influence upon the world of Spanish-American literature. This would indeed be the case, as Darío is generally regarded as having been the father of Spanish Modernism.

According to Manuel Lombardero, before Valera, Darío had been “absolutamente desconocido” in Spain (*Otro don Juan*, 315), with only a few knowing about him in his birth-country and Chile, where he had moved in his early twenties to work at a newspaper. And with the exception of a couple of initial reviews, upon *Azul*’s publication, there was little acclaim: “reina la conspiración del silencio”.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it was not until Valera’s appraisal of the work in the Madrid newspaper, *El Imparcial*, that Darío was “discovered”, gaining him fame, not only in Spain, but all over South America, where Valera’s review was republished in various newspapers. So much did

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<sup>77</sup> (Torres, *Vida de Darío*, 132). In fact, Torres writes that a Mecenaz Federico Varela, to whom Darío had dedicated *Azul*, did not even pay him the courtesy of an acknowledgement (ibid.). In his anger, Darío responded by withdrawing the dedicatory letter from all future editions.

Darío appreciate Valera's backing that the young author himself would include Valera's *Carta* as a prologue to his work's second edition. And when the newspaper at which Darío had formerly been employed failed to print Valera's review, the young Nicaraguan made his dissatisfaction very clear. He wrote to a Narciso Tondreau on the subject, with the following complaint: "He estado agriamente impresionado con toda la prensa, sobre todo con aquella en que hay algunos que se dicen mis amigos".<sup>78</sup> Referring specifically to *La Época*, where he had worked, he explains: "Se han reproducido todas las cartas de don Juan Valera, y se han saltado las dirigidas a mí. Es cierto que don Juan hace elogios que no me ha hecho nadie, y que con la publicación de su juicio vendríamos a quedar en que yo soy un ternero de cinco patas. Cosa que desagradaría a todos los que creen que sólo soy un hombre de cuatro. Porque creo que hay quienes piensan así" (ibid.).<sup>79</sup>

Here we see that Valera put his faith in Darío when, according to the young writer (Darío was only 21 at the time; Valera, 64), others did not. Although Valera also praised many other authors, he could not of course encourage them all to the same degree. As Cleveland states in "Altruistic Faith", we must offer our support and guidance to others, but only in an honest way: "Though my Cadijah love me as her own soul, and have set her whole heart on me, she cannot ... persuade herself that I can be what I cannot be. She can only perceive me to be what I *can* be. Cadijah is a seer, but she is not a visionary. She wields a diviner's rod, but not a wizard's wand" (50).

Valera and Darío would maintain a friendship throughout the years. Although only two letters Valera wrote to Darío appear in *Correspondencia* (with dates of February 1896 and 1899 (month unknown), several others, particularly a series written in August and September of 1892 to Menéndez Pelayo and a Doctor Thebussem,<sup>80</sup> will continue to demonstrate Valera's admiration for the young author. In his letter to Darío of 1896, Valera will encourage him to keep up his writing, mentioning his hopes that Darío finds employment in Madrid, so that the Spanish influence will

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Lombardero, *Otro don Juan*, 315; from A. Ghirardo, *El archivo de Rubén Darío*.

<sup>79</sup> Here, Darío is referring to the numerous other letters Valera wrote, initially published in *El Imparcial*, appraising the works of other Latin American writers that would later be collected in *Cartas americanas* (Oc 3).

<sup>80</sup> His real name was Mariano Pardo de Figueroa.



continue to develop in his work, but also “por lo que me complacería yo [sic] el verlo con frecuencia o de diario” (C 6, 147).

Darío’s biographer, Torres, would go further in highlighting Valera’s encouragement of the Nicaraguan poet, maintaining that Valera dedicated one of his *tertulias* to the young man:

En aquella velada Darío lee *Estival*, uno de los poemas de *Azul...*; el anfitrión lee *La canción de oro*, del mismo libro, y luego Manuel del Palacio, el duque de Almenara, don Narciso Campillo, don José Alcalá Galiano, don Luis Vidart participan en el homenaje leyendo algo propio, y lo mismo hacen los hispanoamericanos don Leónidas Pallarés, delegado de Ecuador, y don Isaac Arias Argáez, de Colombia... La fiesta duró hasta las dos y media de la madrugada. (Qtd. in Lombardero, *Otro don Juan*, 339)

According to Torres, Valera’s aim was one of creating long-lasting relationships and communication between the people of Spanish-speaking South America and Spain, but there is little doubt Valera was also working to give well-deserved backing to a young writer who he knew—from reflecting upon Cleveland’s ideas, but from his own experience also—could only benefit from the endorsement.

Valera also exhibited “divining” qualities and “altruistic faith” in relation to his sister, Sofía, in his encouragement of her to pursue a career as an artist (discussed in chapter 3), and detailed advice to both her and his parents about the best way to go about it. His correspondence also accounts for the professional encouragement he gave to his nephew to write.<sup>81</sup> His support of Pepe extends back to 1877, when he refers to a weekly Friday *tertulia* he hosts in which guests are encouraged to read verses: “de los jóvenes el más brillante es Pepe Alcalá Galiano” (C 3, 50), he remarks to Sofía.

Scattered comments expressing interest in his nephew can be found in Valera’s extant correspondence throughout the 1880s and into the early 1890s, but undoubtedly the

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<sup>81</sup> It shows him encouraging his sons, on the other hand, to study mathematics and become engineers. A stable, worthwhile career in Valera’s eyes, it is clear that he did not want Carlos and Luis struggling in life the way he had.

most glowing and detailed praise is that which he gives Pepe in September of 1894. Remarking on his son's equal interest in *Panoranas orientales* Valera states: "Luis los leyó ... y a dúo los hemos celebrado. Todo ello está lleno de gracia, de color y de primores y riquezas de estilo, con ideas originalísimas, imágenes y paradojas chistosas o profundas. Desde el principio hasta el fin divierte y instruye todo; pero quizá lo mejor sea la pintura de Ceilán y luego lo que dices de la China" (C 5, 749-750). A glowing review of Pepe's efforts, it can certainly be said that Valera is putting his "altruistic faith" in the man. He goes on to remark, "Anímate y sigue adelante. No se ganó Zamora en una hora; y yo no dudo de que, a pesar de la indiferencia que hay en nuestra tierra para las obras literarias, las tuyas acabarán, y pronto, por ser muy leídas del público, y muy buscadas..." (750). But he does not end his comments there, offering: "Lo único que me atrevo a recomendarte es que no te enfuerces por ser original. Tú por naturaleza lo eres, y siempre hay algo de nuevo y de imprevisto en lo que escribes, lo cual es raro en el día, después de tanto como se ha escrito; y más raro es aún que hallen eso imprevisto y eso nuevo personas que, como yo, somos del oficio y conocemos todas las *ficelles*" (ibid.). Valera admires Pepe's work to such an extent that even an implicit criticism disappears amidst the sincerity of so much praise. And we know that Valera was not being disingenuous in his compliments. His nephew had made an impression upon him, and succeeded in sustaining it, long before. Fifteen years after Valera had declared him "el más brillante" of the young people reading verses at his *tertulia*, Valera wrote to Doctor Thebussem in September of 1892: "Pepe es, y no creo que me ciega el afecto de pariente, uno de los más amenos, chistosos y espontáneos escritores que hay en España ahora, y bien merecería ser más conocido y celebrado" (C 5, 423).

Valera would have valued the encouragement and direction he gave to Menéndez Pelayo, Darío, Pepe, Sofía and many more, given his own positive experience on the receiving end, if not from his wife then from others, particularly in youth. Apart from the guidance and "faith" he received from his parents—his father gave him money when he was twenty, upon graduating from university, to publish his very first book of poetry<sup>82</sup>—Serafín Estébanez Calderón, the main recipient of Valera's extant letters

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<sup>82</sup> (C 2, 34). Referring to his poems, Valera once wrote on the subject: "Las imprimí en casa de Benavides y las publiqué; pero a las cuatro o cinco días, cuando yo imaginaba que se habrían vendido trescientos ejemplares, me encontré con que ni tres se habían vendido.... Esto me desengañó o

from Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, encouraged the young Valera to develop his prose and shared his letters at his *tertulias* back in Spain. A good deal older than Valera and a famous writer in his own right by the early 1850s, he in effect provided his protégé with an early audience. Valera himself would give credit to the man, describing him as “el cual me infundió la manía de los libros” (C 2, 35). But Azaña in his essay “Estébanez Calderón y Valera,” goes even further, highlighting Estébanez’s role as “diviner” for Valera:

Estébanez conoció la gran disposición natural de Valera, y cuando sólo producía medianos versos y apenas se había ensayado fuera de la lírica, acertó a pronosticarle su dominio de la prosa ... Estébanez aguija a su discípulo, le declara su porvenir, le persuade cuán poco debe importarle el desengaño de su ambición política, que nunca le subiría a tanto como la literaria. (*Ensayos sobre Valera*, 126)

Likewise, Leopoldo August Cueto, a fervent admirer of Valera’s letters from Russia, supported his friend by publishing the young diplomat’s correspondence from St. Petersburg. As it turns out, Cueto compromised Valera in doing so, as the latter developed a reputation for being a “burlón” (C 2, 38); nonetheless, those who were not offended by Valera’s writing were impressed and amused by his wit, style and descriptive faculties. Also interesting is the fact that the publication of Valera’s correspondence led to his marginalisation from political life—“anhelaba yo ser diputado ... pero el Gobierno se le opuso. Narváez dijo que yo le sacaría, o enseñaría, las uñas” (C 2, 37)—an unintended fallout which would ironically have created both the opportunity, and perhaps necessity, for Valera to dedicate himself to writing, since political and diplomatic appointments could not be relied upon entirely.

Considering Valera’s early experiences with male compatriots exercising their “altruistic faith”, even the power of “divination” in him, and indeed, his own role with others, it may seem strange that the author insisted upon women’s predominance in such matters. We may remember him crediting the female sex, in particular, with a special intuition: “percibe con rápida visión mil verdades a que tal vez no llega el hombre ni después de prolijas cavilaciones y de intrincados discursos” (“Las mujeres

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desilusionó; recogí todos los ejemplares, los di por no publicados, y me curé de poesías; pero no del todo, pues siempre seguí haciendo versos, aunque no con tanta frecuencia” (C 2, 34).

y las academias”, *Oc* 2, 868). And yet some of the explanation for Valera’s belief in women’s greater suitability to matters of “altruistic faith” must also lie in the special status women had for him personally. In “La importancia de la mujer”, he proclaims their singular ability to encourage and motivate, writing:

¿Qué hombre no ha tenido en su desaliento a una mujer enamorada que le consuele y le anime? ¿Cuántos que dudaban ya de su propio valer y hasta llegaban a negarlo, humillados y postrados por lo juzgaban desengaño, no se han levantado de su postración y abatimiento gracias a la mano cariñosa que ella les tendía? ¿Cuántos no han continuado por la áspera senda que no se atrevían ya a seguir o de la que se habían extraviado, porque ella volvía a conducirlos suavizándola con su apoyo y alumbrándola con el resplandor de la esperanza? (1412)

The special status Valera gave women is also evident in comments about Lucía Palladi (introduced at the beginning of this chapter), his early experience of “altruistic faith” as exhibited by a female non-family member. While many others, as discussed, offered Valera encouragement in his writing, none would receive the same recognition for having done so.

So enthusiastic was Valera about Lucía’s “altruistic faith” in him, at one point he transcribed a lengthy excerpt from a letter she wrote to him into a letter to his father, dated April of 1850.<sup>83</sup> “Qué tal el párrafo?” Valera writes, “La carta mía que elogia tanto estaba escrita en francés; figúrese usted qué no seré yo capaz de hacer en español, si hemos de creer a lo que dice *la Muerta*” (*C* 1, 82). Valera’s enthusiasm is clear, as is the special significance of Lucía’s belief in him. His comment, “si hemos de creer a lo que dice *la Muerta*”, seems to suggest a reluctance to trust in full her claims of his talent, and yet the fact that he has copied her words verbatim to his father

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<sup>83</sup> It read: “Votre dernière lettre est charmante; elle est pleine d’humeur et de finesse, de moquerie légère et spirituelle, et je commence à avoir une singulière peur de votre malice; je vous assure que vous m’avez bien fait rire. Je regrette seulement que vous n’employez pas ce talent d’écrire que vous avez évidemment à des choses plus importantes, aussi bien qu’à des lettres familières et sans prétentions. Travaillez, je vous en prie, ne vous laissez pas aller à cette paresse meurtrière que je vous ai souvent tant entendu blâmer chez d’autres. Choisissez une route et suivez-la avec constance, ou plutôt suivez celle qui naturellement se présente à vous, celle vers laquelle vos goûts et votre nature vous portent, celle des lettres pour laquelle vous avez une vocation trop véritable pour qu’il vous soit permis de la négliger. Vous avez d’ailleurs de l’ambition; pour la rendre légitime il faut le travail et l’assiduité; pour justifier ce désir d’approbation il faut savoir la mériter...” (*C* 1, 82).

shows the value he places upon her praise and his excitement about it (he is also perhaps trying to encourage his father not to lose hope in him—showing that others have not). It is also very evident the degree to which Valera craved and even required such encouragement; his letters to Sofía certainly highlight this fact.

### **Valera's Extraordinary Heroines**

We note, in returning to the subject of Valera's extraordinary heroines, that in regard to her standoffishness with others, Doña Luz is very much at odds with Juanita and Rafaela, who are enthusiastic participants in their communities of Villalegre and Rio de Janiero, respectively. Interestingly, however, Rafaela is described on one occasion as being similar to Luz: "El desaliño y la suciedad de los sujetos que andaban cerca de ella era tan pulcra, le causaban repugnancia" (*Genio y figura*, 75); however, her "repugnancia" appears to serve as a motivating force behind her didactic drive and the practice of "altruistic faith" and not something that discourages her from taking on the role. What is more, the rest of her description attests to her warmth, open nature and love of people.

Valera's idealisation of Rafaela is dramatic. According to the narrator, the first time he ever saw Rafaela was at a bullfight. Describing the impression she made on a large crowd of people, he states:

Al aparecer en un palco, con otras tres amigas, los cinco o seis mil espectadores ... clavaron la vista en Rafaela y rompieron en gritos de admiración y entusiasmo ... La función hacía tiempo que había empezado ... Pero todo se suspendió, y durante uno o dos minutos nadie prestó atención ni al diestro de las banderillas ni al toro *puro* tampoco, distraída y embelesada la gente por la aparición de Rafaela *la Generosa*. (69)

This description is significant, because its exaggerated qualities represent what will continue to be at times, as Trimble suggests, an account close to a fairytale (*Valera en sus novelas*, 165). Valera's choice of language and imagery are largely responsible for

this, with her didactic achievements described as “triumfos” (*Genio y figura*, 80) and “milagros” (ibid., 91).

Consider also the narrator’s statement about her *tertulias*. According to him, one of the kindest gifts one could offer a new arrival in Rio de Janeiro was to bring them to Rafaela’s home, as the hostess “unía a su elegancia, discreción y hermosura el carácter más franco y regocijado. Del sitio en que ella se presentaba salía huyendo la tristeza. En torno suyo y en su presencia no había más que conversaciones apacibles o jocosas, risas y burlas inocentes, sin mordacidad ni grave perjuicio del prójimo” (64). Descriptions such as these suggest that she has special powers, even supernatural ones. In her presence “salía huyendo la tristeza”—her energy is so powerful that it enables her, without deliberate action, to control the tenor of conversations in her presence. Other descriptions of the woman, the epithet Rafaela *la generosa*, will contribute to creating a portrayal of the heroine so excessively idealised, she seems of legendary proportions. Referring to her physical condition at the age of 50: “Parecía no tener edad, como las diosas o como las inmortales obras del arte” (183). As Trimble remarks, “Es la única de las heroínas de Valera a quien lleva a la edad de cincuenta” (*Valera en sus novelas*, 150).

Like Luz, Rafaela is also elevated above other women through the narrator’s comparisons. She is described as having an “estrecha conciencia, y, aunque parezca inverosímil en mujeres de su clase, no exigía ni pedía, y hasta rehusaba las dádivas de sus buenos amigos cuando pensaba que eran superiores a sus medios y recursos” (70). The narrator describes her as “una mujer de prendas naturales nada comunes” (81); “la bondad misma” (122); the embodiment of “lealtad, “franqueza”, “desprendimiento” (84); as morally superior to others: “Rafaela no empleó ni ardid, ni astucia, ni embustes, ni retrechería, ni ningún otro artificio de los que suelen emplear las mujeres para proveerse de un marido y sobre todo de un marido rico” (ibid.).

Her “altas prendas y rarísimas cualidades” (68) are further demonstrated through her manner of coping in specific situations. During her opening performance in Rio, although she was received with hostility (the crowd whistled and threw fruit at her), the narrator makes a point of stating, “Rafaela estaba dotada de un estoicismo, no sólo

a prueba de fruta, sino a prueba de bomba. Sufrió con calma el descalabro y hasta lo tomó a risa” (73). She is also described as handling gossiping people with “moderación” and “talento” (84); she is said to manage admirably following the departure from Rio of a friend: “como su carácter era tan alegre, logró consolarse pronto” (114).

Donna Olimpia is also extraordinary; among other things, “una de las más artísticas, hermosas, sabias y elocuentes mujeres, que ha producido Italia en nuestros días” (*Morsamor*, 72).<sup>84</sup> She is educated to the point of erudition: “En Italia la celebran de *mirabilmente colta*. Sabe latín como Nebrija; sabe también algo de griego; ha leído los poetas e historiadores antiguos y clásicos y los de su patria, y entiende tanto de cuanto hay que entender, que pasa por un Pico de la Mirándola o por un Fernando de Córdoba, con faldas” (*ibid.*).<sup>85</sup> Donna Olimpia is also constant, not to mention brave: “tenía la conciencia muy estrecha y jamás faltaba en sus compromisos, a no ser sorprendida por irrupciones y agresiones inesperadas y violentas” (106). The narrator mentions her “desatentada afición a correr mundo y ver tierras extrañas” (105), and how when she and Teletusa board Morsamor’s ship, setting sail for the Far East, “no se mareaban. Se hallaban en el mar como nacidas: como si fuesen nereidas y no mujeres” (116).

There are also inconsistencies in her depiction reminiscent of Valera’s efforts in *Juanita* (discussed at the end of chapter 3) to bestow upon his eponymous heroine every positive trait imaginable. Consider the following description of Olimpia as supremely proud and self-confident to the point of haughtiness:

Se preciaba de bien nacida, de leal en sus tratos, de fiel a sus compromisos y de tener una conciencia tan escrupulosa y estrecha cuanto su profesión consentía. Jactábase donna Olimpia de la nobleza de su cuna, procuraba hacer creer que era su familia del patriciado de Venecia y que figuraba en el *Libro de oro*, aun llegaba a

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<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, Olimpia is Italian, not Spanish—an unusual deviation from Valera’s typical habit of making primary heroines, indeed primary characters in general, originate from Andalusia.

<sup>85</sup> According to Romero Tobar, both men who lived in the fifteenth century were famous for their encyclopedic knowledge (*Morsamor*, 73n).

afirmar en ocasiones que en el Tribunal de los Diez se había sentado un tío suyo.  
(105)

And yet on more than one occasion she is celebrated for her modesty: “Dulce y modesta era donna Olimpia. Nadie con justicia hubiera podido censurarla de marisabidilla y bachillera; pero en su trato íntimo, y cuando Morsamor la estimulaba a hablar, mostraba su rara discreción y su mucha doctrina, con sencillez y sin pedantería ni jactancia” (127). She is an intrepid adventurer and yet loving and gentle; forthright but reserved. At one point she is described as “la personificación de la amenidad serena y elevada” (127), at another it is said that her “discreta conversación y su apacible trato”, enchanted Morsamor, “y de continuo prestaba pábulo a la encendida llama de sus afectos la presencia de aquella mujer dechado de elegancia y de majestuosa hermosura” (130).

Finally, she is also shown to exhibit “altruistic faith” in divining Morsamor’s unhappiness and the reasons for it, the source of which she essentially identifies as herself. Once recognised, she generously removes herself from the situation. As Teletusa writes to Tiburcio, of the women’s sudden disappearance in the midst of festivities aboard their ship one afternoon:

Si ella abandona a Morsamor es porque conoce que, si bien Morsamor la quiere, Morsamor tiene vergüenza de llevarla en su compañía. Harto ha notado ella que cuando Morsamor no está bajo el hechizo de su mirada y recobra la calma y el juicio que le roba la embriaguez del deleite amoroso, ella, si no es objeto de repugnancia para Morsamor, es considerada por él como un estorbo y como un escándalo ... Ella desea que Morsamor alcance grande victorias, triunfos y laureles en la India; entiende que para esto perjudicaría a Morsamor si le siguiese y por eso le deja. Si él por un lado, ella también separadamente por otro puede vencer y triunfar sola. El continuar juntos, dice ella, sería causa de debilidad y a todos nos dañaría. (*Morsamor*, 145)

It is also worth noting here how Olimpia’s own ambition—Teletusa goes on to write of her friend’s desire to travel more extensively: “Ella sola tiene también colosales



proyectos. Quiere visitar la Meca, el reino de Preste Juan, el Egipto, la Tierra Santa y qué sé yo cuantas otras regiones” (145)—offers her a fall-back position in the absence of a man to love (although she does, as discussed earlier, go on eventually to marry Prester John). Valera made an observation about the value of using altruistic faith not only for the benefit of others, but for the benefit of oneself: “Claro está ... que la mujer que puede con su *fe altruista* hacer del hombre un héroe, un santo, un sabio o un poeta, bien puede asimismo hacer por sí grandes cosas con esa misma fe puesta en su valer propio” (*Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, 1412). Although the main aim of Cleveland’s essay is an attempt to incite individuals to behave as Cadijahs to others, she too writes of the importance of faith in oneself.<sup>86</sup> And in the case of Donna Olimpia, we see how Valera not only endows her with a generous will toward another, but with a generous faith in her own value. When she understands that Morsamor is essentially rejecting her (he lacks the clarity and courage to address her directly), she turns her energies to satisfying her own ambitions: embarking upon new adventures to eventually reach North Africa and take part in bettering men who are more accepting of her.

In *Juanita la Larga*, Valera also endows his heroine with exceptional traits, but somewhat differently from the cases of Luz, Rafaela and Olimpia; where these characters are largely rendered in isolation from others, much of Juanita’s virtue is depicted in juxtaposition with its marked absence among Villalegre’s other townspeople. As Marta González Megía remarks of the novel’s early chapters, “los personajes no se presentan independientemente, sino que se salta de uno a otro” (*Juanita la Larga*, 108n). This pattern continues throughout the rest of the novel, too.

It is very clear in *Juanita* which characters the author believes are worthy of admiration and which are not. Tacit references to the dishonourable behaviour of most abound in *Juanita*. At Don Policarpo’s *tertulia*, its guests are described as badmouthing Paco, but on his arrival they quickly go silent, “porque cara a cara no querían ofenderle” (223). When Nicolasa is trampled by a cow and Juanita and her mother discover what has happened, “olvidado el enojo, cumplieron piadosamente con

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<sup>86</sup> We may remember Cleveland’s comment: “A true belief in God is threesided, and the glory of the God-side was never meant to obscure the brightness of the other two sides” (48)—one of those sides being “I believe in other people”, but also, “I believe in myself”.

las leyes de la hospitalidad” (207). Her father, on the other hand, was unavailable to rescue Nicolasa, because “sin pensar en sus hijas, con frac y todo, se subió por los hierros de una reja y logró ponerse en salvo” (205). In return for the Juanas’ assistance, the injured Nicolasa slights the women, giving no sincere expression of gratitude for their help (207). The description of the Juanas dropping their concerns to be of assistance demonstrates their fundamentally more decent nature. Valera similarly portrays Juanita as unselfish and unabsorbed by her own concerns, following her declaration of love to Paco: “Con egoísmo amoroso, sólo del amor mutuo que don Paco y ella se tenían, había ella hablado con don Paco. Ya en la calle y separada de él, Juanita volvió a pensar en Antoñuelo y a cavilar en un medio de salvarle sin que nadie le diese auxilio y siendo ella su única salvadora” (319).

Although Doña Inés is described as a devout Christian, “elogiada” for her charity with the poor (153), her behaviour could not be more uncharitable toward others. She is responsible for Juanita’s humiliation in the Church scene of Chapter 16, “había ya prevenido al padre Anselmo, y le tenía muy sobreexcitado contra Juanita y contra su madre” (194); and she destroys Juanita and her mother’s reputation and livelihood (243). When she employs Juanita herself it is only as a result of her wanting her children impeccably dressed for the bishop’s visit (245). And even at this point she takes advantage of the girl, underpaying her for the work she is doing for Inés (246). Doña Inés’s snobbery is off the scale compared with Doña Luz’s less offensive standoffishness, but both in their very different ways are incapable of Rose Cleveland’s ideal of “altruistic faith”. Inés proves an impediment to Juanita’s social advancement early on, and later in the novel when attempting to determine the right future for Juanita, she decides the convent, entirely inappropriate for the girl, is where she belongs. The capacity for altruism or selfless action is the key to Cleveland’s concept of divination,<sup>87</sup> and Valera shows Inés lacking the fundamental generosity of spirit, in spite of her religious affiliations, required for such practice.

Inés also differs from most of Valera’s other heroines, who, in spite of their flaws, usually have a few redeeming qualities. As González remarks, “Andando el relato, se ve que doña Inés es vana, egoísta, dogmática, agresiva, dominante, hipócrita,

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<sup>87</sup> Without this capacity, one is more likely to err, as Inés does, to let his or her own particular needs or agenda influence their vision for the person in question.

irracional, mentirosa, pueblerina, noble de primera generación por matrimonio, con prejuicios y con mentalidad cursi” (“Introducción” to *Juanita la Larga*, 54-55).

Juanita, equal to Inés in her strong character (and far superior in shrewdness), is a fundamentally better person, and Valera uses every opportunity to show his young heroine as honourable, caring and full of integrity. She could have married Paco “por interés” but she rejects the opportunity, a point which Valera has his male protagonist reflect upon, after reading the letter she has written to him:

Si en extremo le dolía que ella declarase que no le amaba, no podía menos de aplaudir la lealtad de la declaración. Don Paco estaba conforme en lo tocante al aprecio de las circunstancias que se oponían a la boda, y que la hacían aparecer a toda juiciosa previsión como fuente de disgustos y de males. De aquí que sus sentimientos al leer la carta fuesen de dolor y de mortificación de amor propio por el desamor de Juanita; de admiración y aplauso por la prudente conducta de la muchacha; y de mayor cariño hacia ella, así por la noble franqueza con que exponía las causas que justificaban su desdén, como por las amistosas dulzuras con que procuraba suavizarle. (230-231)

Although much of the novel displays Juanita’s efforts to secure her own happiness, Valera shows that his young heroine is admirably principled in doing so. And he also shows that Don Paco, a character linked in chapter 3 with Valera’s own perspective, fully appreciates this.

Additionally, Valera uses her friendship with Antoñuelo, a controversial figure in Villalegre, to demonstrate Juanita’s uncommon qualities of magnanimity, loyalty and self-sacrifice. On hearing the rumours of her audacious conduct with Don Paco—“Por todo el lugar no se habla de otra cosa sino ... de que te mantiene y te viste” (241)—Antoñuelo takes as truth what others are saying, destroying the foundations of their long-standing friendship. Later on in the novel, when Antoñuelo finds himself in trouble, Juanita grants him immediate forgiveness, setting out to discover what she can do to fix his situation. As the narrator dramatically asserts,

[e]l afecto profundo y extraño, como de madre o como de hermana, que Juanita había sentido por Antoñuelo toda su vida, renació entonces con vehemencia en su corazón, olvidándose de los groseros agravios con que la había ofendido aquel mozo. Juanita se propuso salvarle, lograr que se echase tierra al asunto y evitar su deshonra y su ida a presidio, aunque para ello fuera menester buscar los ocho mil reales en el mismo infierno. (311)

In this regard, Juanita is shown to never lose her “altruistic faith” in the boy.

Armed with resolve, Juanita goes directly to the shopkeeper, Ramón, to negotiate the repayment of the eight thousand *reales* which Antoñuelo stole. Not only is her determination to help the troubled boy admirable, Valera shows how Ramón’s ultimate willingness to trust Juanita in her vow to repay him signifies the solidity of the reputation she and her mother have built over the years, a reputation that was acknowledged by all before the church incident, and which continues to be respected among Villalegre’s good few.

### **Real Life Models for Valera’s Extraordinary Heroines**

It is difficult to imagine that any characters described as so exceptional—like Luz, Rafaela, Donna Olimpia or Juanita—could have real-life models, and indeed if Doña Luz was inspired by a real woman, her identity has proven elusive thus far. According to Matilde Galera’s research into its origins, the basis for Valera’s fifth novel was not pure invention. The author confessed to a journalist before his death: “Yo saqué de una peregrina historia que acaeció en Granada el argumento de mi novela *Doña Luz*: sus personajes tuvieron un gran relieve en aquella sociedad. Es una historia de un romanticismo encantador”.<sup>88</sup> His disclosure appears to end there. Likewise, Donna Olimpia offers no obvious comparisons, but instead represents a mere product of the author’s fantasy (as do most of the novel’s other elements). Valera scholars have, on the other hand, found it possible to identify inspiration for Rafaela, Cyrus DeCoster suggesting she might be a composite of several women Valera knew. DeCoster cites, for example, the author’s reference to a “ninfa gaditana” with whom he had relations

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Amorós, *La obra literaria de don Juan Valera: la “música de la vida”*, 265. From: Matilde Galera de Reina. “Notas para un estudio de *Doña Luz*”. *El Egabrense*, Cabra (29 October 1979).

in Lisbon, as well as Valera's comment: "Desde que llegué al Brasil, puso los ojos en mí una cotorróna sabrosa, cantariz jubilada, y casada hoy con el Alfio de Río de Janeiro, usurero riquísimo" ("Introducción" to *Genio y figura*, 41).<sup>89</sup> DeCoster also finds particular significance in a statement Valera made about women he encountered in the Brazilian capital, who were very elegant, either resulting from their natural instinct or because of the diplomats who influenced their appearance and manners, making them more refined: "Entre estas mujeres de que hablo hay una que la echaría yo a pelear con las más pulidas de Europa, porque no sólo es cortesana en el vestir y en los modales, sino que toca y se encumbra a lo científico y sublime, como otra nueva Aspasia; y en cuanto al arte de enamorar, sabe un punto más que el diablo" (*ibid.*).

Although Bravo-Villasante does not identify any particular models for Rafaela, Lombardero, on the other hand, concurs with DeCoster about the "cotorróna sabrosa" and the "ninfa gaditana" being likenesses (*Otro don Juan*, 83).

Considering Rafaela's circumstances and characterisation, it is clear why both critics cite the women mentioned in Valera's letters as probable influences on Rafaela's depiction. Rafaela could indeed be characterised as both a "ninfa gaditana", having originated from Cadíz, and a "cotorróna sabrosa" given her depiction in the latter part of the novel as a fifty-year old beauty who shamelessly flaunts her youthful figure. Moreover, she is a performer, at least initially in Rio de Janeiro, and also ends up marrying a wealthy businessman in Rio, similarly to the second woman mentioned by DeCoster. As regards her character, behaviour and intrinsic qualities, similarly to the third description, Rafaela is portrayed as naturally elegant—a trait which is only further enhanced by her environment and the diplomatic milieu in which she finds herself in Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and finally in Paris. The unidentified main narrator informs us: "En Lisboa fue donde se aristocratizó, se encumbró, y con el trato de los *janotas* acabó por asearse, pulirse, adobarse y llegar en el esmero con que cuidaba su

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<sup>89</sup> Lombardero's quotation from Valera's correspondence includes extra details and is slightly more dramatic. It reads: "Desde que llegué al Brasil, puso los ojos en mí una cotorróna sabrosa, *ex prima donna*, francesa de nación y casada hoy con el Alfio de Río de Janeiro, usurero riquísimo" (*Otro don Juan*, 379). These additional details are not insignificant considering that part of the novel is set in Paris. Rafaela follows this woman's trajectory in reverse: trying her hand as a performer in Brazil and then moving as an older woman to the French capital.

persona hasta el refinamiento más exquisito” (*Genio y figura*, 75). Furthermore, as with all of the women mentioned from Valera's correspondence, Rafaela is a willing and skillful lover.

Although none of these critics have mentioned the possibility, it is also likely that Valera had Rosine Stolz in mind when composing Rafaela's character. This real-life woman and her story, which Valera pondered in his letters, shares similarities with Valera's heroine. According to Contreras, Stolz, “fue mezzo-soprano de formación francesa nacida en Sevilla de madre española y cantó en la Ópera de París, Lisboa, Viena y Río de Janeiro ... conoció a Valera en Lisboa y posteriormente se volvieron a encontrar en Río de Janeiro” (*Valera: Su perfil ignorado*, 152). This last detail, in particular, is very relevant, given that Rafaela's adventure in *Genio y figura* mirrors the real-life singer's as Valera's fictional heroine meets the Viscount of Goivo-Formoso in Lisbon and then years later in Rio de Janeiro. In contrast to Stolz, however, Rafaela was not a professional singer in Europe but a cortesana and did not try her hand at performing as a dancer until she arrived in Brazil, where she attempted to make a living from it initially, but failed. Neither was she received with the same acclaim as Stolz. In the French singer's case, Valera wrote to his mother in 1851 from Lisbon: “todo el mundo se quedó espantado, la aplaudieron frenéticamente y la hicieron salir veinte veces ... y después la esperaron en la calle para vitorearla como si fuera una reina” (C 1, 132). Rafaela, on the other hand, was subjected to “una espantosa silba, acompañada de variados proyectiles” (*Genio y figura*, 73). Valera may have taken Stolz's experiences and circumstances and modified them for his heroine, to make her obstacles greater and therefore more challenging to overcome.

Basic details of the singer's background, which Valera lists in one of his letters, “su patria, Sevilla; su madre, española; su padre, ni ella misma lo sabe” (C 1, 133), match those of Rafaela, with the exception that she is from Cádiz. Comparing the women's character traits, Rafaela's most salient one, her generosity, also appears to be a characteristic of Stolz, with Valera claiming of the latter, “Nuestra heroína ha hecho muy buenos y costosos regalos a toda aquella canalla de entre bastidores, y donación de cinco o seis mil reales vellón a los pobres del hospital. Su casa es una especie de

fonda gratuita para los literatos y poetas hambrientos, en particular para un tal Lopez de Mendoça, que va allí a cualquier hora, pide de comer y le dan de comer” (ibid.).

Again, we see how Valera took basic scenarios associated with Stolz and presented them in a more idealised manner. Rafaela is generous in a similar way:

Menos en las temporadas en que había teatro, la señora de Figueredo recibía todas las noches. Cuando había teatro también, pero no siempre ... Bien podía *afirmarse* que [las tertulias] empezaban a las siete, porque la señora de Figueredo rara vez dejaba de tener convidados a comer ... sin freno ni tasa en el gasto. Pero lo que sobre todo hacía agradable aquella casa, era la misma señora de Figueredo.... Natural era, pues, que el primer obsequio que, no bien llegase a Río, se podía hacer a un forastero, era presentarle a una dama tan hospitalaria y divertida. (*Genio y figura*, 65)

Thus, both women are presented as being generous hostesses. Although the circumstances of the two situations differ—Rafaela’s *tertulias* are more glamorous, her guests representing the upper crust of society and distinguished diplomats from abroad—Valera’s fictional character is no less generous. Her charitable nature is further apparent when her husband dies, as she gives away most of the money she inherits to the local poor.

Aside from the similarities and differences identified, there is no doubt that Valera considered Stolz in some capacity when he was writing his novel, given that her real-life persona actually features in Chapters 20 and 21. In the first of these there is a substantial digression relating to the singer’s anticipated performance in Brazil. Similarly to Rafaela, we are told, she was to face a hostile crowd in Rio. This was due to an insulting article a French critic had written under the pretext of advising her on how to deal with the Brazilians, in his opinion: “hombres de poco arte y de menos literatura” (152)—the narrator’s paraphrasing of the article itself.

Next, in Chapter 21, Stolz appears again for the actual performance which, we are told, causes Rafaela to emerge from her mourning period following Arturo Machado’s

death. Evidently, she wants to support Stolz so that she will not suffer the same public humiliation that she herself had experienced upon her debut performance in Brazil. Thus, Stolz's journey parallels Rafaela's in the novel, in addition to enhancing the depiction of Valera's heroine as magnanimous:

Rafaela, que era generosa de todo, lo era también de aplausos y de alabanzas. Por nada del mundo hubiera gustado de que silbasen a la Stolz como la habían silbado a ella, a no tener a la mano otro don Joaquín para consolarla de la silba. Rafaela quiso, pues, que la Stolz triunfase, y se propuso contribuir a su triunfo ... De aquí que saliese del retraimiento ... la primera noche en que Stolz cantó en la *Semíramis*.  
(154)

Including her, of course, serves other functions, too, such as moving the action along, as her arrival brings Rafaela out of her seclusion. Considering that she is also a well-known, real-life figure, her presence in the work lends Rafaela's story a sense of verisimilitude, since Stolz's travels to and performance in Rio are historically accurate events. The narrator even tries to enhance the realism of the scenario by mentioning the article written about her and trying to paraphrase what he remembers from it (152).

In spite of the similarities between Rafaela and Stolz and the references to women DeCoster cited from Valera's letters, she does not, however, resemble any of them in detail. It seems in this regard Valera remained faithful to his aesthetic ideas relating to the invention of characters. As we noted earlier, in 1897, to his relative Juan Moreno Güeto, he declared, "Nada me ha repugnado más toda mi vida que tomar exactamente de la realidad a mis seres novelescos. Lo que sí hago y no puedo menos de hacer para crearlos es tomar algo de acá y de allá, amasarlo y barajarlo todo y formar un compuesto que a nada ni a nadie se parezca" (C 6, 264).

In relation to Juanita, it also appears certain that she was inspired by at least one real-life figure. Valera drew upon his own *costumbrista* piece of 1872, in writing *Juanita la Larga*; and *La Cordobesa* was evidently based on real-life elements.



According to Andrés Amorós, many elements of *Juanita la Larga* were featured in this earlier work, including, “el marido ausente, la mitad del tiempo; las comidas, como alboronía y guiso de habas, con idéntica explicación; la criada preferida y el criado bufón; las ‘daifas forasteras’; el imperio de chisme, en un pueblo donde es imposible ocultar nada; la visita de las mozas a la fuente, la tertulia en la botica, [etc.]” (*La obra literaria de Valera*, 293). Equally, Juanita and her mother Juana were first mentioned in *La Cordobesa*. In this *costumbrista* sketch, Valera wrote:

Así sucedía en mi lugar con una mujer que llamaban Juana la Larga, la cual murió ya; y es muy cierto que ha dejado una hija, heredera de sus procedimientos arcanos, pero el genio no se hereda, y la hija de Juana la Larga no llega ni con mucho a donde llegaba su madre; es mucho menos larga en todo...<sup>90</sup>

Evidently, Valera’s fictional depiction of the two women deviates significantly from reality. While *La Cordobesa* describes Juana, the mother, as being the accomplished one, in the novel it is the daughter, Juanita, who proves to be accomplished, and in possession of a range of impressive traits and abilities.

Among them, Juanita is described as being a skilled seamstress. Comparing her to Doña Inés’s maid, the narrator informs us:

Todo lo que pudiesen hacer Serafina y otras del lugar era una chapucería cursi si se comparaba con las confecciones de nuestra heroína, que estaba al corriente de las últimas modas de París, que recibía los figurines, y que, ajustándose a ellos, sin encadenar servilmente su fantasía a una imitación minuciosa, ideaba, trazaba, cortaba y hacía trajes para las mujeres dignos de figurar en los salones de la corte. (*Juanita la Larga*, 143)

But her talent does not end with her trade. Juanita is described as having a natural “despejo” and “viveza”, and we are told that the village schoolteacher, Don Pascual, delighted in giving her lessons in her free time as she did not have the luxury of attending school formally:

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Amorós, *La obra literaria de Valera*, 293. From *Obras Completas*. vol. 3, Aguilar edition, 1958.

Hacía mucho honor a su maestro ... salió discípula tan aventajada, que avergonzaba a casi todos los que a la escuela asistían. Nadie sabía mejor que ella el Catecismo de Ripalda y el epítome de la Gramática. Nadie conocía mejor las cuatro reglas. Había aprendido también Juanita algo de Geografía y de Historia; y ya, cuando apenas tenía nueve años, recitaba con mucha gracia varios antiguos romances y no pocas fábulas de Samaniego. (*Juanita la Larga*, 179)

Her native brightness is depicted at numerous other turns in the novel, through her manner of manipulating and duping Inés and Andrés; and not least, of course, through her confrontation with the shopkeeper Ramón following Antoñuelo's robbery. Valera shows his heroine to be a deft negotiator, with her ultimate victory winning Ramón's trust to pay back the stolen money herself.

Most interesting of all, however, is how the Juanas' side-by-side depictions tend to demonstrate Juanita's instincts, shrewdness and ability to reason as surpassing those of her mother.

In Chapter 17, for instance, following the church scandal, Juana is shown pacing "como leona en su jaula" (201). She is outraged at the humiliation her daughter has just endured and encourages the girl to seek vengeance, first suggesting that it is the daughters of the "escribano" who are to blame. Juanita responds, "Mira, mamá, no me hables de las hijas del escribano. No las quiero mal. Si me miraban con descaro y con susto, fue de puro tontas" (202). Next, Juana blames the priest, Father Anselmo. Again, Juanita retorts: "No maldigas del padre. Es un bendito espejo de santidad. Mucho de lo que dijo en el sermón era juicioso ... La Reina Católica prohibiría sin duda la seda, porque en su tiempo se entenderían las cosas de muy otra manera que en el día, y además porque la seda costaría entonces un ojo de la cara y arruinaría al país" (203). Following her thoughtful analysis of the motivations behind the priest's cutting sermon, Juanita becomes exercised herself about the humiliation she has just faced, declaring that Doña Inés, "la que ha armado contra mí todo este gatuperio" (*ibid.*), is the one who should pay. Although Juanita comes around to the idea that vengeance should be sought, her conversation with her mother illustrates the girl's clear-headed, circumspect nature; and even maturity in her willingness to give other offending members the benefit of the doubt. In fact the maturity and restraint exercised by

Juanita in this scene inverts the role of mother and daughter—it is Juanita who behaves like the adult.

In Chapter, 20, Juanita's good sense is again brought into sharp relief by Juana's impulsive nature. Having received a letter from Don Paco in which he asks for the girl's hand in marriage, her mother rushes to celebrate the possibility. As the narrator explains, "No era Juana muy reflexiva ni previsora y no pensó en las dificultades: sólo pensó en el triunfo que ella y su hija, en su sentir, habían alcanzado" (225). Again, it is Juanita who sees clearly, reasoning: "Pues oye, mamá, yo no quiero que nadie reviente; lo mejor es que no lo sepa nadie ... tú, él y yo, seríamos los reventados si hiciésemos tal desatino ... Nos echarían del lugar de patatas" (ibid.).

Juanita is not always calm. Following Don Paco's disappearance in Chapter 28, the girl loses her temper and makes threats: "De todo eso tiene la culpa, esa perra de doña Inés ... La desollaré, la mataré, la descuartizaré" (282). In this instance, it is her mother who behaves calmly, insisting, "cuidado con lo que haces, porque si tú castigaras a doña Inés sin precaución, la justicia ... te podría meter en la cárcel o enviarte a presidio" (282). However, as in other cases of Juanita's temper flaring (and there are many—her temper is depicted as her one consistent "flaw"), the girl does not allow it to take control. Once more Juanita will calm down, her manner of proceeding demonstrating an impressive ability to exercise restraint, and approach the problem she is facing in a clever, roundabout way. Most importantly, this scene is useful for illustrating Juanita's loyalty and caring nature (and of course some guilt). Where in earlier instances the girl is depicted as calm following insults made against her, here, emotions run high as something greater is at stake. She is worried for the life of a friend: "Don Paco no ha parecido. Mi corazón presiente mil desventuras" (280).

This is not the first time in his fiction Valera presents a character who is innately superior to a parent. Clara is described as having taken after Blanca a good deal, being "melancólica, vehemente y apasionada, como su madre" (*El comendador Mendoza*, 441). On the other hand, the narrator adds, "Por dicha, Clara carecía de aquel orgullo, de aquel imperio de su madre, y el lado oscuro y tenebroso de su espíritu estaba suavemente iluminado por un rayo celeste de humildad, resignación y mansedumbre"

(ibid.). And from Valera's perspective, perhaps most important of all: "Clara era mil veces más amante que su madre, y se abandonaba a la dulzura de amar, si bien con recelo siempre de pecar amando" (ibid.).

Valera's other characters differ from their parents, too. Pepita Jiménez is described as "de gran despejo natural" (*Pepita Jiménez*, 71), while her mother is considered to be "una mujer vulgar, de cortas luces y de instintos groseros" (72). Doña Luz is described as discipline personified while her father, referred to as having been "despilfarrador y perdulario" (*Doña Luz*, 50), leaves her relatively impoverished at the time of his death. Similarly, Luis de Vargas is portrayed as a young man with a serious disposition, eager to take on commitments—first the priesthood, next a wife and family—while his father, Don Pedro, has proven to be the opposite, "una especie de don Juan Tenorio" (*Pepita Jiménez*, 70), who fathered Luis out of wedlock, and as the young man puts it, made his mother "víctima de sus liviandades" (ibid., 76). Equally, the daughters of Rafaela and Faustino fulfill plans to enter the convent, which may in large part be due to the shame they feel over the circumstances into which they have been born—as is largely the case with Doña Luz and Luis de Vargas—nonwithstanding this, the paths they choose are paths none of their parents would have been able for, either because of their own lack of discipline, or inability to have faith. In all these cases, Valera demonstrates that one's genetic roots do not determine one's life path and lifestyle, even if shame, an adopted sentiment, does. In this respect, Valera might have regarded himself as an improvement upon his father. Although he describes the man as "muy querido y respetado de cuantos le conocieron, porque era excelente" (C 2, 32), he admits to Don José having been "poco cultivado, salvo en las cosas de su profesión, que la sabía muy bien" (ibid.), a condition Valera strived to surpass through voracious reading in early childhood and his continued, lifelong application to learning and intellectual pursuits.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> "En Cabra me crié y aprendí las primeras letras, y empecé a aficionarme a la lectura desde la edad de seis años, en que leía de corrido, siendo mi libro favorito la historia antigua de Rollin, traducida por Villanueva [sic]....

... Mi afición a la lectura siguió siempre en aumento; pero sin poner orden en ella. Lo mismo leía yo la *Anatomía* del doctor Martín Martínez que un tratado de castrametación. Ya de doce o trece años había leído a Voltaire" (C 2, 33).

Valera's ultimate demonstration of his belief in an individual's ability to determine his or her own destiny free from the limitations of genealogical factors is made in relation to his heroine, Rafaela, of *Genio y figura*. While she may have become a prostitute like her mother, the social ascendance she is shown to attain through her innate "talento", not to mention sheer determination, is remarkable. What is more, like many of Valera's characters, she arrives at her enviable position in spite of having little parental guidance. She never knew her father and, referring to her mother, she writes in her *Confidencias*, "Siendo yo muy niña todavía, me dejó huérfana y muy menesterosa" (*Genio y figura*, 210). While Rafaela's situation is the most dramatic of any of Valera's heroines, by some distance, many of his characters are depicted as having lost a parent in childhood, sometimes both parents, and are nonetheless portrayed in spite of such challenges as growing up to be admirably mannered, self-disciplined adults.

### **Valera's Disappointment with his Niece, Antonia**

Valera's depiction of individuals thriving because of their internal drive for excellence and respectability appears to contrast sharply with his experience of his niece, Antonia, about whom Sofía and he corresponded at the time of their sister Ramona's death in 1869 (discussed in chapter 3). Once praised by Valera as "una chica de mucho talento y de un carácter como a mí me gustan" (C 2, 390), in letters to his sister from the early 1880s she is now the subject of disappointment. It would seem that the guidance available to her in the absence of her mother did not prove enough to keep certain latent defects from developing. The misgivings Valera had expressed in 1869 about her "flojera" are born out in the author's observations about her insalubrious lifestyle and company in adulthood. In a letter believed to have been written in 1880, Valera updates Sofía as to the now young woman's status, lamenting,

Dicho sea entre nosotros, esta vida es bastante desastrada. Antoñita duerme o está en cama hasta las tres o las cuatro de la tarde; y se acuesta a las tres o las cuatro de la mañana. Hasta dicha hora, suele estar en casa de Catalina Casa-Bayona, tertulia un poco rara, donde se fuma, hay poca luz, se juega y se suele *amar*, empezando por la señora de la casa, quien, a pesar de sus años, parece que está *metida* con el

viejo general Concha ... Esta vida de Antoñita ni es a propósito para que se case, ni para tener salud y buenos colores. Así es que la muchacha está flaca, desencajada, con largas ojeras y con color de azafrán en el rostro. (C 3, 200)

It goes without saying that no depiction such as this is ever presented in any of Valera's novels. Even in works such as *Pasarse de listo* and *Las ilusiones del doctor Faustino*, both of which according to DeCoster represent in Madrid "a corrosive portrait of an idle and self-indulgent society, intent only on pleasure" (*Juan Valera*, 124), Valera foregoes the kind of vulgar detail describing Antonia's habits and social circle, conveying his point instead through the depiction of a society which has nothing better to do than spread gossip and slander and casually engage in extramarital affairs.

It is also certain that not one of Valera's heroines is portrayed with Antonia's "flojera"—not even his earlier-period heroines who, if attractive and blessed with qualities elevating them above most, are certainly more averagely depicted than Doña Luz, Juanita la Larga, Donna Olimpia and Rafaela of his fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth novels respectively. In his letter to Sofia of 1869, the author remarks of his specific concerns, as we noted earlier, relating to Antoñita: "ni se lava, ni se mira, ni se adorna, ni aprende nada, desatendiendo igualmente el alma y el cuerpo" (C 2, 390). Although an earnest advocate of learning and intellectual pursuits for women Valera seems to place equal importance upon the attendance to one's physical appearance. Indeed, Valera's complaint about Antonia in adulthood describes her unhealthy appearance in enough detail to indicate this as a particular preoccupation of the author's.<sup>92</sup> Fittingly, Valera frequently gives individual attention to the description of how his heroines attend to such matters.

Indeed, the care his heroines give to the maintenance of their appearance may be the only quality, other than good health, which almost all seem to have in common. And neither is good health an insignificant quality, given that one of the dearest women to him, Lucía Palladi, appeared to be plagued by ill health—the cause, incidentally, for

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<sup>92</sup> "Sólo una extremada malicia o una rara perversión del modo de sentir puede hacer que de nuestro propio cuerpo nos avergoncemos ... El cuidar con cierto esmero de nuestro ser corporal es un deber que tenemos con nosotros mismos y que no se contrapone, sino que completa el superior cuidado con que debemos mirar por nuestras almas" (*Meditaciones utópicas sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1418).

which she determined their relationship would have to remain platonic. Its outward manifestation earned her the nickname “La Muerta”, and Valera’s comment on having seen her for the first time after several years, confirms its appropriateness: “Al verla recordé aquella horrible historia de Poe,” (C 1, 557), he wrote to Cueto from Paris in June of 1857. Three years later she was dead (DeCoster, *Juan Valera*, 17).

Equally significant, Valera’s correspondence bears testimony to the burden of such concerns, which were universal to all in his time. Not only was medicine not as advanced, resulting in the deaths of several loved ones from illnesses which today could have been cured; but there are frequent references to epidemics, as a source of trepidation to all. Travel plans were frequently cancelled for fear of contracting illness; and during one particularly brutal outbreak of tuberculosis in 1890, Valera describes the disease’s impact on the Capital’s residents: “La miseria es grande, y las enfermedades hacen estragos. Muere tanta gente diariamente como en tiempo de cólera, y los madrileños andan mustios y asustados, notándose la falta de alegría, de concurrencia y de bullicio, en calles, paseos y teatros” (C 5, 221). Only two months later he will write to his sister again on the same subject, stating, “es un horror la mortalidad de personas conocidas”, mentioning that 6 out of the Academia Española’s 36 members have died already from the disease in “pocos meses” (C 5, 234).

What is also noteworthy in Valera’s observation about Antonia is the primary concern he gives to the matter of marriage. His niece’s lifestyle is not good for her health (certainly not its outward manifestation) he claims, but first and foremost it is detrimental to her chance of finding a husband. For all of the independence displayed by Valera’s heroines, it must be noted that almost all, ultimately, succumb to marriage. Even Doña Luz marries, her separation from Don Jaime occurring only from the discovery that he was with her for money and not love. In the case of Rosita, another of Valera’s most independent heroines, she gets to the age of 40 before she realises that time is running out:

Aquella mocedad, aquella gallardía, aquella gracia que aún conservaba, eran como un milagro de su voluntad enérgica, y el milagro podía tener término. Algunas canas que aparecían entre su negra y hermosa cabellera eran el único signo exterior

que le anunciaba la venida de la vejez. Esto bastó, no obstante, para que Rosita pensase con espanto en la vejez, y sobre todo en la vejez solitaria. Un deseo ambicioso de encumbrarse más, de figurar y de lucir fuera de Villabermeja, de triunfos, de esplendores y de conquistas en más vasto teatro, y de deslumbrar aún con la luz de su belleza antes que del todo se eclipsase, se apoderó entonces del alma de Rosita. (*Las ilusiones*, 361)

Lacking an ideal candidate, she chooses as her husband Don Claudio Martínez, a politician adored by all, although, in regard to his recognition and favour, “No era Rosita mujer que se dejase deslumbrar por tales grandezas” (362); Rosita is still thinking of Faustino. On the previous page, her memory of him is put forward as one of the reasons for which she perhaps never considered marriage earlier; and here, referring to Rosita’s understanding that Claudio is really only a “personaje vulgar”, the narrator goes on to state, “A veces le comparaba con el cruel alcaide perpetuo, y éste le parecía aún de oro puro...” (ibid.)

Nevertheless, Rosita sees Claudio as being a man who can help her fulfill her ambitions: “D. Faustino era un dije funesto o inútil ... que no servía para nada, mientras que D. Claudio era y podía ser un instrumento provechoso para conseguir multitud de cosas y realizar mil gratos ensueños” (ibid.). But Rosita is even cleverer than that: she sees Claudio as a man with status and assets that combined with her own can serve both of them better as a pair than their own traits and resources could have served them as individuals: “Rosita concibió la idea de su casamiento con don Claudio como una sociedad en comandita, donde, unidos capitales y aptitudes, podrían encumbrarse pronto los socios al pináculo de la riqueza y de los honores” (362)—an interesting description of marriage, considering the lack of team spirit which Valera claimed characterised his own, and even jeopardised his well-being and career (*C* 3, 594).

In any case, the portrayal of Valera’s heroines marrying aligns with his general beliefs about the value of such an arrangement for women. Writing to his daughter Carmen in 1904, he states, “Nada más natural ni razonable que el que toda mujer quiera y busque



marido.... El papel de solterona es poco grato, y no sólo por los leyes y costumbres sociales, sino también por naturaleza” (C 7, 515).

Antonia's laziness, slovenly behaviour and bad company are not Valera's only criticisms of his niece. Letters written in 1882 document how the young woman, who appears to be staying with the author and his family during his second posting in Lisbon, boasts a range of other unattractive qualities. Writing to Sofía in August of 1882, he states, “no hay defecto que no tenga” (C 3, 429). Two weeks later he elaborates upon his grievances, writing: “Nuestra sobrina Antoñita es de una vanidad y una imprudencia maravillosas, que cada día se manifiestan más, exasperada como está con el mal éxito de sus conquistas y coqueterías. Nadie es más noble que ella y todos son *cursis* y plebeyos ... gracias a que la *high life* portuguesa, *cursi* y todo, como es según Antoñita, es dulce, sufrida y de una amabilidad a prueba de desdenes aristocráticos y de tonterías soberbias” (C 3, 432). According to Valera, she is livid over being teased for her “coqueterías” with one gentleman and for a certain woman's failure to take her brother Juanito's interest in her seriously: “Pepita se divierte algo con él, pero no le hace caso. Esto tiene también furiosa a Antoñita, que pone de *cursis* y de plebeyas a las *Kruses*” (ibid.). In addition to portraying her as very proud, Valera also suggests that she has much of the temper and petulance with which he often describes his wife. As he informs his sister, not only do Antonia and Dolores get into fights, “según mi mujer ... cuando se pelea con Antoñita, Antoñita no nos halla a nosotros muy nobles tampoco. En suma, es una manía singular la que le ha entrado de creerse tan ilustre” (ibid.).

This preoccupation with status is not a common one among Valera's heroines; and the most salient example of it is in relation to Doña Inés of *Juanita la Larga*, a character painted as unattractive in myriad ways. Donna Olimpia is also boastful at times about her lineage, although far more benignly so. Valera's other heroines, by contrast, are usually depicted as comfortable with their status. Costanza, already an aristocrat, is after money, not social ascension. Beatriz and Rosita may appear to be exceptions, but as ambitious to reach new social heights as they may be, neither is depicted with the snobbery of Antonia. In fact, Rosita, who has come far by the time she is introduced in *Pasarse de listo*, with Valera-narrator ironically asserting, “ya no se atrevía casi

nadie a llamarla la Reina de las cursis” (78), is very welcoming toward her poorer, Andalusian friends. And Beatriz, who admittedly has social ambitions at the start of the novel, embraces Rosita and her group as much because she is a social character who wants to make friends in the city where she is newly resident. After Braulio’s death, she returns to Andalusia, and following a period of mourning, marries Paco Ramírez, to remain there. Etelvina Mercier, described in chapter 1 of this thesis, is an ambitious social climber; Beatriz’s aspirations extend only so far.

As for Etelvina Mercier, she is an outrageous snob with a misplaced sense of importance and feigned sophistication. However, she is only a minor character, utilised for the purpose of comic relief during a weighty scene in which Faustino appears to be dying from a wound inflicted in his duel with Costanza’s husband, the Marquis of Guadalbarbo. Doña Luz, another of Valera’s aristocratic heroines, is very proud and considers herself to be a class above her fellow villagers, but she is also described as respectful toward them and not interested in receiving recognition for her noble background, refusing to accept the title of “Marquesa” which Don Acisclo offers to assist her in securing after her father’s death. Finally, consider one of the many individuals Rafaela is said to have “improved”—as described earlier in this chapter, she is said to have cured Madame Duval of affectation, in line with Rafaela’s intolerance to it. In this regard, Valera’s heroine does not encourage the aristocratic pretensions which emerge in Don Joaquín after she has cleaned him up, although being an indulgent, light-hearted woman she does not reproach him, but instead finds amusement in his ridiculous behaviour (*Genio y figura*, 110).

In fact, Valera himself did not like affectation or pretentious behaviour. This is evident from his manner of mocking Madrid’s upper classes in *Pasarse de listo*’s opening chapter (discussed in chapter 2). It is also clear from comments the author made, such as the following tongue-in-cheek observation about Madrid: “Es de advertir que la gente elegante de esta corte, o los que se creen elegantes, que serán unas trescientas o cuatrocientas personas a lo más, se han vuelto insoportables con su buen tono”.<sup>93</sup> Consider also Valera’s disparaging remarks about his native *egabrenses*. Their biggest sin in his eyes is their pretence. Writing to his brother, Pepe, from the

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Amorós, *La obra literaria de Valera*, 125. From *Obras Completas* vol. 2, 71, Aguilar edition, 1961.

town of his birth in September of 1859, he comments, “Parecía Cabra una corte, pero yo si hubiera de vivir siempre aquí preferiría, a Cabra, Doña Mencía. Lo que allí presumen de finos me estomaga” (C 1, 632).

It must also be noted that most of Valera’s heroines, and characters in general, if members of the upper classes, do not frequently come from aristocratic backgrounds. Several of those who do are portrayed as particularly morally corrupt, callous or lazy: the Count of Genazahar (*Pepita Jimenez*); Elisa (*Pasarse de listo*); Don Jaime (*Doña Luz*); Don Álvaro (*Juanita la Larga*) and Juan Maury (*Genio y figura*), to name the most salient examples.

Significantly, two of Valera’s most attractive heroines in terms of their personalities and good will, not to mention those which most clearly have his sympathy, are Juanita and Rafaela, who come from the humblest backgrounds of all.

While Valera’s commentary on Antonia’s lifestyle was not made until 1882, observations and criticisms which appear in his correspondence as far back as the late 1840s suggest that she might not have been altogether untypical of his experience of Madrid’s “sociedad elegante”—a good reason for limiting the portrayal of its members in his fiction. Of course the main reason for this choice must also be tied to his aesthetic. All his heroines, in spite, in most cases, of them not proceeding from the aristocracy, are described as being aristocratic by instinct. If Valera was indeed intent on presenting an ideal in his fiction, how could he get any more ideal than this? Portraying the aristocracy would not have left him any room to ascend. In this regard, it is also important to note that the aristocratic figures he does depict are generally from Andalusia. Addressing the view of some that the provenance of these characters renders their degree of refinement unrealistic, Valera defended their portraits in his Postscript to *Las ilusiones*, stating,

En los lugares de Andalucía hay, y puede haber, mujeres que sean la propia discreción y la propia elegancia. No es menester nacer en Madrid para eso. Precisamente, de la pequeña ciudad cuyo nombre callo, y donde yo supongo educada a Constancita y donde Constancita tiene sus devaneos por la reja con el

doctor Faustino, han venido a Madrid nada menos que tres mujeres de nuestra primera aristocracia, que han brillado y brillan, por hermosura, o por ingenio, o por todo. (*Las ilusiones*, 451)

It must also be noted that, as Amorós comments, not even the author himself was noble “en sentido estricto” (*La obra literaria de Valera*, 135), perhaps referring here to the fact that Valera’s mother passed her title to her eldest son, Pepe, and not Valera. Additionally, as Amorós remarks, “Era muy consciente ... de su superioridad cultural sobre casi toda la gran sociedad europea que él trató en Madrid y en las recepciones diplomáticas” (ibid.), thus to some extent his own pride could be responsible for his decision to choose non-aristocratic heroines and gift them with traits ascribed to this most distinguished of classes. Besides, Valera’s view regarding the aristocracy indicates his belief that their gifts are uncommon to other classes—not unobtainable. Writing in April of 1857 from St. Petersburg, he stated,

La ciencia, la virtud, el valor y el ingenio se van a menudo con los burgueses y plebeyos, y abandonan a los nobles; pero lo que no los abandona, y lo que rara vez adquieren los otros, aunque ya con el progreso del tiempo y con el de la humanidad en que creo lo irán adquiriendo también, son los modales elegantes, el trato fino y delicado y la cortesanía y completa apariencia señorial y caballeresca.<sup>94</sup>

Significantly, while Valera attributes the best of manners and discretion to the noble class, he concedes that it is not impossible for others to possess these qualities. Most important of all is his concession, “con el progreso del tiempo y con el de la humanidad ... lo irán adquiriendo también”. With these views in mind, the depictions of Juanita and Rafaela take on a new meaning, for it is clear that Valera has depicted what is possible in his novels and not what is common—his heroines representing the very embodiment of what can emerge from “el progreso del tiempo y con el de la humanidad.”

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Amorós, *La obra literaria de Valera*, 136; see also *C* 1, 444.

Importantly, his heroines in spite of their intrinsic aristocratic-like refinement are portrayed as completely natural—boasting an innate elegance and distinction. The prevailing lack of affectation with which the majority of Valera's women are described reflects, without any doubt, the author's clear preference for a natural manner. His experience of the French actress, Madeleine Brohan (discussed also in chapters 1 and 3 of this thesis), during his posting to St. Petersburg is a particularly apt illustration of his feelings on the subject. Writing to his boss and friend, Leopoldo Augusto Cueto, Valera describes his first meeting with the woman, and what he found attractive about her:

Magdalena estaba en cama, porque se había dislocado un pie haciendo un papel muy apasionado en el teatro. Ella, según afirma, se exalta por tal extremo cuando representa, que no sabe lo que hace, y llora y ríe, y se enfurece de veras, y el día menos pensado será capaz de matarse o de morirse sobre las tablas. Ya, poco ha, se hirió una mano, y en verdad que las tiene preciosas y bien cuidadas, y siguió representando sin advertirlo, hasta que el público lo notó, por la sangre que derramaba y que le manchaba el vestido. En fin, ella estaba en la cama, muy cucamente aderezada para recibir a sus admiradores. Sus ojos tienen una dulzura singular y a veces cierta viveza y resplandor gatunos. La boca grande, los labios frescos y gruesos, y dos hileras de dientes como dos hilos de perlas, que deja ver cuando se ríe, que es a cada instante. Canta como un jilguero y se sabe de memoria todas las cancioncillas francesas más alegres. Ha leído muchas novelas; tiene ideas extrañas y romanescas, y charla como una cotorra y se entusiasma al hablar, y se anima y se pone pálida y colorada, y todo parece natural, sin que vea en ella artificio. Todas estas gracias me hicieron, desde luego notable impresión, entusiasmándome, más que nada, la naturalidad de *bonne fille* de esta comedianta, que verdaderamente hace contraste con la afectación de las damas rusas. (C 1, 477)

Evident from this passage is a certain magnetism that Valera regards Brohan as having, not to mention his attraction to her natural beauty, wit and other charms. Particularly noteworthy, however, is the delight Valera takes in contemplating her

passionate nature—a dominant facet of Katherine Bayard’s nature also.<sup>95</sup> It is no coincidence that several of his heroines, such as Pepita, Rosita, María and Blanca, are portrayed as passionate, even to the point of losing control. In Blanca’s case, her passion is put forward to explain her ardent devotion to God, and at the same time, inability to resist Fadrique’s attraction. Often this passion leads to destructive behaviour—consider also the consequences of Rosita’s temper. And yet, it is clear that Valera found passionate women so fundamentally attractive that even the uglier side of its consequences he was willing to accept. If Valera had to present flawed characters for the purpose of having interesting ones, it appears that aside from pride, vanity, and the coquetry that so often resulted, he most preferred to depict women who had this fiery quality. Even Juanita, who remains completely in control of her romantic passions, is described as having a fierce temper. At one point, the girl is so angry her mother fears a “delito” (*Juanita la Larga*, 282).

While according to Sáenz de Tejada Benvenuti, Valera appreciated his sister Sofia’s softer, gentler, more “feminine” side (*Cartas íntimas*, 20), it is also clear that he valued strength of character (and even physical strength, considering his depiction of Juanita), as evident from a letter to Sofia of October 1889 in which he commends his daughter Carmen for her “imperio” (*C* 5, 193). Moreover, a letter that Valera wrote during his Washington posting to his son Carlos highlights not only the impression studious and intelligent women made upon him, but his admiration for the strong, commanding types also:

Muchas señoritas y señoras son marisabidillas y dicen que saben hasta el latín y el griego y le largan a uno un latinajo. Otras señoras son amazonas y viajan solas y llevan látigo y tienen perros y caballos. Todas se van de paseo y al teatro y hasta de viaje con los caballeros. (*C* 4, 89)

Comical in its simplicity, the extract highlights Valera’s interest in two types of women. It also appears to reveal the author’s experience of a reality in which women who identified with or possessed traits or interests in one category did not often

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<sup>95</sup> “Cuando se electriza se cree tan cargada de electricidad que asegura haber encendido a veces un poco de gas con la chispa que sale de su dedo meñique” (*C* 4, 281).

identify or possess traits of another. Observing a similar situation, Valera wrote to Menéndez Pelayo from his posting in Vienna, “hay un enjambre de marisabidillas y de escritoras.... Y pásmase usted, algunas muy guapas, cosa de maravillar, porque no sé por qué, los genios hembras suelen ser feos y estafalarios” (C 5, 632). In light of Valera’s ideals it should not be surprising that his heroines represent a range of remarkable qualities—what Lou Charnon-Deutsch referred to as “the dream of plenty” (*Gender and Representation*, 21). For the author was surrounded in life by all types of women: some who impressed, some who disappointed, but all who, as his correspondence reveals, the author studied, his conclusions representing the blueprint for what would later become his heroines. In fact Valera himself signalled his willingness to apply his imagination to the transformation of real-life mediocrity into something better. Writing to Sofía in June of 1885, he remarked, “Yo hubiera sido el hombre más feliz de la tierra con una mujer propia que me hubiera respetado un poco; aunque sus calidades físicas, morales e intelectuales, hubieran sido menos que medianas. Con mi imaginación hubiera yo suplido las faltas...” (C 4, 317).

Along these lines, Valera’s correspondence to his daughter Carmen confirms that in the one case in which the author actually had the chance to mould and develop a real female and not just a fictional one, he applied the same standards to his “hija” as he would to those “hijas de mi espíritu”, as he once referred to his heroines, encouraging the girl to study and become “a very accomplished young lady”, citing the importance of her learning the letters and sciences (C 4, 314), while at the same time expressing ill-disguised pride at reports of her athleticism (C 4, 386) and achievements in horse-riding. Writing to Menéndez Pelayo in 1891, Valera tells his friend, “Mis chicos se divierten mucho, sobre todo Carmencita, que es muy intrépida amazona, y monta mucho a caballo ... Salvo el sobresalto en que mi mujer y yo estamos cuando Carmencita va de expedición, de que vuelva con alguna descalabradura, todo va a pedir de boca” (C 5, 361).

Antonia will resurface as a subject of Valera’s correspondence at other points, not least in 1889, when his comments turn from being critical to sympathetic. His niece is older now and is struggling to find herself a husband. Valera narrates her missteps to Sofía:

Antoñita anda ahora muy sobreexcitada de nervios con un semi-novio que le ha salido. Su costumbre es provocar y solevantar a los hombres, lo cual los excita ... pero no los excita para casarse. Ahora Antoñita ha ejercido estas provocaciones sobre un Sr. Sánchez Bedoya, diputado canovista y sevillano rico; pero esto señor ha tiempo que está metido con la Baquer de Retamoso.... Ella se pega como una lapa. Va resultando de todo que Antoñita nada logre, y que en cambio la jamona ofendida y su[s] amigas y cofrades de portería se pongan de uñas contra nuestra sobrina. (C 5, 136)

Having given a matter-of-fact account of his niece's activities, two-and-a-half months later, Valera will refer to the same "semi-novio", this account indicating the development of a clear sympathy for her position. He writes: "La pobre Antoñita tiene mala ventura para novios y sospecho que ya no se casará, aunque ella no pierde las ilusiones ni los deseos. Últimamente estaba muy solevantada creyendo que iba a coger a un señor de Sevilla...; pero Antoñita persigue ella misma demasiado, y los pícaros hombres huyen de quien los persigue. (C 5, 153)

In another letter, five months later, Valera will drive home his niece's desperation, stating, "Solevanta al sevillano, y, como es natural, él la piropea. Sobre tan frágil base levanta Antoñita el caramillo de sus esperanzas matrimoniales" (C 5, 204). While it was once Antonia's party-girl lifestyle which Valera worried would see her "quedarse para vestir imagenes", these later letters suggest that his niece's neediness is largely to blame. Antonia appears to be unlike his daughter, if only because of her age—Carmen was 18; Antonia, 37 or 38, according to Valera (C 5, 241). Writing of Carmen's attitude toward marriage, Valera remarks: "Ella o no le desea con vehemencia o sabe con muchísimo arte disimular su deseo" (C 5, 193).

And yet neither is Valera complacent about his daughter's ability to find a husband. In numerous letters to Sofía from 1889 and 1890, he worries specifically about the challenge not having a dowry will pose to her. In one he writes:



Carmencita está muy guapa y es muy lista ... A pesar de todo su talento y demás atractivos, considero difícil que con sus aspiraciones y viviendo en el círculo en que vive halle novio regular y se case pronto y bien ... Yo no aconsejo ni me meto en nada, pero sentiré que a Carmen le suceda lo que a Antoñita y se queda también para vestir santos. (C 5, 254)

In another, he outright expresses outright hope that his daughter, summering abroad, will not be too choosy in selecting a potential mate, stating, “Mucho celebraré, aunque no impulsaré a nada, que no desdeñe cualquiera proporción regular que se ofrezca. Las muchachas sin dote son muy difíciles de casar” (C 5, 166). Valera’s obvious sympathy for his niece’s position would suggest the author believes his daughter’s remaining single would be the worst outcome for her personally. However, another letter he writes to his sister reveals his interest in having Carmen marry, at least in part, to relieve the financial burden her being single is placing on him. Having referred to his efforts to secure his son, Luis, paid employment in the diplomat corps, he turns his attention to the matter of settling his daughter, writing, “Si ocurriese después la dicha (pero ésta es más difícil) de que se enamorase de Carmen algún ricacho y se casase con ella, el negocio sería redondo, y acabarían nuestros apuros y angustias, aunque yo me quedase cesante para siempre” (C 5, 271). In this, Valera appears to be abandoning his values, as discussed in chapter 3, as they were once expressed in relation to his sister Sofia’s situation.

Money worries plagued Valera his entire life. Letters to his parents written in youth refer to their “*sindineritis* crónica” (C 1, 173), and it is clear his problems in this regard have still not abated in his sixties, as can be seen from its presence as a central preoccupation in his correspondence of this period. The stated reason for which he has been forced to accept diplomatic posting after diplomatic posting when he would have been happier “cesante” and “litereando” between Cabra, Madrid and Paris, will again force him, according to Bravo-Villasante, into accepting an appointment to Vienna in 1893, although at least this position, as Ambassador to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, his most prestigious appointment yet, will be of great significance to him personally, even if it does not prove to be the windfall required to leave him completely care-free until death.

Considering the degree to which financial worries were a driving force in Valera's life—dictating his employment and where he resided for years on end, the amount of time and contact he had with his children,<sup>96</sup> and even harmonious relations with his wife, letters to whom suggest she was particularly furious during periods in which he was without “turrón”—unsurprisingly money concerns are not absent from his novels. We have already seen money, or at least the scarcity of it, as a central preoccupation of his main protagonists in *Pasarse de listo* and *Las ilusiones*, but money concerns are a key element in some of his other works, too, although they seem to affect characters and their choices to a lesser extent.

Writing to his sister in 1880 about his niece, Luisa's, intention to marry, Valera highlights his belief in the importance of money, stating: “Lo único que te callas, y es cosa, aunque prosaica, que importa en extremo mientras vivimos en este bajo mundo, es si el novio es muy rico o regularmente; en suma no tocas la cuestión de hacienda” (C 3, 223).

While the eponymous Pepita Jiménez is described as having married an elderly uncle, Don Gumersindo, to resolve her family's destitution, Valera has her widowed within a short space of time, and the novel begins with her wealthy, single (although still in mourning) and ideally positioned to serve as the young local woman for whom the newly returned Luis de Vargas eschews the priesthood in favour of marriage, family life, and his role as landowner. In *El Comendador Mendoza*, a money question is central, but revolves around Blanca and Fadrique's bid to keep their daughter, the young Clara, from inappropriately receiving an inheritance from a man whom they know is not her father. This proves possible because her true father, Fadrique, is in possession of the same wealth, and through a clever arrangement is able to transfer the sum in question to Don Casimiro, the old man whom Clara is being pressured to marry, thus freeing the girl to marry the young Carlos instead. In spite of the centrality of money matters, not a single character in Valera's third novel is ever depicted as deprived of means, even if they are of freedom. In *Juanita la larga*, a great deal of attention is given in the novel's early chapters to depicting characters' wealth via the

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<sup>96</sup> In fact Valera was on his diplomatic posting in Washington when his son Carlos fell ill and died in the summer of 1885.

description of their assets; and all are described as possessing material comforts if not in excess of, then certainly in line with what one would expect for their class. In *Doña Luz*, much is made of the fact that Luz's father leaves her relatively impoverished in relation to her class. And yet, at the same time, Valera's heroine is financially independent to the degree that when she does finally meet someone attractive to her, Don Jaime, we understand her decision to marry him is in no way motivated by any need for financial maintenance (even though it turns out his choice is). In *Genio y figura* where Rafaela in her early life is forced to work as a prostitute and cross the globe in search of work, she is not described as ever having suffered from this position. With good fortune and little sacrifice, she turns out to be one of the, if not the, wealthiest of all of Valera's characters.

It would seem that in these other novels, while addressing the financial wherewithal of his characters—and in some cases having their money shortages restrict certain actions and lifestyle choices—Valera nevertheless avoids having the money question dictate their choices in relation to marriage. Costanza marks a major exception to this rule, but the other exceptions involving only minor characters—such as Nicolasa who marries Don Casimiro, in *El comendador*—serve only to emphasise the virtue and attractive ideals of his principal protagonists who do marry for love. The case of Rafaela in *Genio y figura* may, as in the case of Costanza, represent an exception of sorts; however, even in this novel Rafaela is described as caring for Don Joaquín as a spouse long before they marry, their legal union representing a mere formality in which they each benefit demonstrably—he as much as she. In any case, in every example other than *Las ilusiones* and perhaps *Genio y figura* Valera's characters marry unambiguously for love. In *Pasarse de listo*, Beatriz is described as having loved Braulio in spite of his modest income and more advanced stage of life. After Braulio's death and her mourning period have ended Beatriz, having retired to Andalusia, marries Paco Ramírez for love. In this regard, Valera's novels represent a substantially more idealised version of what Valera experienced in life: firstly because his characters are for the most part positioned in such a way that they have few, if any, financial worries, and secondly because even in cases where they could benefit from a marriage “por interés”, they choose not to. Significantly, Doña Luz not only refuses to marry for money but terminates relations with her husband, Don Jaime, when she

discovers that he has married her for financial gain. In *El comendador Mendoza*, the young Lucía marries Fadrique in spite of his poverty (and old age)—although he is described as having been reluctant to ask for her hand, anticipating that such considerations would make him unattractive in her eyes. Felicitously, she sees neither as an obstacle, with the narrator explaining,

Precisamente por esa pobreza y por el motivo que la había causado, amaba y admiraba más al comendador. El descuidado desdén, la alegre calma y el nada trabajoso ni lamentable abandono con que don Fadrique se había desprendido de más de cuatro millones, valían más de mil en la poética y generosa mente de Lucía.

Esta llegó a veces a preguntar a su tío (sabido es que tenía el defecto de ser muy preguntona) que por qué no se casaba. Cuando el tío le contestaba que porque era viejo, Lucía le aseguraba que era mozo o que estaba mejor que los mejores mozos. Cuando el tío contestaba que porque era pobre, Lucía afirmaba que la paga de oficial retirado era más que suficiente.... (*El comendador Mendoza*, 451)

### **The Decision to Marry and Disillusionment with Married Life**

Valera's decision to marry Dolores Delavat does not appear to have been financially motivated,<sup>97</sup> financial motivations to such an arrangement were common and accepted. His correspondence is replete with references to people who he suggests were persuaded in their choice of husband and wife by financial considerations; advice he gave to his nephew, Juanito, in Washington encourages him to take such factors into account in choosing which young ladies to pursue; a youthful Valera nearly married for the security offered by a Portuguese woman, Julia Pacheco, with whom he broke off an engagement twice.

Although Valera's "ideas poéticas", which he termed them, served as a primary impediment to him going through with marriage to Pacheco for such prosaic reasons,

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<sup>97</sup> Carlos Sáenz de Tejada Benvenuti believes it was, referring to their marriage as a "boda de pura conveniencia", referring to Dolores's money as a "fortuna modesta que [Valera] juzgaba complemento imprescindible de su sueldo diplomático para vivir de acuerdo con sus aficiones." *Juan Valera—Serafín Estébanez Calderón (1850-1858)*, 147.

the author's reasons for marrying Dolores Delevat in 1867 did not appear to be much more romantic. He wrote to his nephew Salvador, only days before the ceremony, "A fin de ir realizando la vida lo menos mal posible, he determinado casarme con la señorita ... No es *βαθήκυλλπος*, pero es joven, graciosa y muy inocente y buena muchacha" (C 2, 330). A rather unenthusiastic explanation for his reasons for marrying, such a statement would not seem particularly significant, and could even be interpreted as bravado if it were not for Valera's reflections many years later. In a letter written from March of 1885 he will refer to his wife's contempt, claiming, "Todo esto es muy triste; y no porque yo haya tenido jamás una pasión viva por Dolores" (C 4, 283). In 1890 he will declare unequivocally: "Yo me casé tontamente, sin cálculo y sin amor, por tontería" (C 5, 230), and also, "Siempre que vuelvo la vista atrás y pienso en mi casamiento, me asombra lo inexplicable y absurdo de aquel acto, tan sin propósito y tan sin conocer el carácter de mi entonces futura" (C 5, 186). Are these simply the words of a man hurt by a woman he did love? We may remember (as highlighted in chapter 1) Valera's reference to his marriage as having been "un delito de egoísmo miserable" (C 2, 409). Numerous letters written in the two months leading up to their union also bring into question his motivations for marrying Dolores and suggest that his retrospective appraisal of the marriage as having been "por tontería", is not unjustified.

The first letter in which any reference is made to his intention to marry Dolores is to the woman herself, dated the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, two months before the wedding. In it, he refers to his delight on receiving a letter from her mother indicating that his advances are welcome. He also refers to the fact that this process of seeking her hand only began 20 days earlier with a communication to her mother (although he claims his interest was piqued on seeing her the previous year in Biarritz).

Considering Valera's intentions, it is surprising that only two days later, in a letter dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, he will write to his friend Gumersindo Laverde about an affair from which he is trying to extricate himself. Not only does he sound anxious, his references to the woman as "la prójima pecadora" and references to the devil's involvement suggest that she was most likely married. What is more, Valera's suggestion that he may not be strong enough to pull himself out indicates that his

interest in the woman is powerful. And yet in the midst of all of this he is considering marriage to another woman? He writes to Laverde:

Estoy muy preocupado con mil cosas y no tengo tranquilidad de espíritu para escribir nada ... Sepa usted, y esto se lo digo con el mayor sigilo, que pienso nada menos en casarme y que tengo la novia en París ... una chica de 18 años, bastante guapa. Lo malo está en que he menester romper con otros amores más profanos y me duele herir el amor y el amor propio, y causar disgustos y resentimientos amargos. Me he venido aquí huyendo de Madrid, donde está la prójima pecadora y, como si dijéramos, para romper con menos violencia los lazos que forjó el diablo, ponerme bien con Dios y prepararme a recibir los santos sacramentos. Aún no sé si los lazos diabólicos serán tan fuertes que impidan los otros lazos santos y lo descompongan todo. (C 2, 316)<sup>98</sup>

The next letter, dated neither to his fiancé nor his mother-in-law, is one to Alarcón from the 28th of October, indicating that his friend is encouraging him to marry and that Valera is in bad humour although the cause of this is not entirely clear. (He does not appear to share the same level of confidence with Alarcón as he does with Laverde.) Notwithstanding this, he responds to his friend:

Lo difícil está en hallar mujer que me pete y convenga y que se allane a cargar conmigo...

.... No puede Vd. figurarse lo aburrido, gibado y decaído de ánimo que me siento. Tal vez el casarme, como Vd. me aconseja, sería remedio a mi mal. Casado con una muchacha que yo quisiese y que me quisiese, no tendría yo dificultad en retirarme a Cabra o a Doña Mencía y acabar mi vida con un idilio. (C 2, 321)

Was Valera unduly influenced by the opinion of others? Was he full of illusions regarding the lifestyle and outcome in which marriage would result?

In another letter addressed to Laverde, the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, he explains his presence in Paris, expressing unease: “Lo de mi probable boda me tiene harto imaginativo,

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<sup>98</sup> In a letter dated one month later, the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, he writes to Pedro Antonio de Alarcón that Dolores is 20 (C 2, 326).

caviloso y preocupado. A veces se me antoja que yo no soy para casado. En fin, estoy triste e inquieto. Más me hubiera valido meterme monje benedictino, si hubiera yo tenido fe. (C 2, 326)

Three days later, Valera writes once again to Alarcón, stating “voy a seguir su consejo ... voy a casarme” (C 2, 326). Significantly, this letter will also reveal that his future brother-in-law has already divulged Dolores’s and his wedding plans to “todos sus compañeros y jefes” (C 2, 327). As Valera goes on to consider the implications, “no ha quedado en París un solo conocido que no esté al corriente de todo. A estas horas sucederá lo mismo en Madrid” (ibid.). Many years later Valera will reflect upon his “temor de escándalo” as the primary reason for which he cannot separate permanently from Dolores. Might this fear have trapped him into going through with a plan he was not entirely committed to?

In one last letter written to Laverde, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, three weeks before his wedding, Valera describes his planned marriage in more positive terms, stating that “Mi novia me parece excelente muchacha y yo me siento muy prendado de ella y resignado a echarme a cuestras la cruz del matrimonio” (C 2, 329). He also refers to the five or six hours of “pláticas tiernas” he has daily with Dolores during which he claims, “no me aburro. Este milagro es de muy buen agüero” (ibid.). However, in a letter Valera wrote only five days earlier, mentioning the same “pláticas” to Alarcón on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, Valera sounds less cheerful, describing them as “Demasiadas ya para un corazón de 43 años como el mío” (C 2, 327).

Finally, resigned to marriage and only a day from his wedding, Valera writes one last time to his friend Gumersindo Laverde, in perhaps his most revealing letter yet as to his motivations for marriage, stating:

Una de las razones que para casarme he tenido es que pienso dejarme de hacer una vida tan de sociedad como hasta aquí y dedicarme con energía y asiduidad a mis proyectos literarios. (C 2, 330)

Just as his dream of retiring to Cabra or Doña Mencía and ending his life “con un idilio” will prove elusive, marriage will ironically prove the precise reason for which Valera will not be able to dedicate himself to literature full time: the cost of maintaining a wife and family being too high, forcing him into repeatedly accepting diplomatic assignments in order to pay the bills. Nonetheless it is clear that Valera viewed marriage as an arrangement that would support his aspirations, not hinder them—the explanation for which must surely lie in his experience of the emotionally and mentally destabilising effect that many of his love affairs had upon him. Bravo-Villasante alludes to this in her statement about the different effect Dolores had upon Valera when he was contemplating a life with her in 1866: “El desasosiego, la duda inquietante, la lucha que ha sostenido con otras mujeres para salir unas veces vencedor, otras vencido quedan disipados” (*Vida de Juan Valera*, 156). Indeed, Valera’s correspondence attests to the fact that periods of anxiety hindered his ability to write. While episodes such as that following his break-up with French singer and actress Madeleine Brohan demonstrated writing to be an excellent outlet for his emotional release from anguish, when he was in the midst of a crisis and not at the other end of it, the stress involved seemed to have the opposite effect.<sup>99</sup> In the same letter to Laverde in which he expresses his need to extricate himself from the affair with a woman in Madrid, Valera writes that “no tengo tranquilidad de espíritu para escribir nada,” and further along, referring to the delicate matter of terminating his relations with her, “[c]on este cuidado y con otros harto graves también, no es de extrañar que mis Musas duerman. Ni verso ni prosa salen de mi pluma” (*C* 2, 316). Emotional turmoil—so frequently the outcome of Valera’s relationships with any number of women, and his affairs with these women so frequently the outcome of his “vida tan de sociedad”—proved detrimental to his creative process, so it appears likely that Valera sought to impose order and calm in his life not only through marriage, but through marriage to a woman who inspired him with little passion.

As it turns out, Valera gravely miscalculated. It would not take years for problems to manifest themselves. Only seven weeks after his wedding, Valera writes to Laverde,

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<sup>99</sup> His marriage with Dolores, on the other hand, is different—representing a problem to be coped with rather than a problem to be solved, explaining why their conflict did not distract Valera to the same degree from being able to write, although it did very clearly impact themes and characterisation within his work.



explaining why he has not had a chance to respond to his friend's letter: "de casado pierdo aún más tiempo que de soltero, acompañado, mimando y aún consolando a mi mujer que, acostumbrada a vivir en París, echa mil cosas de menos en España y, como niña muy mimada, no siempre acierta a llevarlo todo con paciencia" (C 2, 335). Not only would the need to support Dolores financially and to contend with her "rabietas" impede the author from being able to devote himself full-time to his literary pursuits, his wife would fail to provide him with that much needed support Valera saw as essential not only to his own, but to any man's success.

In the context of his wife's on-going disdain, Valera's defence of his heroines in Chapter 16 of *Pasarse de listo* (also cited and discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis and repeated here for the reader's convenience), in spite of several of them having substantial character flaws, takes on new meaning:

Todas estas mujeres (nadie sostendrá lo contrario) se advierten en medio de sus mayores extravíos tal anhelo de infinito amor, tan dulce ternura y tan fervoroso ahínco de hacer el papel de salvadoras y de redentoras, de proporcionar la bienaventuranza o un asomo de bienaventuranza para el hombre querido, aun a costa de la propia condenación, que las perdonamos sin esfuerzo y nos parecen simpáticas. (133-134)

If only Valera's wife had been similarly inclined! In fact, comments Valera made suggest not only a lack of will on her part to be that source of support and encouragement to her husband, but disdain in relation to what she allegedly ridiculed as the Spanish nation's singular obsession with romance: "Mi mujer, por censurarlo todo en España, hallaba que allí nadie piensa en más que enamorar, ni criados, ni señores" (C 4, 259). No wonder Valera devoted so many of his novels to the ultimate depiction of men and women falling in love, the women embracing their role as devoted wives and willing lovers. Not even those who marry men they fail to love prove altogether incapable of acting as if they do. In this way, Valera's heroines represent a substantial improvement upon the disappointment he experienced in Dolores.

In summary, this chapter has explored further biographical influences on Valera's heroines, particularly his more exceptional ones and those who serve as "models" to members of their communities. "Altruistic Faith" by Rose Cleveland, an article Valera discovered during his posting in Washington, D.C., clearly had an impact upon the author, as evident from his references to it and use of it as a concept in both critical works and his later novels. Valera himself proved capable of the generosity required for the practice of such faith, but references to it in his essays identify only the role he feels women should perform in relation to it. His wife, in his own eyes, failed to practice "altruistic faith" and several of his novels very clearly depict the spousal relationship Valera would have liked. Not only are Valera's fictional heroines ardent supporters of their men, willing lovers, cheerful domestic companions, and a source of consolation and comfort in the face of their husbands' personal and professional trials and disappointments, several of them also accept and even love their men in spite of their poverty and old age, and in some cases, because of it. And yet, we have seen in discussions throughout this thesis how Valera never celebrates the submission of his heroines to a marital situation which jeopardises their own integrity. He conjures his own fantasy of conjugal bliss while also maintaining the right of his "hijas" to dignity and respect, in accordance with his own ideal for Spain's daughters, and women in general, as described in his critical works, but as also revealed in letters expressing his opinion about the circumstances and futures of his sister Sofía, daughter Carmen, and nieces Antonia and Luisa.

## Conclusion

Pedro, Valentín, Braulio, Faustino, Fadrique, the Count of Alhedín, Don Juan Fresco, Paco, Morsamor, Tiburcio and Luis have all been discussed, building upon the views of others, during the course of this thesis, as representing facets of the author himself, but this study has gone beyond looking at the transmission of Valera's personal qualities and experiences to his male characters, aiming to shed light upon the heretofore much neglected relationships he had with such primary women in his life as his wife Dolores, and sister Sofía, not to mention, mother, daughter and nieces, as well as several love-interests as revealed through the copious remains of his correspondence, published in full only in the last ten years. This study has attempted to throw new light on how Valera's relationships with Dolores and Sofía were particularly pivotal to the themes and characterisation in his novels.

The author made an early comment in his correspondence, revealing what he regarded as women's importance to man, but his later works, "Las mujeres y las academias, cuestión social inocente" (1901) and *Meditaciones útopicas sobre la educación humana* (1902), go even further than his earliest concept of the woman as man's civiliser, crediting the female sex with an even loftier role, as: "causa de los más nobles actos y de las más bellas creaciones de los hombres, ya estimulándolos como premio si logran dar cima a sus empresas, ya señalándoles y allanándoles el camino y haciendo reverdecer en ellos la esperanza marchita" (*Meditaciones, Oc 3*, 1412). The present work has intended to explore, to exemplify, and to account for the fact that Valera felt woman had an indispensable part to play as man's supporter, bestowing on him self-belief and confidence—a conclusion he arrived at following the absence of support he had experienced in the preceding thirty or so years of his troubled marriage to Dolores.

It has also been discovered during the course of this enquiry that discrepancies at times appear regarding Valera's attitude towards women, between the supposed ideals he expresses of the dutiful, almost demure lady who embraces domestic and caring roles, and the respect, even admiration he had for the intelligent, independent, brave, even commanding type—not to mention the adventurous single lady he encountered

in Washington, as his correspondence reveals—who lived according to her own whims and desires. His novels more often represent the latter type: females who are full of brio and act as masters of their destiny, and yet who convert, circumstances permitting, to the dutiful, devotional woman celebrated in his essays. Bravo-Villasante in her work *Vida de Juan Valera* makes much of the self-sufficiency and complete freedom which Valera bestows upon his heroines, but she does not address to the same extent the fact that many, if not most of his women, use their liberty to essentially relinquish it, choosing love and devotion when an appropriate male candidate presents himself. In this way, Valera also expressed his ideal through his novelistic fiction, as it eluded him in life, his egoistic, unaccepting wife falling far short of his *hijas*' more generous, self-sacrificing disposition.

And yet, as also remarked upon at the end of chapter 4, Valera never celebrates the submission of his heroines to a situation which jeopardises their integrity. Joaquín Oltra Pons (1979) felt that Valera was *machista*, and Jeanne Maurer Chew (1958) that Valera's female depictions reveal him advocating the status quo of women's subordinate position during the Spain of his time, but such viewpoints fail to consider the nuance to the portrayal of Valera's female protagonists. His message in Doña Ana's is that her brother and father did wrong in essentially coercing her into marriage; in Pepita's that her marriage to Gumersindo was cruel; in Rosita's that while her reaction to Faustino's rejection was an over-reaction and uncalled for, he was indeed no innocent himself, but self-serving and insensitive, and thus, to some extent, a party to the destruction which resulted. Indeed, in Blanca, Valera deals with the aftermath of a man's frivolity in his love affairs; and in Rafaela we get a sympathetic view of a woman who is used by men, even though for most of her life she promotes the very reputation which contributes to her downfall.

In Valera's correspondence, he commends Pardo Bazan's talent and intellectualism; his daughter's bravery, athleticism, and "imperio"; he encourages his sister to face up to and defeat, in the only manner her soft and gentle nature will permit, her disrespectful son-in-law. He argues that his niece Luisa is undoubtedly better off

single than with an abusive husband,<sup>100</sup> suggesting on two different occasions, that an annulment is not desirable because it leaves open the potential for marriage again (C 4, 272; C 4, 316), and that she may be happier remaining single (this is Valera, of course, reflecting about his own unhappy experience of marriage). He commends Carmen for having waited to find a husband she really loves, and states the importance of a mate who pleases her—“un hombre capaz de enamorarte o que, al menos, logre y merezca tu estimación y te agrade moral, intelectual y físicamente” (C 7, 515)—not the other way around.

In his critical essays Valera never argues for the submission of women to the institution of marriage, but the willing embrace of the female sex to something greater: the devotion to others, the natural conclusion of which, for many, may perhaps be marriage, but not necessarily. Valera only wanted his daughter to marry if the right candidate presented himself. Indeed, he likewise argued against the terrible situation of Spain's daughters who were forced by society's conventions into a situation which diminished them “intelectual, moral y físicamente” (*Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1418). He thought that for those for whom an ideal marital situation (that is, one resulting from mutual love—mutual esteem, at least) did not appear, women should be able to support themselves so as not to be forced into a position of enslavement such as that which effectively Ana and Pepita suffered at the hands of their own families.

And yet marriage, in Valera's eyes, was not an unimportant institution. It had a natural import for women (for reasons of “naturaleza” as well as “costumbres sociales”), and indeed, a natural appeal to himself.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, we cannot regenerate as a human race, he argued, “sin la unión de los individuos de un sexo con los del otro” (*Meditaciones sobre la educación humana*, Oc 3, 1415). This was essential to humanity's survival. But also vital to humanity's advancement was man's achievement, and as Valera saw it, man's achievement depended upon his self-

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<sup>100</sup> “Me parece que Luisa hará muy bien en separarse de un hombre que es majadero, pobre, vano, y que no le da ni posición ni dinero, sino bofetones y sombrerozcos ... No tiene derecho un hombre jamás a poner la mano violentamente en una mujer ... es cobardía infame hacerlo” (C 4, 175).

<sup>101</sup> “Yo estoy convencido de que es el acto más tremendo que hacen los seres humanos. Sin duda un buen matrimonio realiza casi la bienaventuranza en la tierra, tiene algo de divino; mas, por lo mismo, es tan raro, que vale más no casarse” (C 4, 273).

confidence. Valera's own self-confidence depended upon the love of a woman. Hence his claims, which clearly represent his own perspective (as he cannot possibly speak for the experience of every man): "Si el hombre es valiente, estudioso, trabajador, honrado, limpio, elegante, cortés, ameno, chistoso, buen poeta, orador, gran político, sabio, bailarín y ágil, todo es por ganarse el corazón de una mujer y ser de ella muy querido" ("Las mujeres y las academias", *Oc* 2, 865).

This enquiry has also touched on the significance of Rose Cleveland's essay, "Altruistic Faith", to Valera. Her concept regarding human relationships resounded with our author because it expressed an ideal of which he had been deprived in his relationship of most fundamental personal significance: marriage. And yet Valera and Cleveland's shared ideal not only finds a place in the Cordobesan's novels through the context of married life. Others exhibit such charitable instincts and caring qualities—particularly Juanita, Rafaela and Donna Olimpia of Valera's late-period novels—outside of such a union, demonstrating the value Valera placed on human generosity and a caring disposition toward others in general. He himself exhibited this attitude and conduct, and the male characters who have his greatest approval are those like Fadrique and Pedro, who, while incapable of inspiring others in the way his heroines can, are nonetheless generous of spirit and indulgent, in line with Valera's own nature and values.

Paco also has the author's admiration for being "bonachón", if unassertive, while his daughter Inés, Etelvina, the Countess of Majano, even Blanca, although perhaps to a lesser extent, given more complex factors behind her depiction, do not impress him. In terms of the men, he has less time for Faustino and Braulio (Morsamor also has certain traits in common with Braulio, especially; but Valera's old age and the very resignation which produced the novel's themes appears to have tempered his criticism of this character). Braulio in particular was censured, in so far as Valera was capable of censuring anyone: Rosita and her *cursi* friends were not admirable, but neither were they deserving of the man's disdain, which the author-narrator indicates as "sobrado malicioso" in Chapter 10 of *Pasarse de listo*. Just as Dolores's insecurities were not enough in Valera's eyes for him to grant her dispensation for her often unkind attitude and behaviour toward others, above all of him, neither was Braulio relieved of

responsibility for his insecurities. And yet what Valera clearly found most contemptible in *Pasarse de listo* was the Madrid society which proved cruel to Braulio himself—not a likeable fellow—but certainly not deserving of the malice its “sociedad murmuradora” unleashed upon him, the Count and his wife. In sum, no one deserved but kindness and understanding from others. Valera was sensitive to the importance of such generous sentiments (even if he on occasion struggled to exhibit them himself), since he received so few from the person to whom he was intimately and inextricably linked for life. In this regard, Valera’s experience of Dolores—and Sofia, in sharp contrast to his wife—not only influenced the depiction of heroines and themes directly connected with them, but the value he placed upon generosity, love and compassion (and, indeed, his contempt for the opposite) which pervade his novels on so many levels.

The impact of Dolores and Sofia on the themes and characterisation in his novels marks the major contribution of this thesis to Valera scholarship. Although Valera’s fictional heroines have endured over time as subjects of keen interest to scholars, it was not until the recent publication of Romero Tobar’s *Correspondencia* that the role and influence of such female family members, upon both the author and his fiction, was brought to light. Earlier scholars have frequently proposed Valera’s lovers as inspirational figures. But the author himself had publicly acknowledged the importance of a man’s closest female kin as powerful forces in his life, and the present study acknowledges and responds to this aspect of Valera’s belief-system, relating it to the subject of his fiction.

Research pertaining to Valera’s private life itself has remained scant over the years, with most scholars choosing instead to focus upon aspects of Valera the professional—the diplomat, the critic, the politician—or even upon stylistic questions relating to the many genres of his literary work. While the present study of Juan Valera’s correspondence in itself offers a fascinating autobiographical account of his experiences, values and beliefs, this examination of his novels, with such new autobiographical material in mind, additionally offers a fresh perspective on prose, by one of Spain’s most beloved and influential figures, that must stand as among the finest ever written in the Spanish language.

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